Forget About the Sticks and Stones,
Let's Talk About the Words:
Challenging the Normalizing of
Sexual Harassment in Online Video Gaming

by

Chantal Laurene Turpin

M.A., Simon Fraser University, 2014
B.Sc. (Hons., Anthropology), Trent University, 2011
B.Sc. (Hons., Forensic Science), Trent University, 2011

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

School of Criminology

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Chantal Laurene Turpin 2024

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2024

Declaration of Committee

Name: **Chantal Laurene Turpin**

Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy**

Title: ***Forget About the Sticks and Stones, Let's Talk About the Words: Challenging the Normalizing of Sexual Harassment in Online Video Gaming***

Committee: **Chair:**   **Danielle Murdoch**
Senior Lecturer, Criminology

Sheri Fabian
Co-Supervisor
University Lecturer, Criminology

Bryan Kinney
Co-Supervisor
Associate Professor, Criminology

Dave Fracchia
Committee Member
Professor, Centre for Digital Media

CJ Rowe
Examiner
Director, Sexual Violence Support & Prevention Office

Amanda Cote
External Examiner
Associate Professor, Media & Information
Michigan State University

Abstract

Sexual harassment in online video gaming is a systemic social problem and part of a larger conversation about the treatment of women online. Frequently, sexual harassment in online gaming spaces is falsely characterized as *just* trolling and/or trash talking that is a natural and expected part of gaming culture. Consequently, bystander techniques for intervening in individual incidents of sexual harassment have been under-researched to date. This research project's objective was to address three research questions: 1) What are the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts? 2) What are the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment in online gaming that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours? 3) What are the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming? To do this, qualitative content analysis examined two websites where female gamers publicly documented their experiences with incidents of harassment. The types of sexual harassment identified were consistent with four key themes: the spectrum of solicitation; insults abound; no girls allowed; and threaten the women away. Analysis also showed that individual incidents of sexual harassment demonstrate the normalization of a common cultural practice and the conceptual flaws of the "it is just a game" justification that reinforces the normalization of harassment behaviours. Finally, the different bystander intervention techniques identified are described by five themes: the "shut down!" interjections; the "is that the best you can do" reactions; the attention redirection technique; the skills and kills defence; and the stereotype challengers. Together, these results contribute to an evolving area of social inquiry in an effort to demystify sexual harassment in online gaming spaces, recognize it as a systemic social problem, and highlight the bystander intervention techniques that could help shift existing cultural norms.

Keywords: sexual harassment; online video gaming; bystander intervention; social norms; systemic inequities

This culmination of resolve, exasperation, pressure, anxiety, and tears is dedicated to the amazing moms in my life

To Laurene

My mom, dearly missed

Whose unwavering determination and perseverance

Inspires me daily

To Kath and Sheri

My "moms by choice"

Steadfast beacons of light and hope

Guiding me through the turbulent waters of life

Acknowledgements

work stress was not really about work at all. And finally, to my work director Pratibha – thank you for your unwavering support, compassion and trust in me to manage all the things that you gave me the freedom to balance.

Grad school is not a solo journey (even when it feels like it is), and so it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge my fellow graduate students who I met along the way who provided empathy, support and understanding when things got tough or overwhelming. I see you and I thank you – you are not alone on this journey. They tell you at the start of your graduate journey into academia that its about research excellence, prestige and publication success, but for some that is not the reality of their lived experience. For myself, and many others, the journey becomes one of mere survival. Persevering through the stress, anxiety, depression and trauma, just to reach the end goal, while always questioning if the outcome is worth the pain and strife. The fact that you are reading this today is proof that I survived, and so I acknowledge, with deep respect, my fellow survivors of graduate school, and your courage to persevere in the face of overwhelming odds. Unfortunately, this survival comes in spite of current academic systems, that prioritize success over safety and well being, and dismiss graduate students' concerns to a point where they are asked to thrive despite the system instead of because of it. My dream it that, one day, the stories of survival, not prestige, echo through the halls of academia as a catalyst for systemic change.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1.   Introduction

"Is this [research] just an excuse to play video games?" I remember a faculty member asking me this question in passing almost 10 years ago when I first started this research. At the time, I brushed it off as just another naïve comment from someone who should know better. But that question, and the casual and dismissive way it was asked, remain fixed in my memory. Over the course of this research journey, I have often reflected on that question, the moment it was asked, and the quick, but clear, "no, I'm actually playing less while researching" that I gave as an answer in that caught off guard moment. It was an answer that I acknowledge now, was not a great one. I have often thought about why this question was asked, the answer I gave than, and what I would say in response to a similar question today.

The faculty member who asked this question has probably long since forgotten this exchange, but the fact that the question was ever asked, and why it likely was, is relevant and bears unpacking. While I will never know for certain, I suspect I was asked this question because there were those who doubted that researching sexual harassment in online gaming was a legitimate area of academic inquiry, even in a criminology department. Remember this was 2014, #Gamergate[1] was only just making headlines, the #MeToo Movement[2] had not happened yet, and research into sexual

---

[1] #Gamergate is a series of events that occurred in the gaming community between February 2013 and the end of 2014. #Gamergate started as an online debate about ethics in gaming journalism, taking place mostly on online forums such as Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan (Deng, 2023; Shaw & Chess, 2016; Todd, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). It began when independent game developer Zoe Quinn was criticized after being falsely accused, by an ex-boyfriend, of having a relationship with a gaming journalist in exchange for positive reviews of her game. This criticism quickly escalated to harassment and both online and offline threats, directed at both Zoe and at other women in the gaming industry, including game developer Brianna Wu and cultural critic Antia Sarkeesian (Deng, 2023; Shaw & Chess, 2016; Todd, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). These women and many others (both men and women) in the gaming industry were subjected to harassment that included rape threats, death threats, and the posting of private information online, often simply just for voicing their opinion about the initial harassment incidents or for publicly voicing concerns about sexism and the portrayal of female characters in video games (Shaw & Chess, 2016; Todd, 2015). All of these events came to be collectively known by the *Twitter* hashtag #Gamergate and raised serious concerns in both the gaming industry and the wider gaming community, about how gamers (particularly female ones) are treated both in-game and beyond (Conditt, 2015).

[2] #MeToo was originally coined by African American women's rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006 "to help those who experienced sexual assault and harassment obtain help and understand they were not alone" (Brunner & Partlow-Lefevre, 2020, p. 168). The #MeToo hashtag began trending on *Twitter* in October 2017 after actress Alyssa Milano used the hashtag "in response to allegations

harassment in online contexts was not a universally accepted area of academic research. At this time, the social construction of gender in online gaming spaces and how players experienced gendered stereotypes was already an established area of inquiry in media studies (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007; Dill, Brown, & Collins, 2008; Downs & Smith, 2010; Fox & Tang, 2014; Ivory, 2006; Kasumovic & Kuznekoff, 2015; Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012), however there were only a few studies that had directly considered the harassment of female gamers in online gaming (Cross, 2014; Gray, 2012, 2014; Jenson & De Castell, 2014). Within the field of criminology, sexual harassment in online gaming spaces was, and remains, a deeply under researched area, even after Henry & Powell's (2017) seminal book *Sexual Violence in the Digital Age* brought more criminological research focus to technology-facilitated sexualized violence.

Looking back on it now, I spent a lot of time in those early years justifying the legitimacy and relevance of this research. I even wrote two papers as part of my course work to establish the legitimacy of the research for those who were skeptical. One paper was a foundational introduction to the topic of sexual harassment in online gaming and why it was an important area of inquiry, and the other a deep dive into the relevant criminological theories applicable to sexual harassment in online spaces. To be fair, not all this early work to simply justify the relevance of my research area was motivated by that one question or other external factors. A lot of it was also self-motivated, as though I knew (or at least thought), that undertaking such "unconventional" research in a deeply traditional criminology department would not be without skeptics and doubters questioning the relevance of the work or asking, "if it was just an excuse to play video games."

Ten years, and one roller coaster of a research journey later, the hope is that any skeptics who remain will be swayed, if not by my research, then by the increasing public consciousness of the pervasiveness of the systemic sexual harassment of women in online spaces. There have been many publicly documented cases of women being sexually harassed and threatened online, from journalists (Posetti, Aboulez, Bontcheva,

---

of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein" (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018, p. 236). Milano encouraged others to use the hashtag to share their experiences, and it quickly went viral, with millions of posts within 24 hours, garnering significant mainstream media attention and becoming known as the #MeToo Movement (Brunner & Partlow-Lefevre, 2020; Fairbairn, 2020; Mendes et al., 2018).

Harrison, & Waisbord, 2020), politicians (Collier & Raney, 2018; Raney & McGregor, 2023), and Nobel Peace Prize winners (Posetti, Maynard, Bontcheva, Hapal, & Salcedo, 2021), to the countless everyday incidents that occur but never garner any public attention (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Ortiz, 2024; Vogels, 2021). Sexual harassment in online gaming is just one of the many contexts where women are targeted with violence and abuse online (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Gray, Voorhees, & Vossen, 2018; Henry & Powell, 2017; Ortiz, 2024). As my own experience highlights, before #Gamergate, "harassment in gaming [had] been excused, minimized, and outright overlooked as a matter of boys and men too immature to understand the consequences of their vitriol" (Gray et al., 2018, p. 4). Like the research that has come before it, the goal of this thesis is to challenge the status quo acceptance of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces as a normal, natural, and inevitable part of day-to-day gaming experiences that should simply be tolerated.

Chapter 2. *The Journey It Took to Get Here (AKA The Methods)* – is the methodological foundation of this research project, detailing how three studies were undertaken using qualitative content analysis to examine previously documented examples of online sexual harassment experienced during video game play. The data set for this research consisted of the complete contents of two publicly accessible websites, *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* and *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com*, created by female gamers, as platforms for themselves and others to share their experiences. These websites were purposively selected because they were relatively well known in the gaming community at the time, actively encouraged women to share their experiences, and contained numerous examples of text and voice-based interactions that female gamers publicly shared online. Using *NCapture* for *NVivo*, the complete content of both websites, including all visuals, text, and audio was collected and analyzed. An inductive, line-by-line coding process was used to allow for themes and patterns to emerge from the entire data set, identifying 42 codes which formed the basis for further inquiry into three distinct topic areas: 1) types of sexual harassment that occur, 2) the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment, and 3) the active bystander techniques used during incident of sexual harassment in online video gaming. Further coding and analysis of these three topic areas was undertaken, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts?

2. What are the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment in online gaming that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours?

3. What are the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming?

Chapter 2, and these three distinct research questions, lay the methodological foundation for subsequent chapters, where each research question is addressed in a standalone chapter that includes a dedicated literature review, results, discussion, and conclusion. The broad nature of the research objective necessitated a clear articulation of scope, from the outset, to keep the project manageable. Aspects that were beyond the scope of the current project included looking at variations in harassment between different platforms (e.g. mobile versus console versus PC games), games and game genres (e.g. first-person shooter versus MMORPG), and differences in player identity demographics and/or player skill level in those different contexts. Understanding the harms experienced by female gamers who are sexually harassed while gaming online was also beyond the scope of this research.

Chapter 3. *Always Just a ****: understanding sexual harassment in online gaming* – takes a deep dive into what sexual harassment in online gaming is, and the different nature and specific types of sexual harassment that typically occur during in-game interactions. As a mainstream social problem, one of the core elements of sexual harassment in online gaming is its pervasive nature and often graphic content. While past research has looked at how players respond to voice-based gender cues in-game, limited research has sought to categorize the types, style and language of sexual harassment within the in-game context. Using the methodological process outlined in Chapter 2, qualitative content analysis was used to categorize the types and styles of sexual harassment prevalent within online gaming spaces. The results identified four key themes: the spectrum of solicitation; insults abound; no girls allowed; and threaten the women away. The sexual harassment within these themes was primarily characterized by active, verbal types of sexual harassment, although less common instances of active,

graphic gender harassment and passive, verbal sexual harassment also appeared in the data. The language incorporated into the harassing comments often used both common derogatory terms for women and common stereotypes about women. The nature of the comments, particularly in the "threaten the women away" theme, also highlights the severity of the harassment taking place in gaming spaces. The results demonstrate the ongoing use of real and symbolic violence, both actively and passively, to marginalize female gamers and their participation in online gaming spaces.

Chapter 4. *It is time to trash the trolling excuse: reconceptualizing trash talking and trolling as the normalizing of sexual harassment* – unpacks how sexual harassment in online gaming has been socially constructed as individual instances of "trolling" or "trash talking" that are justified with statements like "it is just a game," "that is just how gaming is," "it is not real," so "deal with it." These responses could apply to anyone but raise concerns about sexual harassment in online gaming because they are typically made to women, creating a problematic social construction of sexual harassment in online gaming as individual instances to be ignored or dismissed. This construction normalizes the behaviour and minimizes the severity of the problem by framing it as natural and inevitable. Reconceptualizing sexual harassment as a pattern of systemic gender inequity is a necessary step towards deconstructing these harmful social norms and catalyzing culture change. Using the methodological process outlined in Chapter 2, qualitative content analysis was used to identify the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours in gaming culture. The two themes identified in this study were: normalizing a common cultural practice (through language, repetition, and ubiquity); and the conceptual flaws of the "it is just a game" justification that reinforces normalizing these behaviours. It is through examining these examples of real "everyday" incidents that we can challenge the socio-cultural foundations that normalize sexual harassment in online gaming so that we can, as a society, begin to enact social change and dismantle the existing cultural norms. We must stop characterizing harassment incidents as trolling, gender trolling, e-bile, trash talking, or even sexist trash talking, which minimizes its effects and instead call it what it really is – a systemic pattern of sexual harassment and violence against women in gaming culture. Only with honest recognition of the systemic nature of the social problem can we look for ways to make systemic change.

Chapter 5. *"How come you're only talking to her like that?": exploring active bystander intervention in online gaming spaces* – lays a foundation for the discussion and application of active bystander intervention within online gaming contexts. Despite the unfortunate ubiquity of sexual harassment in online gaming, techniques for intervening in individual incidents to shift this normalized culture have been under-researched to date. Using the methodological process outlined in Chapter 2, qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming. Using examples of "everyday" incidents, this chapter describes and classifies five different bystander intervention techniques commonly used during in-game interactions. The techniques used are described by the five identified themes: the "shut down!" interjections; the "is that the best you can do" reactions; the attention redirection technique; the skills and kills defence; and the stereotype challengers. Characterizing different techniques used by male players to intervene when witnessing the harassment of a female gamer, this work establishes a foundation for future research on the application of a bystander intervention model for sexual harassment in online video gaming.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation, calling out sexual harassment of women online as a systemic social problem as the latest wave in a repeating historical pattern of women being deliberately targeted to dismiss and marginalize their contributions to society. The history of video game culture is no different, with the current issues of sexual harassment just the latest part of systemic efforts to continue marginalizing women's participation in gaming culture (Cote, 2020; Gray et al., 2018). The chapter summarizes the results of the dissertation, weaving together an understanding of sexual harassment in online gaming; the need to reconceptualize trolling and trash talking as labels that normalize sexual harassment in gaming contexts; and the potential of active bystander intervention as a technique for challenging the ongoing normalizing of sexual harassment as a standard part of gameplay. Collectively, the purpose of *Forget About the Sticks and Stones, Let's Talk About the Words: Challenging the Normalizing of Sexual Harassment in Online Video Gaming* is to contribute to an evolving area of social inquiry in order to demystify sexual harassment in online gaming spaces, recognize it as a systemic social problem, and explore intervention techniques that could help shift existing cultural norms. While each chapter, after the methods, can be read in insolation, together they are stepping stones that help us shift from knowledge into action.

Chapter 2.   The Journey It Took to Get Here (AKA The Methods)

This research project, comprised of three separate but interconnected studies, used qualitative content analysis to examine previously documented examples of online sexual harassment captured by players and shared online. The data set consisted of the complete contents of two publicly accessible websites created by female gamers as platforms for themselves and other female gamers to share their experiences.

The first website, *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com*, was a moderated content blog, active from 2011 until 2023, created to expose the systemic nature of harassment and sexism in video games. Female gamers submitted examples of their experiences of harassment and sexism that occurred while they were gaming online. The moderators then posted these examples as blog entries on the website, often using humour and sarcasm to highlight the problematic nature of the interactions they were sharing. Each individual blog entry included a title, the date it was posted and could include one or more example incidents (from one or more submissions) in the form of screen captures of chat messages, and occasionally, an audio or video recording of the incident, sometimes accompanied by direct quotes from a female gamer's submission providing additional context about the interaction.

The second website, *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com*, was a blog website, active from 2011 until 2019, where a female gamer, named Jenny, documented her personal experiences with sexism and harassment when playing video games online. Her objective was to share a woman's perspective on men's reactions to interacting with women while playing video games online. To document her experiences, she audio recorded interactions while gaming online, and then posted audio excerpts and transcripts as blog entries on her website. Each individual blog entry included a title, the date it was posted, and the audio clip and transcript from that entry's example, sometimes accompanied by additional context about the interaction.

These two websites were purposively selected because they were relatively well known in the gaming community at the time of data collection[3] (completed in Spring of 2017), actively encouraged players to share their experiences, and contained numerous examples of both text and voice-based interactions that female gamers choose to publicly share online.

Gender identification in the data set was based on identity indicators provided in the data itself, those who self-identified as women or voice-based gender cues that indicated they were women. When direct gender identification within the data was not available, a presumption was made, based on the original intent and purpose of the websites, that the submitters were women sharing their experiences. It was also presumed that these women were, at the time an incident occurred, gender identified by the players targeting them, using cues like voice, username, avatar appearance, and self-disclosure. However, these presumptions are by no means a completely accurate gender identification process and more research is needed on how different types of gender cues are identified and interpreted by different players in online gaming spaces.

2.1. Data Collection, Coding and Analysis

The complete content of both websites, including all visuals (both images and screen captures of text messages), all text, and all audio clips were collected using *NCapture* for *NVivo*, with each page of the website captured as a separate PDF. Video clips and audio recorded messages embedded on the website pages were traced back to their original source on *YouTube* and were collected as videos using *NCapture*. It was not possible to use *NCapture* to collect the audio clips embedded on the *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* website and maintain their functionality in *NVivo*. Consequently, the transcripts provided on the website were entered as memos linked to each PDF in *NVivo*, and then verified by listening to the audio clip directly on the website. Video clip dialogue and audio-only voice messages, only found on the *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* website, were also transcribed within *NVivo*. Sometimes these transcripts included acronyms that identified who was speaking during interactions that involved multiple

---

[3] Both websites, and their creators, began receiving significant media attention during the events of #Gamergate, and were featured at gaming conventions and in a documentary video in the years prior to data collection.

players. RMP or MP followed by a number stands for random[4] male player in reference to a male player unknown to the female gamer in that interaction. FP is short for female player and those individuals with their gamertag/username referenced are friends of the female gamer in that interaction.

Content from 121 separate website pages was collected and transcribed. Each page contained approximately 6 - 10 individual entries, depending on their length, and each entry included at least one and sometimes multiple interaction examples. Entries on the websites were text-based but often included excerpts from the interaction being described. The excerpts were generally either screen captures of text-based interactions, recordings of audio-only direct messages, and audio or video clips of live gameplay interactions. Website staff update entries were excluded from analysis because they did not contain examples of interactions from online video gaming. Spelling mistakes in text-based messages and pre-existing transcripts were maintained to ensure the authenticity of the data. Consequently, direct excerpts from the data reproduced in this study do contain incorrect spelling[5].

The first round of data analysis involved an inductive line-by-line coding process that allowed for themes and patterns to emerge from the entire data set. Coding was based solely on the patterns and themes that emerged from the data set and did not make use of any prior coding done on sexual harassment in online spaces. Early during the initial round of coding, I learned that *NVivo* did not allow the screen captured text messages in the PDF's to be coded as text, only as images and therefore they would not appear directly in codes. This technical limitation restricted the ability to conduct subsequent rounds of coding. To resolve this issue, every screen captured text message was transcribed into memos, attached to the corresponding PDF within *NVivo*. The initial round of coding consisted of reading through the entire data set multiple times, using different codes in *NVivo* to create categories based on the patterns emerging from the

---

[4] *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* used the term random in reference to players who were unknown to the female gamer and her friends. In this context, the term is not intended to refer to a random sample for the purposes of statistical analysis.

[5] While providing editorial feedback on this thesis, one of my best friends remarked on the spelling errors in the data set by saying "The spelling in these examples makes my brain hurt. If you're going to insult me, or my gender, please spell properly." This made me laugh out loud so much - thank you Jen for always bringing levity, especially at times when you probably did not realize how much it was needed.

data. Names given to the codes acted as a rough description of the primary pattern that was being observed, with numerous parts of the data set coded more than once as it contained multiple patterns. After the first round of coding, a total of 42 codes were identified in the data (see Figure A.1). A detailed review of the content all 42 codes identified three distinctive topics for subsequent rounds of coding and analysis[6]. These distinctive topic areas consisted of the following:

- Analyzing the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts based on the language and style of harassment occurring;

- Looking at the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours by analyzing common behavioural patterns; and

- Identifying and analyzing the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment.

As a result of the iterative nature of the qualitative process, the three research questions guiding this project emerged iteratively from the three distinct topic areas over the course of multiple rounds of coding and analysis. The three research questions that guided this project were:

1. What are the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts?

2. What are the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment in online gaming that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours?

3. What are the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming?

---

[6] It is important to acknowledge that there were significantly more codes identified after the initial round of coding then those that were relevant for the 3 studies in this project. The original plan for the PhD was to include an interview and experiment component in addition to the content analysis. However, after completing the first round of coding and realizing how much data there was, a decision was made to proceed with only doing content analyses for this project.

As subsequent rounds of coding and analysis proceeded for each research question, the analysis processes diverged somewhat as the different topic areas necessitated different focuses and approaches within the overall data set.

Analysis of the Types of Sexual Harassment

The analysis focused on identifying the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts looked specifically at the language used and the nature and style of the harassment within the data set. Any information about the context surrounding the examples analyzed that existed within the data set was out of scope for the analysis of this topic area. Relevant data for the analysis included content drawn from both websites that comprised the data source. Because both sites documented the experiences of female gamers with sexist and harassing interactions during online play (albeit in different ways) they both contained numerous examples that were coded and relevant to the research question.

A detailed review of the content of all 42 codes identified 22 codes associated with the language and style of sexual harassment, allowing for the identification of the different types of sexual harassment that occur during online gaming (see Figure A.2). The complete lists of the data from each of these 22 codes were printed and a second round of manual thematic coding (using highlighters and sticky notes) to group the codes into categories and subcategories was conducted (see Figures A.3 and A.4). This was done by reading through all the relevant codes multiple times, iteratively refining the patterns until clear themes emerged. This final round of coding led to the identification of four major themes that distinguish the different types of sexual harassment typically directed towards female gamers when they are playing online.

Analysis of the Commonalities Amongst Individual Instances of Sexual Harassment

The analysis focused on identifying the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours was the second topic area of focus. Unlike coding for the different types of sexual harassment, any context about individual examples of harassment that existed in the data set became highly important as it often included additional information about the

circumstances under which an incident occurred. This information was highly relevant for identifying patterns of behaviour; however, a technological challenge was encountered while trying to code for this information accurately.

Upon initiating a second round of coding focused on interactions that demonstrated, in different ways, the persistent nature and cultural pervasiveness of sexual harassment within online gaming spaces, a significant problem with how *NVivo* had captured coded information from the PDF's and memos in the codes was identified. Because each blog entry had information coded from multiple formats (both PDF's and memos) within *NVivo*, the content organization in the codes was problematic, with different elements of the same blog entry not grouped together within the code. The example and explanation from a single blog entry were pages apart and not clearly connected at all, resulting in significant context loss within the coded data. Multiple attempts were made to resolve this issue within *NVivo* without success, after which, the only solution was to transfer the complete contents of each relevant code into a separate word document and reconnect the elements of each individual blog entry manually.

The codes relevant to the research question regarding the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment were moved into individual word documents, reviewed multiple times to identify the different elements of individual blog entries, and manual copy and paste functions were used to reconnect each blog entry, so that the entire entry was presented together in context. Each entry was then manually rechecked against the original data set to ensure no information was lost during this process. This entire process took almost six months to complete, during which time additional coding of the data was not possible. Once completed, a second round of coding was conducted, resulting in the identification of one relevant code as well as the creation of two new codes that were not previously identified in the data. The two new codes are not reflected on the list of the original 42 codes (see Figure A.1) but emerged from data within some of those existing codes. These complete codes were printed and a third round of manual thematic coding (using highlighters and sticky notes) to group the codes into categories and subcategories was conducted (see Figures A.5 and A.6). This was done by reading through all the relevant codes multiple times, iteratively refining the patterns until clear themes emerged. This final round of coding led to the identification of two major themes that illustrate the culturally pervasive nature of sexual harassment within online gaming.

Relevant data included content drawn from both websites that comprised the data source, although the majority of the relevant data came from *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* because it had significantly more examples of repeated, patterned behaviour than the other site. Since the entries from the *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* website were from the experiences of a sole female player, an attempt was made to quantify the frequency of the occurrence of sexually harassing comments by counting the number of website entries over time (see Figure A.7). This count provides a different means by which to display and discuss the pervasive nature of sexual harassment within gaming culture.

Analysis of Active Bystander Techniques

The analysis focused on identifying the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment was the third area of focus. As with the analysis of the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment, the code relevant to active bystander techniques also needed to be transferred to a word document, and the elements of each individual blog entry reconnected. The process followed for this code was identical to the process outlined above and the work was completed over the course of the same 6-month period. Once this process was completed, the code was printed and a second round of manual thematic coding (using highlighters and sticky notes) to group the code into categories and subcategories was conducted (see Figures A.8 – A.10). This was done by reading through the relevant code multiple times, iteratively refining the patterns until clear themes emerged. This final round of coding led to the identification of five major themes demonstrating different active bystander techniques used to intervene during in-game interactions when a female gamer is being harassed.

Relevant data included content drawn from both websites that comprised the data source, although the vast majority of the relevant data came from the *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* website because it had significantly more examples of live gameplay interactions then the *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* website. Interactions that included live gameplay incidents were more likely to contain examples of active bystander intervention because other players were witnessing the interactions, making bystander intervention more likely. In contrast, text-based interactions, which often occur through direct message, are often not visible to witnesses and thus bystander

intervention is not possible when incidents occur through that method of communication. Since *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* documented the experiences of a sole female gamer, the bystander intervention data predominately reflects the bystander intervention techniques used by that female gamer and her male friends. Consequently, the results and interpretations made may not be reflective of the bystander intervention techniques that may be used in other gaming contexts by different female gamers and bystanders.

2.2. Credibility

Using an inductive coding process allowed for a thematic analysis informed by a grounded theory perspective, where the continued engagement with the data enabled analysis that moved from specific observations to more general conclusions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Scott & Garner, 2013). Every entry in the data set was considered in its entirety and reviewed multiple times to ensure that the organization and interpretation of themes identified remained grounded in the data. The trustworthiness of the results was established through prolonged engagement with the data set during the analysis process to ensure that emerging themes accurately and consistently reflected the original data. Additionally, rich thick description was achieved through the inclusion of a generous number of direct quotes and examples from the data set. Direct quotes and examples are evidence supporting the interpretations made and allow readers to make their own interpretations of the results while reading subsequent chapters. Prolonged engagement with the data during analysis and the use of rich thick description throughout the study lessens the potential for alternative interpretations of the data, however that possibility cannot be entirely eliminated.

The data collection, coding and analysis process was not without its challenges, resulting in some gaps in the detailed documentation of the process. While the initial phase of data collection and coding for these studies occurred within a short span of time (during the summer and fall of 2017), subsequent rounds of coding and analysis for two of the three studies were delayed both because of the technical challenges and because of personal life circumstances. These factors resulted in coding and analysis of the data taking significantly longer than anticipated and it was not completed until late 2019. After completing all the data coding and analysis, both websites were re-checked to see if any new information was available. Neither website had any new entries, both

had ceased making updates, and no additional blog posts were ever made on the websites apart from announcements that they would be shutting down.

The significant delays and frequent disruptions to the research process meant I failed to maintain a proper research journal for this study. This oversight has resulted in a less than thorough record of how I arrived at the interpretations I made during the coding and analysis of the data. The notes I did take were very factual – documenting what I did – but not any personal reflections regarding the studies[7]. The lack of a proper research journal represents a gap in the demonstration of reflexivity throughout the research process, which could impact the credibility of the themes presented in this study, although that impact is likely minimal given the rich thick description and trustworthiness that have been achieved.

While the prolonged engagement with the data during the unintentionally protracted analysis process greatly strengthened the credibility of this study, it also took a significant toll mentally and emotionally in ways that I am still coming to terms with years later. Immersing oneself into this type of content, over such an extended period, impacts you in ways that are not always immediately apparent or easy to put into words[8]. I have vague but powerful memories of the early days of data coding, hours upon hours spent reading disturbing and sometimes horrific examples of how women are treated in online gaming. I remember frequently feeling mentally exhausted and overwhelmed, like my emotional regulator had ceased functioning properly. However, during the data collection process I did not have the ability to put into words what I was feeling and how the data was impacting me. It is only with the benefit of hindsight and some distance, that I can begin to take stock of what I was experiencing and the coping mechanisms

---

[7] The research notes documented information like how far I had progressed through the first round of coding the data and the types of technical issues or challenges that I encountered along the way (see excerpts in Figure A.11). They did not contain any personal thoughts or proper attempts at self-reflection and completely stopped after the initial round of coding was completed. Reflecting on this now, this style of note taking was no doubt influenced by my scientific background and my comparatively new foray (at the time) into qualitative research for my PhD after completing science focused degrees and research projects during my undergraduate and MA. Sheri, you did always say to me that my ability to understand qualitative research confused you because of my scientific background – I suppose this is one of the consequences of being able to move between very different modes of academic inquiry, old, ingrained habits sometimes go unnoticed until its too late.

[8] It was only upon writing this paragraph that I found the clinically descriptive words – vicarious trauma – that describe the emotions that I did, and to some extent still do, experience because of undertaking this work. Academically, I've always understood what vicarious trauma is, but have never associated it with my own experience of my PhD research until now.

that I subconsciously developed along the way. It would be easy to say that compartmentalization was key and just leave it at that, but that would be both untrue and an oversimplification. Instead of the data being something I could look at while still acknowledging how it made me feel, it became more like a pandora's box. All the emotion padlocked away into a little corner in the back of my mind. Then it became dangerous to venture too close to that box, for fear of opening an unknown floodgate of unprocessed emotion. The feelings of anger, fear and despair that the data could often provoke, were necessarily replaced with deflection, using humour and sarcasm (so much sarcasm), to maintain my emotional stability throughout this PhD. Dissociation, a skill born of necessity, but now extremely difficult to unlearn for the purposes of demonstrating reflexivity.

It is for these reasons that while I freely acknowledge the lack of strong reflexivity throughout my data collection and analysis process, I also cannot apologize for its absence. It was a necessary, if subconsciously made choice, preserving my emotional well being as an individual by sacrificing some of the methodological rigour. A novel concept perhaps, within the academic ivory tower, and certainly not something that completing graduate studies prepares you for. However, it is something that demands further consideration in academic spheres – training future researchers not only on methodological rigour, but how to balance it with the lived human experience that the work forces them to face every day and the emotional toll that can inevitably take. My advice, find a balance, and never hesitate to put your own wellbeing before your research (a lesson it took me too long to learn).

2.3. Scope and Limitations

As the purpose of this research project was to focus on sexual harassment in online video gaming broadly, there were certain nuances and details that were identified from the outset as being out of scope to keep the project manageable. Areas of inquiry that were beyond the scope included looking at variations in patterns of harassment between different platforms (e.g. mobile versus console versus PC games), games and game genres (e.g. first-person shooter versus MMORPG), and differences in player identity demographics and/or player skill level in those different contexts. Because there were significantly more codes identified after the initial round of coding then those that were revenant to the three topic areas, potential patterns that could have been analyzed

further also remained unanalyzed as they were beyond the scope of the current project (e.g. whether incidents included information about female gamers blocking or reporting harassing players).

Specific limitations with the methods of these studies include the aforementioned shortcoming with the gender identification process in the data set, and using a presumption of gender when direct confirmation was not available. As these presumptions cannot be verified, it potentially constrains the trustworthiness of the interpretations made based on the data set. Additionally, the use of data from websites where female gamers chose to document and share their experiences gives rise to a potential form of self-selection bias. While the websites used were selected purposively, the content of those sites is comprised of content from female gamers who chose to document harassment interactions and submit them for public sharing (for *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com*) or to publish their personal experiences directly (for *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com*). Thus, only those women who knew about the websites, and made the effort to document and share their experiences, are represented in the data set. Consequently, the results of this study may not be fully transferable to the broader context of all female gamers experiences. Furthermore, since all the data for the third study reflects the experiences of a single female gamer and her friends, the themes identified from the data set may not fully represent bystander intervention techniques in online gaming contexts more broadly.

2.4. Content Warning

Before proceeding, I acknowledge and caution readers that this paper contains offensive language and graphic content, including but not limited to: swearing, crude references to genitalia, and threating violence, rape and/or death, and encouragements of suicide. I made a deliberate choice to use verbatim examples of the language and content from my data set without censoring inappropriate language. While I recognize the potential harm such language may cause, the need to highlight these findings to the public, both to convey the nature and severity of online sexual harassment and to draw attention to these offensive behaviours, I believe, outweighs the potential harms of exposing people to the realities of online gaming.

Chapter 3.   Always just a ****: understanding sexual harassment in online gaming

3.1. Literature Review

Understanding sexual harassment within the world of online gaming requires you to begin by dispelling two common, but wholly inaccurate, stereotypes – that online gaming is an exclusively solitary activity and that women do not play video games. As of 2023, 46% of video game players in the United States are female (Entertainment Software Association, 2023), which means that "video game players are about as likely to be female as male" (Entertainment Software Association, 2022, p. 2). In Canada, player demographics are similar, with women representing 50% of the game playing population who identify as gamers (Entertainment Software Association of Canada, 2020). At the same time, 80% of gamers are playing with others either online or in person (Entertainment Software Association, 2023), which means they are playing games that encourage and likely require virtual interaction between players to be able to participate in at least some aspects of the game. An online game is any type of game that is played over some type of online computer network, allowing different players to participate in the game simultaneously (Adams, 2010). Online games are not specific to any particular genre of game or type of gameplay, they are simply a mechanism through which players can connect while playing (Adams, 2010). Until recent years, because of these stereotypes, the issue of sexual harassment within online gaming environments had been under-researched, even though studies looking at online sexual harassment more broadly have increased in the last several years (Henry & Powell, 2017; Levey, 2018; Mantilla, 2015; Poland, 2016b; Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2020). High profile incidents, like #Gamergate, and high-profile awareness campaigns, like #mencallmethings,[9] that have gained considerable media attention and increased public awareness of the severity of the sexual harassment of women in online spaces.

Online sexual harassment within online gaming spaces does not occur in a cultural-less vacuum devoid of context, but instead occurs within a rich and unique cultural space (Boellstorff, 2008; Dovey & Kennedy, 2006; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009;

---

[9] #mencallmethigns is a *Twitter* hashtag, started in 2011, which women used to publicly share the harassment they had received from men online (Megarry, 2014).

Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006) that is also both a highly-gendered space and a highly-gendered activity. Gaming spaces have historically been, and in many cases continue to be patriarchal, with the common perceptions that both gaming spaces and the activity of gaming itself are traditionally male (Cote, 2020, 2021; Cross, 2014; Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Gaming is perceived as a space dominated by male discourse, where even the simple act of participating is perceived by some as a deviation from women's socially defined gender roles (Cote, 2020; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012; T. L. Taylor, 2009; Williams, Consalvo, Caplan, & Yee, 2009). The patriarchal nature of gaming spaces is further reinforced by the fact that gaming is a highly-gendered institution where women are under-represented both as developers and designers within the industry[10] (Blodgett & Salter, 2013; Cote, 2020; Prescott & Bogg, 2013; Vysotsky & Allaway, 2018), which in-turn contributes to women being underrepresented and often highly stereotyped and sexualized within the game content itself (Cote, 2020; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017a). This marginalization of women's perspective and voice further reinforces the gendered nature of both the space, with even in-game tasks often being stereotypically masculine,[11] and the interactions that occur within the space, with the perpetuation of misogyny and harassment recognized as a common consequence (Cross, 2014). In addition to the gendered nature of online gaming spaces, the space itself is commonly framed as a space for "play" as opposed to "non-play." This distinction creates the additional complication that any concerns about misogyny and harassing behaviours within these spaces are often being dismissed as "not real" and "just a game" because of a default assumption within the substructure of gaming culture that "it's not real, therefore it's ok" (Cross, 2014, p. 7). This context makes understanding and addressing the issue of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces uniquely challenging.

---

[10] Blodgett and Salter's study provided 2012 industry survey data from *GameCareerGuide.com* indicating that "women were a minority in most industry disciplines, making up only 3% of programmers, 13% of artists and animators, 11% of designers, 6% of audio developers, and 5% of QA testers" (2013, p. 1). Vysotsky & Allaway's (2018) research interviewing and surveying women working in the video game industry found that 79% of women interviewed and 60% of women survey had experienced sexism or harassment working in the industry. Additionally, 55% of men surveyed knew a woman actively working in the video game industry who had experienced sexism (Vysotsky & Allaway, 2018).

[11] Common examples include a playable male character having the task of rescuing the "damsel in distress" or wooing a seductive beauty (Downs & Smith, 2010).

Sexual harassment, broadly defined, "includes unwelcome sexual advances or other conduct that targets someone based on their sex, gender, or gender identity. These behaviours may range from making discriminatory comments or sexist jokes to coercing someone to perform sex acts" (Fox & Tang, 2017a, p. 116). Sexual harassment within the online context, uses different terms to describe the associated behaviours in the current research literature, namely: e-bile (Jane, 2014b); cyber sexism (Poland, 2016b; Vergel, La parra-Casado, & Vives-Cases, 2023); gender trolling (Mantilla, 2013, 2015); and online sexual harassment (Henry & Powell, 2017; Megarry, 2014; Tang et al., 2020). The term e-bile describes "the extravagant invective, the sexualized threats of violence, and the recreational nastiness" (Jane, 2014b, pp. 531–532) within internet discourse. Similarly, cyber sexism "is the expression of prejudice, privilege, and power in online spaces and through technology as a medium" (Poland, 2016b, p. 3), which includes the graphic and verbal expressions of sexism that forms part of online harassment.

Internet trolling "consists of making online comments or engaging in behaviours that are purposely meant to be annoying or disruptive" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 4), whereas the term gender trolling is used to distinguish the specific types of behaviours that are often more threatening, aggressive, virulent, vicious, enduring and pervasive than more generic trolling. Gender trolling is also described distinctively because it often uses graphic gender-based and sexualized insults that serve to "demean women as sexual objects and to insult them for being women" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 11) and is often perceived as a subcategory of online harassment. Online sexual harassment is recognized in the literature as a broad term that captures a comprehensive understanding "that includes unwanted sexual attention, image-based abuse, simulated rape, rape threats, hate speech, trolling, flaming, cyberbullying and cyberstalking" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 156). While these different terms capture a large scope of the behaviours discussed here, the term *online sexual harassment* was chosen as the umbrella term in an attempt to emphasize the severity of these behaviours by steering the conversation away from the idea that this is just regular (and therefore acceptable) trolling (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook, Tang, & Lin, 2023, 2024; C. Cook, Schaafsma, & Antheunis, 2018; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Ortiz, 2020; Sanfilippo, Yang, & Fichman, 2017). The choice of the term *online sexual* harassment also facilitates a discussion of the parallels with offline sexual harassment using common terminology, while still

identifying the unique nature of the public space through which this sexual harassment is manifesting (Megarry, 2014; Tang et al., 2020).

Previous research looking at the intersections of gender and gaming found that gender has an impact on player behaviours and how they interact with each other in-game (Martey, Stromer-Galley, Banks, Wu, & Consalvo, 2014; Tang et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2009). Gender roles and gender stereotypes also have a negative impact on both the female gaming experience and performance within the space (Kaye & Pennington, 2016; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Tang et al., 2020; Vermeulen, Castellar, Janssen, Calvi, & Van Looy, 2016). Previous research on gender identity and sexism in online gaming has focused on the gender stereotypes that exist around female gaming (Cote, 2020; Hayes, 2005; Morgenroth, Stratemeyer, & Paaßen, 2020; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Tang et al., 2020); the interactive nature of the gendered landscape and practices (for both men and women) in online gaming spaces (Cote, 2020; Nardi, 2010); how real-life gender impacts character choice and avatar representation (Boellstorff, 2008; Cote, 2020; DiGiuseppe & Nardi, 2007); and the stereotyped portrayal of in-game female characters who are scantily clad and hypersexualized or as weak individuals always needing to be rescued (Burgess et al., 2007; Deng, 2023; Downs & Smith, 2010; Ivory, 2006). Studies on the impacts of sexist representations of women in online games and its effects on player perceptions (Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Fox & Tang, 2014; Gray, 2014; Tang et al., 2020) indicate that certain player personality variables related to masculinity, particularly "the desire for power over women and the need for heterosexual self-preservation" (Fox & Tang, 2014, p. 317), can be strong predictive factors for sexist attitudes around video gaming. Other research indicates that players exposed to sexualized characters often have a higher tolerance for sexual harassment, which normalizes the behaviours and increases the likelihood that men will be more tolerant of sexual harassment in other social contexts (Dill et al., 2008; Fox & Tang, 2014; Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010).

Previous research focusing directly on the nature and extent of harassment that takes place in online gaming has been limited to date (Cross, 2014; Gray, 2012, 2014; Jenson & De Castell, 2014). Kuznekoff & Rose (2012) identified that player communication typically occurred within one of three main categories: queries; directed positive comments; and directed negative comments and "found that the female [voice] received roughly three times as many [directed negative] comments as the male [voice]

and the control [no voice] condition" (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012, p. 549). Directed negative comments consisted of insults and derogatory terms in response to the female voice saying innocuous comments like "hi everyone" or "alright team let's do this" (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012, p. 551). The increased frequency of directed negative comments at the female voice occurred despite nearly identical game conditions and supports the argument that "the gender of the players does impact communication occurring in a multiplayer game" (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012, p. 552). Gray (2012) documented the experiences of women of ethnic minorities within Xbox Live, focusing primarily on issues of identity, inequality and oppression, and linguistic profiling. They found that these women "experience discriminatory acts resulting from the label of deviance placed upon their ascribed identities as recognized through their voice" (Gray, 2012, p. 419) and that in response, these racialized women often segregated themselves from the larger gaming community, frequently forming their own gaming clans to avoid racism and sexism while playing (Gray, 2012). More recent research undertaken by Cote (2020) found that women being perceived as a rarity in gaming sometimes resulted in them experiencing excessive positive attention. Female gamers who were interviewed described being "asked numerous questions about what games they liked, about how long they had been playing, and about themselves as people" (Cote, 2020, pp. 94–95). However, interviewees also described this attention as abnormal because "the frequency with which it occurred made players feel like anomalies rather than just regular gamers" (Cote, 2020, p. 95), perpetuating the "othering" of female gamers despite the positive nature of the interactions.

While previous studies provide some insight into the issue of harassment in online gaming much remains unknown about this social phenomenon. In particular, little is known about the nature and types of sexual harassment that occur within online gaming spaces and how those types may compare to online sexual harassment in other contexts. The purpose of this study is to classify the different types of sexual harassment that occur within online gaming contexts, to better understand and define the umbrella term *online sexual harassment*. To bridge these existing gaps in the literature, this exploratory qualitative study was guided by the following research question: What are the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts? The qualitative content analysis undertaken (as explained in Chapter 2)

resulted in the identification of four themes identifying the different types of sexual harassment typically directed towards women in online gaming spaces.

3.2. Results and Discussion

The themes identified in this study are all examples of the style and nature of sexual harassment that occur in online gaming contexts. Before discussing each individual theme, I acknowledge considerable overlap and intersection between the different types of sexual harassment observed. Thus, while these themes are being presented distinctively for ease of discussion, in practice there was overlap between the types and style of sexual harassment captured within the different themes. The four themes identified within this dataset are 1) the spectrum of solicitation, 2) insults abound, 3) no girls allowed, and 4) threaten the women away.

The Spectrum of Solicitation

The first theme identified that focused on the style and nature of the comments was the spectrum of solicitation. Merriam Webster defines solicit as "to approach with a request or plea" ("Solicit," n.d.) and comments that involved any type of request made of the gamer who received the message were included. Messages of solicitation received by female gamers appeared frequently within the data set and the nature of the solicitation requests appeared on a continuum of offensiveness. At the least offensive end, women were often asked to confirm their gender through requests that ranged from, *vag?*[12] - to those that also insult the receiver based on their gender, such as - *KISS MY ASS BITCH HE JUST WANTS TO KNOW IF YOU R A GIRL! PS SUCK A LIGHT UP DILDO BITCH HOR*. A reference to female genitalia followed by a question mark is a request for gender confirmation, whereas the second example includes gender-based insults such as bitch and whore in addition to the exclamation that they simply want confirmation that the gamer is female. Here, gendered insults are used despite acknowledging uncertainty about the receiver's gender. This claim suggests the player may be using other in-game cues (like gamertag, voice, or profile details) to make preliminary gender identifications. However, these solicitations for gender confirmation often included a strong undertone of disbelief that these gamers were actually women.

---

[12] Vag is a slang term for vagina ("Vag," n.d.)

This disbelief was often emphasized by the repetition of the request multiple times and/or through the inclusion of comments like *seriously?* following the original request, as illustrated by the below example:

> R U seriously a girl? i think your lying
>
> U serious?
>
> wow i didn't know girls played video games, no offense
>
> U a girl?

Repeated requests for gender confirmation linked to a high level of skepticism at the presence of women in gaming spaces, as evidenced by the line "*i didn't know girls played video games*" reflect a common, but inaccurate, stereotype that women do not play video games (Cote, 2020; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Tang et al., 2020; Vergel et al., 2023). Perpetuating this misconception using solicitous comments further reinforces the stereotype because many male players who encounter female gamers treat them as an obscure anomaly within the space (Cote, 2020). However, the high level of skepticism about the reality of the female presence and/or the lack of gender confirmation did not dissuade the frequent use of gender-based insults and derogatory terminology, or any of the other types of, documented solicitous comments. It also highlights that even a cursory indication that a gamer was female was sufficient to motivate gender-based responses.

At this less offensive end of the spectrum, female gamers were also frequently solicited for a wide range of personal details. These personal details included everything from name, age, phone number, relationship status, weight and other aspects of their physical appearance, such as - *this question maybe weird but what color toenails do you have* and *what color r your panties?* – to more salacious details like preferred sexual positions and dimensions of their genitalia, as shown:

MP5: ok

MP1: you little pervo …

MP2: do you have big areolas

MP1: things ding ding …

MP2: how big are your areolas

(in-game voice chat transcript)

Less offensive requests often heavily focused on gendered aspects of personal details. Even more general solicitations for information about - *what's up* - often included gendered derogatory comments as well. This focus on female gamer's gender echoes the idea that women are treated as a sort of anomaly within gaming spaces and reflects a strong misogynistic culture that perpetuates the focus on female gamers as "being women," minimizing their importance by emphasizing their gender at the expense of any other contributions they make to video game culture (Sobieraj, 2018; Vergel et al., 2023).

Moving along the spectrum, the emphasis on gender and solicitous requests becomes more blatant, asking female gamers for photos or videos (typically of genitalia, but not always). Examples include:

ur peerty, can I have nuude pictures of you (high, quirky chuckle)

(audio message transcript)

and

am sorry 4 asking this but would send me some pics of your bare feet
and would you like to see a big cock.

These comments highlight the sexual undertone of these photo and video requests, demonstrated by the solicitous nature of the requests themselves, as well as in the offer to send a penis picture. Solicitations for sex and various types of sexual contact also fit into this point along the spectrum. For example:

(slightly high pitched voice) do you want some penis in your mouth and
ear and pussy

(audio message transcript)

25

and

>   wanna b tbag[13] buddies

place an underlying focus on the sexual gratification of the male player making the request. This focus on gratification is emphasized both by the blatant sexual nature of the solicitous requests as well as the fact these requests were often prompted just by learning that the gamer was female (or at least the player sending the message believed they were). Finally, at the opposite end of the spectrum, some solicitous requests seemed to defy categorization, and were often particularly crude and disturbing in nature. Comments such as:

>   if ur undead…does that mean someone has to be a necrophiliac to have
>   sex with u?

and

>   i wanna smell ur taint

illustrate the particularly crass and unsettling nature of these types of comments and emphasize the inherently sexist nature of many of the solicitations received by female gamers. The solicitous comments identified at the most offensive end of the spectrum of solicitation are blatant examples of sexual solicitation, defined as "receiving unwanted requests to talk about sex, do something sexual or engage in an intimate relationship" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 160) and emphasize the prevalence of the objectification of women within online gaming spaces. This theme also highlights that solicitous comments are a prominent type of both gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention within this online forum and that it often manifests as active verbal sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, as described by Barak (2005) and Henry & Powell (2017), is either written or spoken solicitous comments, typically being directly targeted at a particular female gamer in response to their presence within the space.

---

[13] The term tbag is common slang for the act of placing one's testicles in the open mouth of another individual ("T Bag Definition," n.d.).

Insults Abound

The second theme that emerged from the data was that insults were extremely common, and that specific types of insults were articulated towards female gamers. The first two types of insults centered on the fact that women were insulted using gendered terms;

fucking slut

and

RMP: Hey, you know what bitch? Fuck off.

(in-game voice chat transcript)

and more crudely sophisticated and disturbingly creative insults like;

im going to stick an egg in ur vaginal canal and punch it-

and

i hope your vibrator shorts out and fries your fucking vagina :]

The more simplistic insults often used derogatory terms about women, such as *bitch, slut,* and *cunt*, while also typically incorporating a request to *shut up* or *fuck off.* These gendered and misogynistic slurs are used to demean and shame women who are perceived as violating expected hetero-feminine norms (Levey, 2018; Sobieraj, 2018), in this instance, the very act of playing video games, traditionally perceived as a male-only activity (Cote, 2020; Cross, 2014; Deavours, 2023; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Paaßen et al., 2017). The more crudely creative insults could potentially reflect some attempt at humour on the part of the sender, but instead have the effect of attempting to make the sentiments seem harmless while also reinforcing and further normalizing misogyny (Levey, 2018) within online gaming spaces. At the core, both types focus on insulting gamers simply because of their gender. These findings are supported by other research that indicates that voice-based gender cues alone are sufficient to change players reactions and to increase the number of directed negative comments targeted at gamers who are perceived to be female (Cote, 2020, 2021; Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012; Vergel et al., 2023).

Stereotyped insults are the third type directed at female gamers. For the purposes of this theme "stereotypes can be understood as vivid but simple representations that reduce persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, characteristics" (Baker, 2000, p.263 as cited by Marchbank & Letherby, 2014). In this case, the insults were framed around stereotypical assumptions about the type of women present in gaming spaces. The most common stereotypes focused on the appearance of female players; their presumed lack of intelligence; or challenges to their femininity because of their presence within a traditionally masculine space. Appearance-based stereotyped insults focused primarily on the presumed appearance of female players, such as:

u know ur an ugly girl when u play xbox

and

You sound fat lol. How many chins we talking here? I bet you smell like old onions lol.

These comments imply that women who play video games must be ugly or fat, or generally possess an appearance that does not meet the heteronormative standards of beauty. Judging women's physical attractiveness as deficient is a common method of sexual harassment in online contexts (Mantilla, 2015). In the gaming context the misplaced belief that female gamers participating in an activity that deviates from the assumed gender normative behaviour, must also fail to meet the masculine heteronormative standards of appearance. These stereotyped insults represent an attempt by men to police physical appearance while also regulating what proper female behaviour should be (Cote, 2020; Levey, 2018). They do this by suggesting that only women who do not possess a certain type of appearance, in this case a sexually appealing physical appearance, would be participating in what is perceived to be the masculine behaviour of gaming. These appearance-based insults also serve to further reinforce the male-only stereotype of the space (Cross, 2014; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2020; Paaßen et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2020; Vergel et al., 2023) because women who possess a more traditional heteronormative female appearance are assumed not to participate in gaming.

Insults focused on female gamers presumed lack of intelligence often referred to women as being dumb, such as

ME A BETTER GAMER THAN YOU DUMB MUTHA FUCKER WE MEN DONT
NEED WOMEN THEY DUMB FUCKS

while some insults went further saying that women are less than human, such as:

> You ain't nothing but a coward hah, god gets my revenge and has way
> meaner than I could ever hope to be to my enemies. I would tell you to
> go out and get a brain but that implies your capable of thought your a
> lower life form. I'll be laughing while you burn

These types of insults continue the thread that stereotyped insults have misogynistic
undertones but focus on the perceived intelligence of women instead of physical
appearance. This stereotype is historically rooted in ideas of biological essentialism and
the notion that women were inherently, for perceived biological reasons, less intelligent
than men (Kimmel & Holler, 2011). Historically, the gaming industry further perpetuated
this notion because of the perception that women lacked the technical skills required to
participate, both as creators of gaming content and as players, resulting in the ongoing
marginalization and exclusion of women in the industry (Cote, 2020; Easpaig &
Humphrey, 2017; Robinson, 2023; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Tomkinson & Harper,
2015; Vergel et al., 2023; Vysotsky & Allaway, 2018). The continued presence of
stereotyped insults in modern contexts emphasizes that these deeply and historically
rooted misogynistic ideas continue to persist within online gaming spaces.

Stereotypical insults that focused on challenging the femininity of the women
within a traditionally masculine space, included:

> ugly dike u got host u suck no live

and

> RMP1: 3 and 21. [talking about how badly another player did]
>
> RMP2: That dude ducked [unintelligible] 3 and 21.
>
> FP: Dud, look at your score, you sucked too.
>
> RMP2: Meee meee meee, you sound like a fuckin lesbian bitch.
> [laughter]
>
> *(in-game voice chat transcript)*

Both examples refer to women as lesbians, with one using the term dyke, a term often
seen as "a disparaging or offensive term for lesbians" (Levey, 2018, p. 83). Not only is

this terminology an overt example of homophobia, it also serves to challenge and shame female gamers who deviate from "traditional gender and sexual norms" (Levey, 2018, p. 84). These notions are rooted in the interactionist approach of conceptualizing gender as "doing" or performing it through an individual's actions and activities (Kimmel & Holler, 2011). In this context, male players interpret the very presence and participation of women in online video games as a lack of conformity to traditional gender norms (Cote, 2020) and therefore the stereotyped insults focused on femininity are an attempt to challenge these female gamers because of their failure to conform (Cote, 2020; Levey, 2018; Sobieraj, 2018).

The stereotyped assumption that women do not, and should not, have any skills in gameplay was the final type of insults directed at players. This insult type manifested in several different ways, including the use of common gaming terminology, but directed at female gamers as an insult. Examples of these comments include:

> k fuck off u didn't even get that shit legitly. I killed u and u used fucking nooby second chance pro and got revived. FUCK OFF NOOB

and

> gotta move 2 win bitch now get tf out of my lobby cunt n stop campin

Noob is gaming slang for a new, inexperienced player ("Noob," n.d.) and its use in the first example suggests that a female gamer's success in gameplay can only be due to beginner's luck or new player second chances, thereby insinuating that women do not have any real skill in video game play. Camper is an accusation made against players who are believed to be staying in one place on a game map and sniping opponents from a distance instead of being in the centre of the action. Camping is commonly viewed as a less skilled method of gameplay and is often used as an insult against players perceived to possess no gameplay skill ("Camping," n.d.). Such insults even happened in situations in which women had demonstrated skills to the contrary (in other words the male players lost). The use of common gaming terminology as a mechanism of insult against female gamers reflects a certain heteronormative standard that women are expected to adhere to, namely that women who play videos games have no skill – in comparison to male players.

During interactions where female gamers demonstrated they had strong gameplay skills (usually through winning), insults shifted from relying on gaming terminology to insinuating that the only way women could win was by cheating. An example of this is:

RMP1: …Again, by the same guy. Fuckin' Reverend.

RMP2: I don't know how a fuckin' female got positive. I know she was cheating.

FP: You're hysterical.

RMP2: I know, right? I knew you'd love that shit.

(in-game voice chat transcript)

Insults challenging women's skills in gameplay, whether through dismissing their accomplishments as "beginners luck" or through outright accusations of cheating, parallels the stereotyped insults around intelligence historically rooted in inaccurate assumptions that women are inherently less capable than men in video game play (Cote, 2020; Deng, 2023; Easpaig & Humphrey, 2017; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Seo, Oh, & Kil, 2022; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). The sequential nature of these occurrences, with accusations of cheating used after a female gamer's skill made insults of noob and/or camper ineffective, also demonstrates that these insults are being used by male players to rationalize the skills they are witnessing from female gamers during these interactions. The accusation of cheating in response to a demonstrated skill set goes a step beyond the insult itself, with male players seeking to rationalize how women can be skillful in something that deviates so far from the stereotyped gender norms. Holz Ivory et al. (2014) suggest

> that female players may be evaluated negatively regardless of their game play performance; specifically, female players who perform well during game play will violate the expectations of their stereotype, whereas female players who perform poorly will confirm the pre-existing stereotype. (p. 151)

At times, skill-focused insults either insinuated or explicitly stated that female gamers who demonstrate gameplay skill must be lesbians, thereby pairing these two stereotypes and further reinforcing heteronormative gender norms.

31

Skill-related insults also frequently manifested in the form of questioning women about their motivations for playing video games, often insinuating that the only reason they were playing was to seek attention from guys. One example,

> u aint nuthin but a hoe u dont even play games the only reason u got live[14] is because all of the dudes that are on ther bye bitch

clearly exemplifies the underlying idea that women are not really "playing" at all but instead are just in the space to seek male attention. This type of insult questions, and ultimately undermines, the legitimacy of female gamers participation in and success at an activity perceived as masculine (Cote, 2020; Deng, 2023; Easpaig & Humphrey, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2014; Holz Ivory et al., 2014; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Robinson, 2023). Female gamers who challenge the stereotype are reduced to being objectified by men, who view them solely as sexual objects within gaming spaces. This example from a longer interaction demonstrates such objectification.

> (RMP1 had just heard the female player laugh during play)
>
> RMP1: Hey yo, you can tell the bitch got no life- her fuckin' K/D[15] is 2.07.
>
> Play: Or maybe when she plays she's actually good. Unlike your ass. With your 1.34.
>
> RMP1: Yeah, she good at suckin' this dick right here.

> *(in-game voice chat transcript)*

Above, a male player attempts to rationalize the female gamers demonstrated skill level, as denoted by their high K/D ratio. When a friend of the female gamer challenges that rationalization, he shifts to sexual objectification to avoid confronting the reality that female gamers can be skilled players. Along with objectification, stereotyped insults also demonstrate that male players need to rationalize the presence of women within "their"

---

[14] In this example, the term live is a reference to Xbox Live, which is the online network for playing multiplayer games on Xbox consoles.

[15] The acronym K/D is shorthand for the term kill/death ratio, which, in a first-person shooter video game, is the number of kills of members of the opposing team a player has divided by the number of times the player's own character dies and respawns ("K/D," n.d.). A high K/D ratio is the desired objective, demonstrating a high level of skill if a player has lots of kills with fewer deaths after each round of play.

space as seen in the following exchange between two male players during an in-game voice chat:

> (RMP1 had just insulted the female player in the game)
>
> RMP1: Girls like that come on this Xbox for attention. They live for it.
>
> RMP3: Dude, dude- girls can like games just like guys.
>
> RMP1: Woah woah woah- She's either a lesbian or [everyone talks at one]
>
> RMP3: My girlfriend games.
>
> RMP1: Yeah well your girlfriend's probably fat and
>
> RMP1: Nasty.

(in-game voice chat transcript)

Above, player one begins his rationalization suggesting that women only play for attention. When challenged by another male player, he shifts to the "she must be a lesbian" reasoning, and when challenged again, this time with a counter example, he adjusts the rationalization for a second time to "well they must be fat and nasty." This example illustrates that, overall, stereotypical insults are an attempt by male players to rationalize away the presence of female gamers to de-legitimize their participation in this space. Their rationale appears to be challenged any time a woman demonstrates gameplay skills, indicates that she enjoys playing, or she fails to meet any of the heteronormative expectations of gendered appearance or behaviours. However, because the act of participation in video game play itself violates the stereotype "that women do not play video games," the need to re-rationalize that stereotype is almost constant and manifests as stereotyped insults. In this context, these stereotyped insults represent another type of sexual harassment within online gaming spaces, and similar to the spectrum of solicitation, are primarily examples of active, verbal gender-based harassment, as described by Barak (2005) and Henry & Powell (2017).

No Girls Allowed

The third emerging theme centered around the fact that many comments directed at the female gamers were a direct utterance that they were not welcome within the gaming space and that they should leave. These comments frequently made use of two

common slights directed at women in gaming spaces, "go back to the kitchen" and "make me a sandwich." Examples include:

go in the kitchen and stop gaming its for men not for pussys

and

cam ur tits

make me a sandwitch

i love seeing try hads cry

Phrases such as "go back to the kitchen" and "make me a sandwich" are rooted in the "socio-cultural and structural context of gender inequality" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 29) and, in this case, reflect the historic gender roles of women as solely responsible for domestic labour in the home (Luxton, 1980, 1983). Historically, the inequities of the division of labour in the home were a result of male power (Luxton, 1983), where the women's primary role in the household was to perform the domestic labour, including housework, a considerable component involving meal preparation and other duties within the kitchen of the home (Luxton, 1980). Using these phrases in online gaming represents a type of symbolic violence, "which describes the way in which sexual minorities have been ignored, trivialized, or condemned by those in power" (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015, p. 627). While women may not actually be a minority within gaming, they are marginalized, as seen above, using language that trivializes and dismisses their presence as an intrusion into the "boys club", and "illustrates how norms and ideologies around gender roles and responsibilities are slow to change" (Cote, 2020, p. 91). This marginalization is consistent with previous research (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023) and emphasizes deeply rooted misogynistic ideals about the spaces men deem appropriate for women to enter and those where they do not belong, such as gaming spaces. These utterances that women were not welcome in gaming spaces were sometimes far more blatant and direct in nature.
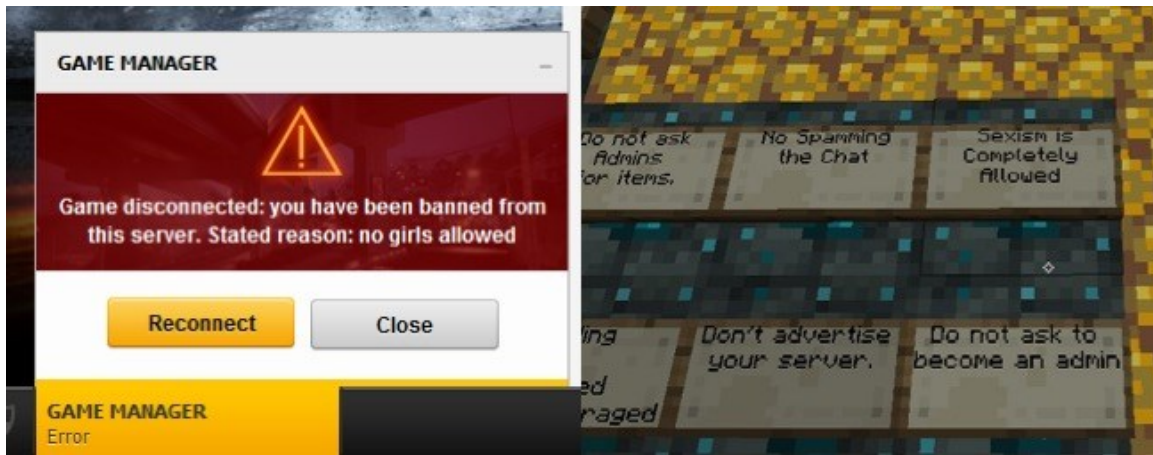
Figure 1. Two screen captured images of statements showing that women are not welcome within gaming spaces ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

As demonstrated in Figure 1, blatant statements that no girls were allowed, were a rationale for ejecting female gamers from a game server. Figure 1 also includes the comment that "sexism is completely allowed," illustrating the blatant intolerance towards women within some gaming spaces. These comments make the symbolic violence within the gaming spaces explicit.

This "women are not welcome" mentality was repeatedly found in comments that women in gaming spaces must only be there because they have no life. Remarks like

> you're telling me to learn? lol how bout u go get a damn life. Shit you've wasted over 800 hours of your life on this game! How bout u learn to get off your fat ass and go do something else with your life!

show how comments were used to state that if a woman was playing video games, then she must have no life beyond that. When stating that women did not have real lives, the male players often contrasted this by emphasizing their own life experiences and challenges beyond the game. Similar to *Insults Abound*, these types of comments represent attempts by male players to rationalize the presence of women in gaming spaces. Unlike the previous themes, however, they also delegitimize women's voices, framing them as inferior to the male players (Poland, 2016b) by not having a life, further emphasized by the direct contrast with their own superior lives. These "no life" statements also manifested in remarks that female gamers must be single, such as:

> RMP1: Get the fuck back in the kitchen and take your goddamn hands off a fucking video game controller.

35

FP: Nah. Having too much fun.

RMP1: Fucking stupid bitch.

RMP3: Fat whore.

RMP1: I hope your boyfriend beats you. Nah, you can't get a boyfriend. The fuck am I talking about.

(in-game voice chat transcript)

or with suggestions that female gamers have no other skills or purpose in life, except for having sex with men. For example:

stfu you fat fucking texas slag, go lose some weight, get a job and make some real friends, Sincerly The Bunny

and

wow yours so good get your fatass off the couch and get some friends you cunt p.s tell mr faggo to blow me cause he sucks like you ohh yea your uggie kid

The language being used here not only marginalizes and delegitimizes the voices of the female gamers but objectifies women and reduces them to a sexualized stereotype that women serve the pleasure of the dominant "male gamer" identity (Paaßen et al., 2017; Poland, 2016b; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015). In this theme, symbolic violence is a form of sexual harassment, exemplified by the text-based and voice-based messages, incidents which are consistent with Barak's (2005) definition of active, verbal sexual harassment. The image-based examples, however, represent passive verbal sexual harassment, defined by Barak (2005) as when "the harasser does not target harassing messages directly to a particular person or persons but, rather, to potential receivers" (p. 79).

All themes discussed thus far are examples of microaggressions, defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership (people of colour, women, or LGBTs)" (Sue, 2010b, p. 24). Gender microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative sexist slights and insults toward women" (Capodilupo et al., 2010, p. 197). Three different forms of microaggressions, including gendered ones, can manifest: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014; Jackson &

Nadal, 2017; Sue, 2010b, 2010a). Microassaults are the most common and overt type of microaggression and "are conscious biased beliefs or attitudes that are held by individuals and intentionally expressed or acted out overtly or covertly towards a marginalized person or socially devalued group" (Sue, 2010a, p. 8). Microassaults tend to manifest only under conditions in which the perpetrator has some degree of anonymity, feels safe expressing these views in a space where there may be others who share those beliefs and where they know they can get away with it (Sue, 2010b). These characteristics accurately describe online gaming spaces, where anonymity is the norm, and male players do not face any consequences for their comments and are sometimes encouraged to continue by other male players. Another element of these examples that identifies them as microaggressions is the strong focus on sexual objectification by viewing the female gamers as simply an object that is there for the sexual gratification of the male players. Sexual objectification is one theme commonly observed within different types of microaggression and is "the process by which women are transformed into 'objects' or property at the sexual disposal or benefit of men" (Sue, 2010b, p. 36). In these examples, the threats made against women, reduces them to objects of pleasure, while also marginalizing the female gamers by exerting power during their interactions. Microaggressions'

> less obvious nature makes it potentially more difficult to combat as its assumptions appear to be true or at least not damaging. However, it still acts as a barrier to equality in gaming spaces … by normalizing masculinity while marking women's desire to enter the space as unusual and deviant. (Cote, 2020, p. 88)

Threaten the Women Away

In addition to comments directed at women letting them know that they were not welcome in the space, they were threatened in several ways, often to encourage them to leave the gaming space, which is the basis of the final theme presented here. The most common types of threats identified were death, encouragement to suicide, rape, and genital mutilation. Death threats, such as

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

included derogatory gendered insults, like *cunt*, *slut* and *bitch*, emphasizing the extremely gendered nature of these violent threats. Similar language is also used in encouragements to suicide:

> Get a life or lose wieght of just kill yourself…..The last one is probably going to be your best bet. So, have at it, and YOU have a good day.

rape threats:

> fuck u bitch u think u so hard hit up then [redacted with comment – [really specific address and phone number, including zipcode][16] PUSSY I FUCKIN RAPE U ask 4 jesse my dads name is doug

and threats of genital mutilation:

> u act like ur good u down syndrome cunt ill rip ur ovaries out n make u eat em u mother fuckin spawn killin pathetic whore

The graphically violent content makes these types of threats disturbing. Such threats are a type of active, verbal sexual harassment (as described by Barak (2005) and Henry & Powell (2017)) "geared toward being as shocking and intimidating as possible to the targeted women, in the hopes she will withdraw" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 55) from participation in the gaming space entirely. The use of gendered language, such as *cunt* and *bitch*, as well as directly threatening their genitalia, emphasizes the sexist and misogynistic motivations behind the threats. Women are most likely to perceive graphic threats as particularly credible, but often they are not taken seriously by others because they are framed as crude humour that differs from offline threats (Henry & Powell, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Mantilla, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). The graphic nature of these threats alone should be enough to debunk the idea that threats of this nature are somehow less credible or less impactful simply because they are happening within an online gaming space. In addition to the text and voice-based graphic threats, active graphic gender harassment, sometimes referred to as image-based sexual harassment (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017; Vergel et al., 2023), appeared in the data. Image-based sexual harassment usually occurs in conjunction with the other types of threats or gender-based insults discussed above, and while there are distinct forms of image-

---

[16] This redaction was part of the original data set and would have been redacted before being posted on the website.

based harassment, as described by Henry & Powell (2017), this data set included crudely drawn images (see Figure 2) meant to depict the target in a sexual way.
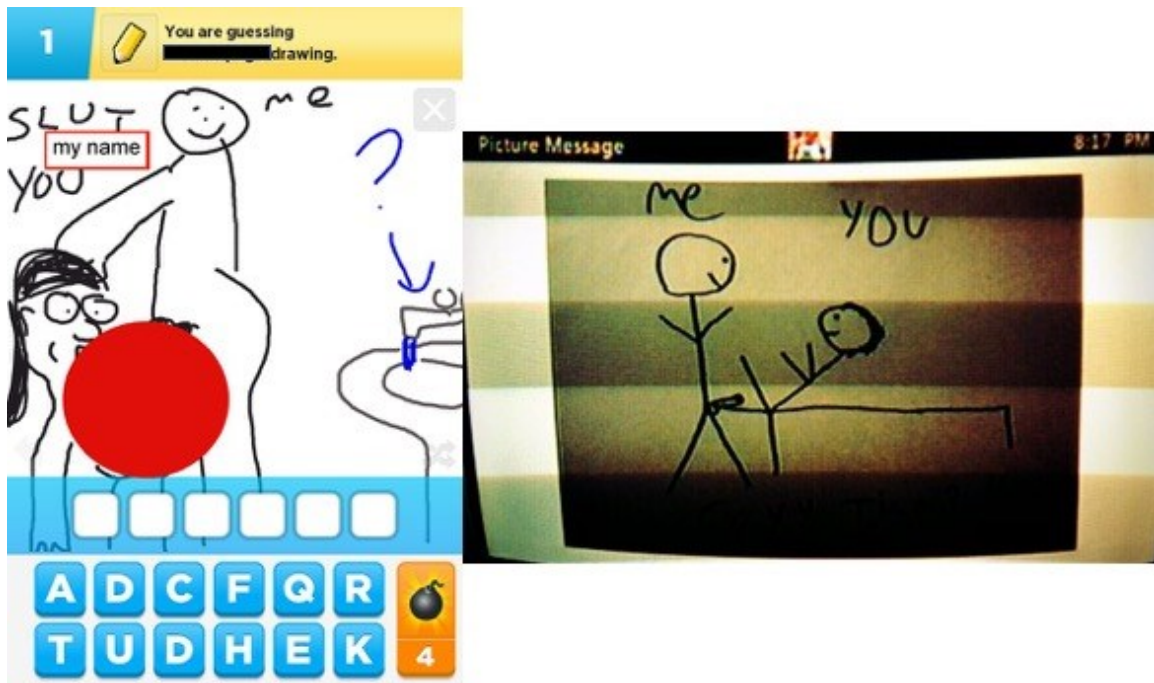
Figure 2. **Examples of image-based sexual harassment ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

In both images, the message recipient is drawn in sexually explicit and compromising positions with the sender. Such images degrade women (Henry & Powell, 2017; Megarry, 2014) and are another mechanism to threaten them with graphic violence. Violent threats further marginalize women within gaming spaces and highlight the extent to which a misogynistic culture persists within the online gaming community.

While actively trying to threaten the women out of the gaming spaces, male players also frequently described "getting off" on the female presence in the space – often at the same time they were issuing threats. Two examples include:

> Lets say i snuck into ur bedroom n grabbed ur ankle while u were asleep n i put ur foot against my groin n u woke up to catch me with my pants down humping ur foot n about to come? ..what would u honestly do at that very moment?

and

> im going to travel back in time .. find a dinosaur egg.. bring it back to the future, sit on it till it hatches, raise it, love it, and then watch it

mangle your lifeless and helpless carcass.. while i touch myself inappropriately

Beyond violent threats, the language used above highlights an underlying level of enjoyment and sexual gratification on the part of the male players while making these threats. These threats represent not only the sender's attempt to exert power over the female gamers, but the explicit descriptions of sexual gratification also highlights the senders' sexual objectification of female gamers. As such, these threats bring together the two most common elements of sexual harassment within online gaming spaces, marginalizing female gamers by exerting power and sexual objectification and dismissal of their presence within the space (Maloney, Roberts, & Graham, 2019; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Sobieraj, 2018; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017).

The threats articulated in this theme also move beyond the space of sexual harassment and need to be considered as potentially criminal behaviour. Under section 264.1 of the *Canadian Criminal Code*, it is illegal to utter threats of death or bodily harm to any person (Criminal Code, 1985). That threatening sexual harassment in online gaming spaces can also potentially constitute criminal behaviour in certain circumstances emphasizes the severity of these incidents and why it is important that these interactions are not simply dismissed as crude humour that differs from offline threats (Henry & Powell, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Mantilla, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). Regardless of the potentially criminal nature of these behaviours, there is still harm occurring to those who repeatedly experience these interactions. The term harm "captures acts that may not be deemed a criminal offence or a civil wrong under law" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 5). While harm "is a broad and unspecified term, it has the benefit of capturing impacts on victims where some kind of physical, psychological, social or financial harm has resulted (or a combination of them all)" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 5). A detailed discussion of the harms caused by sexual harassment in online video gaming is beyond the scope of this study, however it is necessary to acknowledge that those harms do in fact exist and that there are negative impacts on those who experience these types of threats and other forms of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces (Fox & Tang, 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Gray, 2014; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b).

A Note about Dick Pics

The absence of "dick pics" in the data is notable. The term dick pics describes "a particular phallocentric phenomenon in which men create and distribute images of their genitalia" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 164), unsolicited, as a form of image-based, online sexual harassment. Women receiving unsolicited dick pics from men online has become increasingly common and is generally used as a technique to intimidate, hurt, or harass women, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Amundsen, 2021). Dick pics are "sexist acts grounded in discriminatory perceptions of (especially female) gender and sexuality" (Amundsen, 2021, p. 1476). Dick pics are noticeable in their absence from this data set, but that is *not* because they do not happen in online gaming contexts. The following excerpts illustrates this (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. **Excerpt from a post on *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* (n.d.).**
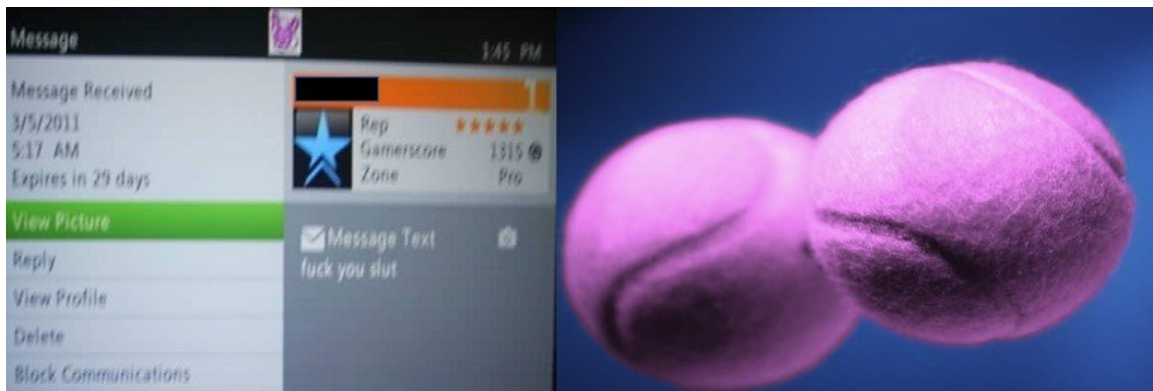
The moderators' substitution of pink tennis balls for the original submission "with more pants," emphasizes that dick pics are very common in online gaming. The absence of unsolicited dick pics in the data set is not because they do not occur, but because the websites refused to post them. Consequently, the full extent and severity of the sexualized harassment in online gaming is underrepresented by this data set.

The four themes identified in this study, and the types of online sexual harassment they represent, are consistent with the theory of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010). "The theory of ambivalent sexism posits that individuals may hold both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women, both of which have derogatory implications for women's nature and abilities" (Fox & Tang, 2017a, p. 118). Attitudes characterized by antipathy and superiority over women, with elements of dominative paternalism, where male dominance is asserted using gendered stereotypes, are generally characterized as hostile sexism (Lee et al., 2010; Tang & Fox, 2016). Gendered stereotypes of female gamers are, as seen in this study, common in sexual harassment in online gaming, particularly those that focused on appearances and lack of intelligence. In contrast benevolent sexism is characterized by paternalistic views of women and their gender roles, with women seen as weak, incapable, and disempowered, while men fill the role of protector (Lee et al., 2010; Tang & Fox, 2016). In the gaming context, the use of slights like "go back to the kitchen" and "make me a sandwich" highlight the rigid adherence to gender roles and the repeated demeaning and dismissing of female gamers skills in gameplay strongly reflects the characteristics of benevolent sexism. The added complexity of the stereotype component is that it is actually an interplay of both the gender stereotyping of women and the role or context that they are participating in (Fiske & Glick, 1995). In this context, gaming is not just a masculine space with a masculine culture (Cote, 2020; Fiske & Glick, 1995), but a hypermasculine one (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). "Hypermasculinity is a psychological term coined to describe the exaggeration of masculine cultural stereotypes within subcultures" (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 402), something which remains prevalent in the gaming sphere because of both the continued association of the gamer identity with the male gender and the continued invisibility of women in the industry as a whole (Cote, 2020; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Paaßen et al., 2017; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Tang et al., 2020; Vysotsky & Allaway, 2018). However, the discourse needs to move beyond cultural characterizations of gaming spaces to discuss the potential for catalysts for changing the current cultural status quo.

3.3. Conclusion

Sexual harassment within the sphere of online gaming is a mainstream social problem, and while previous research has looked at how players respond to voice-based

gender cues in-game and at sexism within the video game industry more broadly, less research focused specifically on sexual harassment within online gaming contexts. This study used a qualitative content analysis to categorize the types and styles of sexual harassment prevalent within online gaming spaces. The results identified four key themes: the spectrum of solicitation; insults abound; no girls allowed; and threaten the women away. These themes were characterized predominantly by active, verbal types of sexual harassment, typically in the form of written text-based messages or voice-based messages and conversations. Instances of active, graphic gender harassment (also known as image-based sexual harassment) and passive, verbal sexual harassment, also appeared in the data.

The language in these harassing comments often used both common, derogatory terms for women (e.g., *slut*, *cunt*, and *bitch*) and common stereotypes about women (e.g., appearance, intelligence, and skill) to frame the sexually harassing comments. The nature of the comments, particularly within the *Threaten the Women Away* theme, also highlights the severity of the harassment in these spaces, with threats of death, rape, and genital mutilation common occurrences. Symbolic violence, using insults and slurs that included the phrases "go back to the kitchen" and "make me a sandwich," and gendered microassaults based on sexual objectification, appear in some themes and emphasize the ongoing misogynistic culture within online gaming that both actively and passively marginalizes female gamers. The use of sexual harassment to marginalize female gamers was further highlighted by the rationales provided by male players that sought to justify their behaviours. Through the use of various stereotypes, and despite the active presence of female gamers, male players sought to maintain the overall stereotype "that women do not play video games" and exclude women from participation in this "masculine" behaviour.

The primary purpose of this study was to classify the different types of sexual harassment that occur within the online gaming context to better understand the specific behaviours occurring when that term is used. The results contribute to our understanding of sexual harassment in online gaming and lay a foundation for future research about the serious harms of online sexual harassment in this context. This study focused on the patterns of the types and styles of sexual harassment used in online gaming but did not consider any additional behavioural patterns. Future research needs to study this data, not as individual incidents, but as a larger pattern of systemic social behaviour.

Analyzing common language and behavioural patterns across a multitude of examples will allow for the identification of commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment and hopefully begin to demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours. Only after reconceptualizing our understanding of sexual harassment as a systemic social issue, instead of just countless one-off "everyday" incidents, can we effectively begin exploring prevention and intervention strategies.

Chapter 4. It is time to trash the trolling excuse: reconceptualizing trash talking and trolling as normalizing sexual harassment

4.1. Literature Review

Sexual harassment is typically understood as "a broad concept that encompasses many behaviours: unwelcomed sexual attention, the offering of benefits for sexual favours, coercion into sexual activity, or bullying and harassment on the ground of one's gender" (Kimmel & Holler, 2011, p. 391). Considered a form of sex discrimination (Fox & Tang, 2017b; Henry & Powell, 2017), sexual harassment is generally classified into three broad categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Table 1) (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017). While the behaviours comprising sexual harassment have traditionally been applied in offline contexts, like workplace and street harassment, the definitions are equally applicable to online contexts, where all three categories have been observed (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017).

Table 1.   Descriptions of the categories of sexual harassment

Category of Sexual Harassment	Description
Gender Harassment	Comments and remarks that insult an individual based on their gender to provoke a response. Includes intimidating behaviours and unwelcome visual and verbal comments (e.g., misogynist hate speech) (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017).
Unwanted Sexual Attention	Comments and remarks or uninvited behaviours that are sexually based or that communicate sexual desires/intentions. Includes actions like insinuating sexual activity or staring at a woman's breasts (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017).
Sexual Coercion	Using psychological or physical pressure to force a person to cooperate in a sexual manner. Includes making threats and offering bribes for sexual favours and undesired physical touching (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017).

Online sexual harassment captures a wide range of online behaviours, including "unwanted sexual attention, image-based abuse, simulated rape threats, hate speech, trolling, flaming, cyberbullying and cyberstalking" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 156). These behaviours occur in a range of online contexts (e.g., social media, online dating, chat/discussion forums, emails/texts, live streaming, & video gaming) and formats that

include voice, text, or image-based (Henry & Powell, 2017). The persistence of online sexual harassment limits participation in online spaces (Henry & Powell, 2017), yet, at times, the public and academics have mischaracterized it as a novel phenomenon that is somehow less real and less harmful than sexual harassment occurring in the more traditionally understood in-person contexts (Brail, 1996; Coles & West, 2016; Mantilla, 2015; Poland, 2016b). Framing online sexual harassment as distinct and/or different from offline encounters minimizes its prevalence and severity, which in turn contributes to the normalizing of these behaviours. Missing from the discourse around sexual harassment online is a focus on the factors that contribute to normalizing these behaviours.

Parallels with the Past

Sexual harassment online has often been defined and characterized using alternative terminology (Coles & West, 2016; Fox & Tang, 2017b; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Jane, 2015, 2016; Levey, 2018; Mantilla, 2015; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016a), often with the notion that the problem is in some way novel because of the online context in which it occurs. This mischaracterization has resulted in less focus being placed on the many parallels that exist between sexual harassment occurring online, and in various offline contexts. Whether online or offline, the behaviours (and harm) primarily target women, are pervasive, and have major impacts on those who experience them (Mantilla, 2015; Ortiz, 2024). The behaviours are also typically ubiquitous in society but are not widely acknowledged or recognized as problematic and the social harms they cause are often disregarded or minimized (Mantilla, 2015; Ortiz, 2024). Thus, sexual harassment online "rather than being a new and unprecedented phenomenon, is a reflection and embodiment of long-standing cultural patterns of misogyny – both beliefs and practices" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 132). In this way, sexual harassment online is a more recent manifestation of the systemic ways in which women have been excluded from full participation in society throughout history (Mantilla, 2013, 2015).

The history of sexual harassment illustrates the parallels in the social perceptions of sexual harassment, whether online or offline. Prior to feminist activism in the 1970s, most of society typically dismissed sexual harassment in the workplace as "workplace flirting" (Citron, 2014, p. 95). Moreover, women's concerns were ignored because harassing behaviours were perceived as normal occurrences that women were expected

to tolerate (Citron, 2014; Mantilla, 2013, 2015). The women's movement, through significant activism, challenged the social attitudes that legitimized, minimized, and normalized sexual harassment in the workplace (Mantilla, 2013, 2015) by debunking the reasons society had normalized the practices and exposing the behaviours as systemic and illegitimate (Citron, 2014). Historically, "sexual harassment in the workplace [was] another form of misogyny that was widespread and yet simultaneously unacknowledged" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 152). It took significant efforts to delegitimize these behaviours and begin changing social attitudes. The harassment of women on public streets is another example of a widespread social issue that prevents women from being full participants in public spaces (Mantilla, 2013, 2015), but "it is only recently that the concept of street harassment has begun to be named and acknowledged to as a harmful pattern of behaviour that targets women" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 151). Sexual harassment online is simply the latest iteration of this historical pattern, where women are targeted within a specific social context not for their ideas but simply because they are women, in order to dismiss or disregard their contributions to society (Cote, 2020; Mantilla, 2013, 2015; Ortiz, 2024; Sobieraj, 2018). Like sexual harassment in the workplace and street harassment before it, online sexual harassment of women has become increasingly widespread, but at the same time is unacknowledged and ignored to such an extent that it has been normalized and accepted by much of society, rendering the systemic nature of the problem invisible (Citron, 2014; Mantilla, 2015; Mills, 2022; Ortiz, 2024; Sobieraj, 2018).

Stop Calling It Trolling and Trash Talking

In both public discourse and the academic literature, assorted terms describe different sexual and gendered aspects of the harassment of women in online contexts (Levey, 2018). Gender-based harassment in cyberspace (Barak, 2005), cyber harassment, cyberstalking and cyber sexism (Poland, 2016a, 2016b; Vergel et al., 2023), broadly reflect the behaviours associated with sexual harassment in online contexts. On the other hand while terms like e-bile (Jane, 2014b, 2016), flaming (Cruz, Seo, & Rex, 2018; Jane, 2015; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Vergel et al., 2023), trash talking/sexist trash talking (Cote, 2017; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim, Vungthong, & Trakulkasemsuk, 2024; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a; Vergel et al., 2023), and trolling/gender trolling (Coles & West, 2016; Condis,

2018; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; C. Cook et al., 2018; Cruz et al., 2018; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Mantilla, 2013, 2015; Thacker & Griffiths, 2012; Vergel et al., 2023), used to describe online sexual harassment have arguably contributed, albeit inadvertently, to normalizing and minimizing the severity and pervasiveness of the problem. Unpacking the problematic nature of all these terms is important, however this paper focuses on trash talking and trolling, given their ubiquity and general acceptance in online gaming culture.

It is Not Trash Talk If It is Sexist

Trash talking broadly is defined as "boastful comment[s] about the self or insulting comments about an opponent that are delivered by a competitor typically before or during a competition" (Yip, Schweitzer, & Nurmohamed, 2018, p. 126). In gaming culture, "trash talking is often perceived as a normal part of competitive gameplay wherein a player demeans targets in an attempt to affect their play" (Fox & Tang, 2017b, p. 1292). Trash talk can be considered a type of trolling that includes "putting down or making fun of other players" (C. Cook et al., 2018, p. 3329) with the goal of distracting, intimidating, taunting and/or demoralizing opponents (Lim et al., 2024). The terms trash talking and trolling are often used interchangeably within gaming culture, both with the underlying meaning that they are just harmless, minor inconveniences, and that cultural norms in gaming continue reinforcing them as an accepted practice despite ongoing critiques of that minimization (Cote, 2020; Deng, 2023; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017). Trash talking has been culturally normalized to the point where it is an expected part of regular gameplay, where "those who react poorly are thought to be taking it too seriously" (Cote, 2017, p. 139), and where the right to engage in trash talk is actively defended by players (Cote, 2017, 2020; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Vergel et al., 2023).

Trash talk as a cultural norm and expected behaviour has led to its use as a tool "to categorize people and can reproduce institutionalized social differences in a space where racism and sexism are already inescapable realities" (Ortiz, 2019a, p. 880). Sexist trash talking in this context is viewed as the worst form of trash talk yet is typically justified by its frequency and prevalence within gaming (Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Ortiz, 2019a; Vergel et al., 2023) and thus, as with trolling, is normalized and excused as an accepted part of gaming cultural practice. Normalizing minimizes

these behaviours and serves to render them harmless (Coles & West, 2016). As such, common discourse rarely re-characterizes these behaviours as harassment and fails to accurately present both the severity and the target's perception of the behaviours (Fox & Tang, 2017b; Ortiz, 2019a). Framing harmful sexist, or racist, behaviours as trash talk normalizes discriminatory discourse as a regular and expected aspect of gameplay and creates an expectation that players need to participate in such behaviour to be accepted within gaming culture (Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Ortiz, 2019b). Repeated normalizing conceals the systemic nature of the problem, encourages desensitization, and creates a perception that sexism occurring in online settings is somehow less real than harassment that occurs offline (Ortiz, 2019b).

Stop Calling It Trolling If It is Gendered

The term trolling emerged in the 1990s and was initially defined as "disrupt[ing] a conversation or entire community by posting incendiary statements or stupid questions onto a discussion board" (Mantilla, 2013, p. 563) in an effort to be deliberatively quarrelsome or for personal enjoyment. Today, the term trolling has become a catch-all term for many types of "online malicious behaviour[s] intended to aggravate, annoy or otherwise disrupt online interactions and communications" (Coles & West, 2016, p. 233). Trolling has become pervasive online, occurring in countless different contexts and on a multitude of different platforms but often with common characteristics like repetition, provocation, intentionality, and anonymity (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; Cruz et al., 2018; Sanfilippo et al., 2017). While many different definitions of trolling are proposed in the academic literature (Bishop, 2014; Condis, 2018; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; C. Cook et al., 2018; Cruz et al., 2018; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Thacker & Griffiths, 2012), one of the commonalities across definitions has focused on trolling behaviours intended to provoke a reaction from the person being targeted (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; C. Cook et al., 2018). Consequently, definitions of trolling have typically been framed only around the intent of the troll (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; Cruz et al., 2018; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Ortiz, 2020). This conceptual focus places too much emphasis on the intent of the troll and ignores the perceptions and experiences of the person being targeted (Ortiz, 2020), and contributes to normalizing trolling in internet discourse.

To counteract normalizing, some scholars coined the term gender trolling, which is described as distinct, and more virulent and threatening than trolling, with specific features that make it more destructive (Mantilla, 2013). Gender trolling can include gender-based insults and vicious language, often with credible threats of sexualized violence and tend to have a greater intensity than trolling (Mantilla, 2013). Gender trolling is also more likely to "involve a concerted or coordinated effort on the part of many trolls…who overwhelm the victim with the sheer quantity of attacks" (Mantilla, 2013, p. 564). However, despite these distinctive characteristics gender trolling is treated the same as trolling, with people failing to "recognize the drastically different character of the attacks or the levels of threat involved" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 177). This characterization of harassing behaviours as "trolling" had the unintended consequence of marginalizing its prevalence (Jane, 2015) and minimizing its severity. The association of sexual harassment online with trolling resulted in assumptions of similarity, where sexual harassment was simply accepted and dismissed as part of the game alongside trash talking (Coles & West, 2016; Jane, 2016; Mantilla, 2015). Thus, the use of terms like trolling and trash talking contributes to further normalizing these behaviours and minimizes the gendered and systemic nature and harms caused by pervasive sexual harassment in online spaces.

The Mechanisms of Minimization

Trash talking or trolling, as a normalized part of gaming culture, is most apparent in the way in which players are often instructed to respond to, or more accurately, ignore these behaviours when they occur. Research shows that the most common advice provided is simply "do not feed the trolls." Although this sentiment reflects the cultural expectation in gaming which suggests that if the person is ignored, the trash talk will end because they will go away, research continues to challenge the ongoing normalization of trolling and trash talking in gaming culture (Coles & West, 2016; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020). Other common advice[17] regarding trolling documented within gaming culture includes "it happens to everyone," "it is just the part of the game," "just block them," "it is a public forum," and "just turn it off" (Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Poland, 2016b). These types

---

[17] Advice about managing trolling and statements that excuse trolling as normal behaviour are not mutually exclusive. These common pieces of advice given to people experiencing harassment online, often serve as excuses, effectively minimizing the severity of what is being experienced.

of responses excuse, normalize and dismiss trolling and trash talking within gaming culture, and frame it as acceptable rather than harmful. Trolling has also been documented as a celebrated "rite of passage" in online gaming culture (C. Cook et al., 2018; Cote, 2020), further reinforcing its acceptability, and arguably its expected, status.

These culturally normalized common excuses for trolling/trash talking consistently place onus on the target, in various ways, as needing thick skin to be in the space and to either "suck it up" or leave. The "it happens to everyone" excuse frames targets as overreacting to something that everyone experiences, which is reinforced by the "it is just part of the game" excuses which suggests that these behaviours are nothing more than a function of being in the space because that's simply how things are, the cultural equivalent of an environmental hazard that cannot be changed, despite significant work challenging the ongoing use of these common excuses (C. Cook et al., 2018; Cote, 2021; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Poland, 2016b). The "it is a public forum" excuse is grounded in the argument that these behaviours are protected by "free speech," and as a result, no one should be overreacting to something normal experienced by everyone. These three excuses are all rooted in the "suck it up" argument that if you are going to be in this space, trolling/trash talking is going to happen and its normal so do not complain about it. The other two excuses, "just block them" or "just leave," once again put the onus on the person being targeted, but in this case to take direct action to protect themselves "if they cannot take it" by blocking/reporting[18] the troll or simply leaving the space completely. When trash talk becomes abusive, which happens when it is gendered or sexist in nature, excuses put the onus on women to ignore the behaviours and to stop talking about its impacts, with "do not feed the trolls" another way of saying "stop making everyone uncomfortable by pointing out abuse" (Poland, 2016b, p. 62).

The continued use of terms like trolling and trash talking to describe behaviours that would, in offline contexts,[19] be called sexual harassment, contributes to the ongoing

---

[18] Blocking and reporting are formalized, platform dependent, reactionary response mechanisms and not socio-cultural mechanisms through which normalizing continues during in-game incidents of harassment. Consequently, a discussion of the frequency with which these options are used, and their effectiveness is beyond the scope of this study.

[19] The intent of this comparison is not to minimize the severity of sexual harassment in offline contexts. Instead, the objective is to highlight that when women experience sexual harassment

diminishment of the severity and impact of those behaviours (Poland, 2016b). Because these terms are commonly conceptualized as being a natural aspect of online interactions, sexual harassment, mischaracterized as trolling or trash talking, is subjected to all of the same justifications that are used to justify trolling and trash taking, but now with the messaging that "everyone gets harassed", which frames sexual harassment "as though it is an inevitable part of the online experience" (Poland, 2016b, p. 75). "This sentiment is typically expressed with an air of futility, as if to say that the Internet will be the Internet, in much the same way that 'boys will be boys' is used to rationalize other kinds of abusive behaviours" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 183). Research has documented that this sentiment results in the harassing and abusive behaviours targeting women online being excused as acceptable, or framed as free speech, with women than accused of overreacting/being too sensitive, or of lying or exaggerating the severity of the problem (Brail, 1996; Citron, 2014; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Jane, 2014b, 2015; Mantilla, 2015; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2024; Poland, 2016b; Suden & Sveningsson, 2012; N. Taylor & Voorhees, 2018). In response to calling out the minimization of these harassing behaviours, cultural norms continue to persist and women are provided the same advice as everyone else, "do not feed the trolls" and to simply ignore the behaviours or "just leave the internet and/or turn off the computer" (Citron, 2014; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Poland, 2016b).

"'Do not feed the trolls' is really easy for people to say when you're not getting 100 rape threats, when you're not getting 100 death threats" (Mantilla, 2013, p. 568). All of these minimization/justification tactics contribute to normalizing sexual harassment online, which "erases women's specific experiences and excuses the behaviour" (Poland, 2016b, p. 73). In the online gaming context, the use of these justifications for harassing behaviours legitimizes the insults and threats directed at female gamers (as discussed in Chapter 3), intending to marginalize women's participation and remove them from gaming spaces entirely (Jagayat & Choma, 2021). The justification tactics and minimization through terminology, all contribute to the perception that sexual harassment online is somehow less real or less harmful, because insults and threats are normalized as "just part of the game." Normalizing contributes to the ongoing marginalization of women in gaming spaces and "has a tendency to kill conversations about seeking

---

online, their experiences are being ignored and dismissed in different ways then in offline contexts, including through labelling the behaviours as trolling or trash talking.

solutions before they get off the ground" (Poland, 2016b, p. 75). The goal of this study is to further shift the narrative surrounding the issue of sexual harassment in online gaming and to challenge continued normalizing of sexual harassment as just trolling or trash talking that "is just part of the game." Instead, sexual harassment in online gaming needs to be reframed as a systemic issue, properly situated within the broader context of the harassment of women historically to limit women's participation in public spaces. To support a discussion of this reframing, this exploratory qualitative study was guided by the research question: What are the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment in online gaming that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours? The qualitative content analysis undertaken (as explained in Chapter 2) resulted in the identification of two major themes that illustrate the culturally pervasive nature of sexual harassment within online gaming.

4.2. Results and Discussion

While the sheer size and easy availability of this data set should itself be a strong indicator of the systemic nature of the problem of sexual harassment within online gaming spaces, it is still frequently conceptualized as individual instances of "trolling or trash talking," which are dismissed as "just part of the game." Sexual harassment in online gaming, on the surface, is easily framed as individual instances of problematic behaviour, especially when the focus is placed on the content of the abuse without any consideration of the behavioural dimensions, which are a key indicator of the systemic nature of sexual harassment and thus the harms it causes (Jane, 2014a; M. Salter, 2017). A closer look at the behavioural aspects of sexual harassment in online gaming, with a focus on the commonalities between individual instances, makes visible the extent to which sexual harassment is normalized as an accepted cultural practice within gaming culture. Normalizing is demonstrated using a common language, the repetition of occurrences, and the notable cultural acceptability of the behaviours, to such an extent that it is justified as "just part of the game," even when those same behaviours are contrary to that very justification.

Normalizing an Accepted Cultural Practice

Normalizing of sexual harassment in online gaming culture is exposed through three subthemes, which overlap and intersect, and together highlight the behavioural dimensions of individual incidents, the commonalities between them, and the mechanisms through which the prevalence and frequency of these individual incidents contribute to the ongoing normalizing. The three subthemes are: the common language reflects a common culture; repetition is not the better part of valour; and harassment by one, harassment by all.

Common Language reflects a Common Culture

The first mechanism through which normalizing of sexual harassment in gaming culture is demonstrated is through the usage of a common language to engage in that harassment. The consistent usage of similar terms and similar styles of language across individual instances of harassment, despite a wide variety of senders, emphasizes that there is a type of standardized language within the culture for engaging in sexual harassment. This theme is demonstrated by two examples where text-based messages show common language patterns despite being sent by many different male players to different female gamers.

In Figure 4, five messages from five different male players, are sent to the same female gamer, with identical messages that comment on her physical appearance. Figure 5 displays six messages sent to six different female gamers, from different male players, using very similar language for sexual solicitation. These examples illustrate just how culturally imbedded the "common" language of sexual harassment is within gaming. The presence of these imbedded language norms, regardless of the number of female gamers targeted, emphasizes a standard of culturally derived language that normalizes sexual harassment in online gaming.
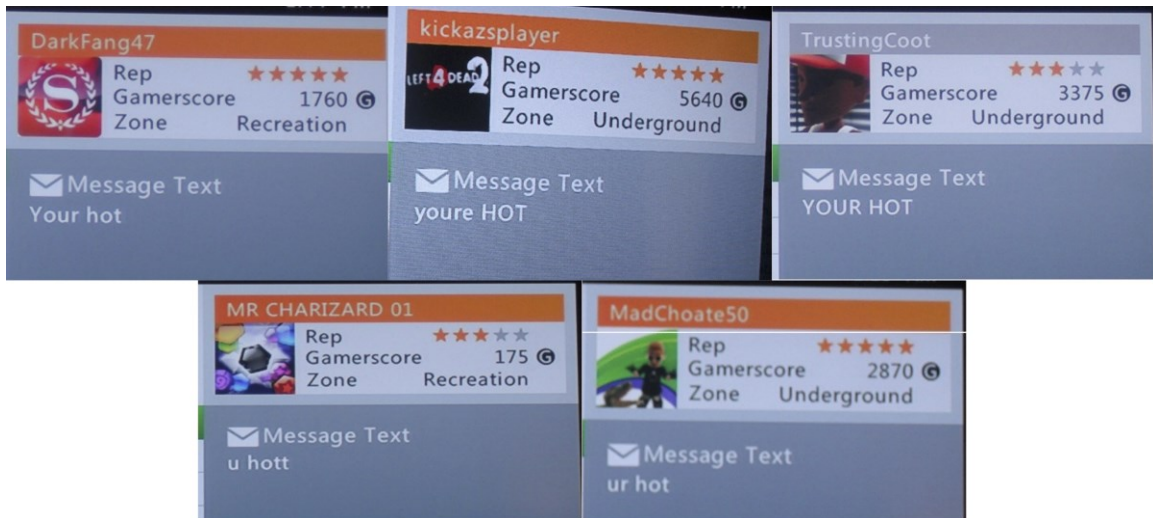
Figure 4. Messages sent to a single female gamer, with language focused on her perceived physical appearance ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

Figure 5. Six messages sent to six different female gamers, all using similar language to engage in unwanted sexual solicitation ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

The imbedded language norms within these individual behaviours from different players, demonstrates a common vernacular, that reflect a normalized approach to engaging in sexual harassment that may even be expected in gaming culture. The common terms, tone, and style of the harassing comments, exhibited from different sources, "suggests that causal misogyny is a normalized part of the online lexicon for some users" (M. Salter, 2017, p. 105). As discussed in Chapter 3, gendered insults and sexual solicitations that use common derogatory terms and stereotypes, are forms of symbolic violence used by male players to objectify and marginalize women's

participation within gaming spaces (Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill, 2017; Paaßen et al., 2017; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015).

The use of a common lexicon across separate individual incidents extends to the common patterns of tone and style with which specific terminology is used. Both examples showcase very similar tones and styles, including framing the solicitation request in the form of a question (see Figure 5). These common patterns of the cultural usage of terminology extend beyond the specific examples identified in this data set. A notable example is the use of the term rape, which in gaming has become commonly used "slang for victory over an obstacle or fellow player" (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 406), but is actually "a severe form of 'physical ownership' that is justified and uncritically accepted as merely an offshoot of the competitive nature of gaming" (Ortiz, 2019a, p. 406).

Language use, in the context of common patterns utilized by different individuals is a behavioural dimension that normalizes sexual harassment in online gaming, highlighting the systemic nature of the problem. Recognizing language usage as a key behavioural dimension is important because,

> focusing on the content of abuse and overlooking its behavioural dimensions minimizes the seriousness of online abuse and its consequences. The content of abuse can be shocking or insulting but the behavioural aspects of incidents of online abuse are key markers of invasiveness and potential harm. (M. Salter, 2017, p. 106)

Because individual incidents are often described as merely "trolling or trash talking" (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023; Cote, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Ortiz, 2019b; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017) the patterned characteristics of both the lexicon and the behavioural dimensions are often overlooked (Mantilla, 2015), further normalizing the behaviours.

Repetition Is Not the Better Part of Valour

The second mechanism that normalizes sexual harassment in gaming is the ongoing repetition of these behaviours by male players. This repetition manifests in two ways, with a male player engaging in multiple harassment interactions with the same female gamer or with a male player sending similar harassing messages to many different female gamers. The first form of repetition is more reminiscent of sexual

harassment as it is traditionally understood, with a sole harasser focused on a single target. Figure 6 shows a male player's harassing message sent to a female gamer, telling her to get a life, lose weight or kill herself. She reported him and his account was temporarily banned[20]. The female gamer then describes what happened after the player's banned was lifted, when he sent a subsequent audio message to insult and curse at her.

Figure 6.   First harassing message received, resulting in the male player being reported and temporarily banned ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

"Remember the guy that sent me the message? Well, he decided to send me another msg as soon as his account was unbanned."

(voice message transcript) How about this (pause) how about fuck you, you stupid, fat, silly, bitch. Put this shit up on your website. What the fuck is your deal, god damn. Dumb bitch.

Figure 7 shows three different harassing messages sent to a female gamer from the same male player, all at different times. One message is soliciting sexual information, another is describing non-consensual sexual touching, and the third message is threatening bodily harm for sexual gratification.

---

[20] While a few incidents in the data set provided detail on a female gamer reporting a male player for harassment, many of the blog entries did not include that type of detail. Additionally, determining the frequency and effectiveness of the reporting of incidents was beyond the scope of the current study.
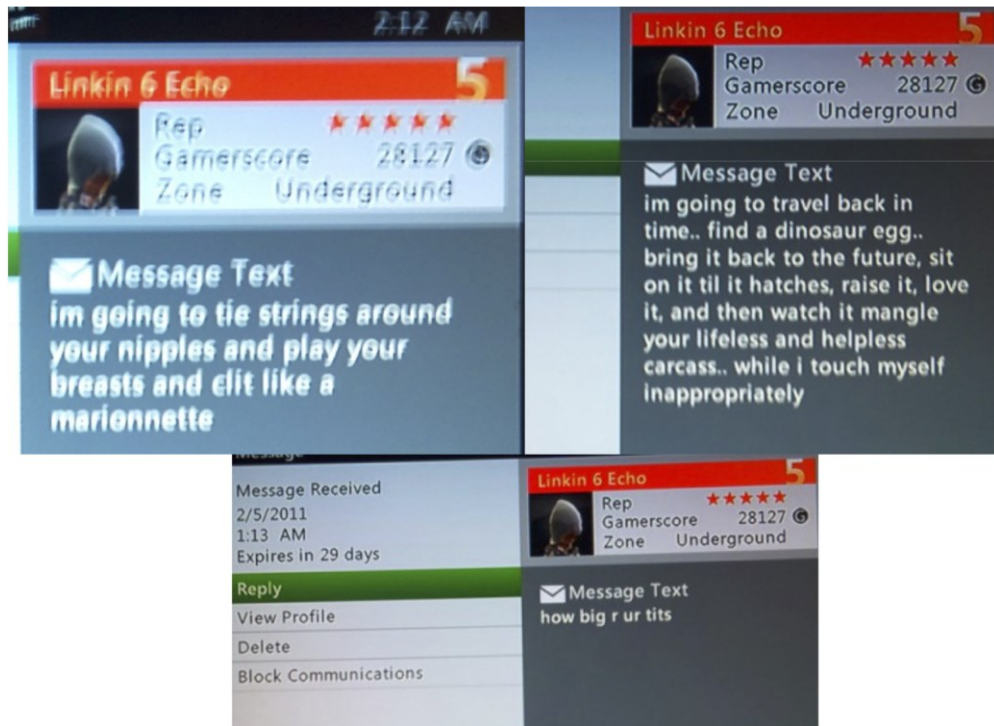
Figure 7. Three different harassing messages sent by the same male player to the same female gamer at different times ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

Both examples more closely conform to what sexual harassment is traditionally understood to look like, with one harasser repeatedly targeting one individual even though it is occurring in the online context (Barak, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2017; Megarry, 2014). These examples demonstrate how similar online harassment is to that which occurs in offline contexts (Citron, 2014; Mantilla, 2015; Nic & Easpaig, 2018). The repeated targeting of a single female gamer, even after being reported and temporarily banned from the platform, normalizes these behaviours and suggests that male players have no qualms about repeatedly targeting the same person, regardless of the consequences. The fact that sexual harassment in an online context is still dismissed/ignored (Mantilla, 2015), and/or characterized by society more broadly as simply "trolling or trash talking" (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023; Cruz et al., 2018; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Jane, 2016; Lim et al., 2024; Mantilla, 2015; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017) speaks to the high level of cultural acceptance of these behaviours within gaming culture. Consequently, these behaviours often lack meaningful consequences, even when individuals take action, such as by reporting a player for the harassing behaviour (Jane, 2016).

The second way repetition manifested was when male players sent identical or similar messages to several different gamers, often around the same time. Two examples of this type of interaction are provided, and include a description of the context and a screen capture of the messages that were sent:

"I've started to go through our backlog of older submission to clear things out. I wasn't sure I was going to post this first image, but then something happened as I went through the inbox. I found that three separate people have submitted screenshots of iTz LiGhTn3sS, all of them early last week. Damn boy, slow down!"
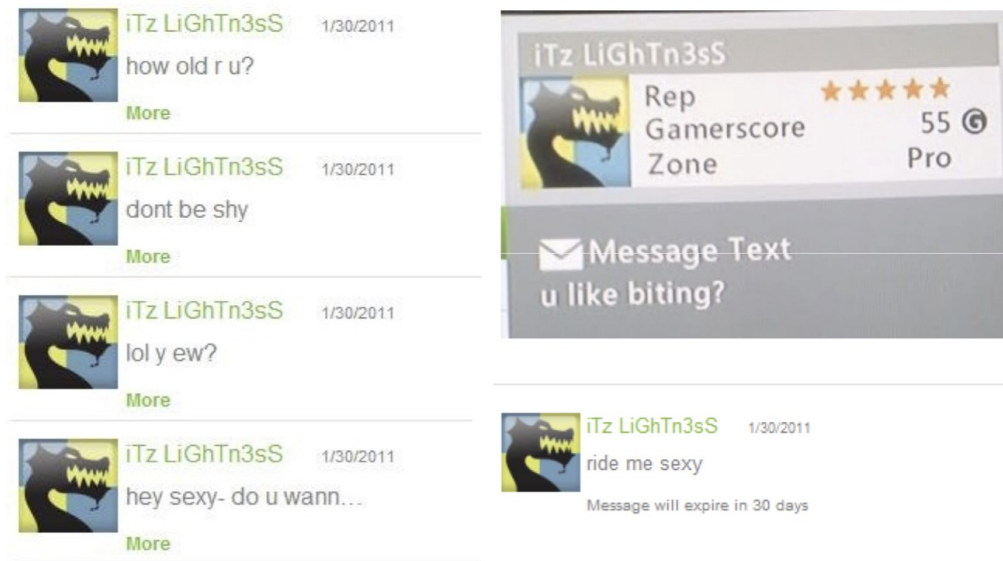
Figure 8.   Example of a male player sending similar harassing messages to different female gamers, all within the same week ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

"Tha Godfather 8 sent his offers out to at least two women, who each then submitted to FUoS. Certainly not the first time that's happened."
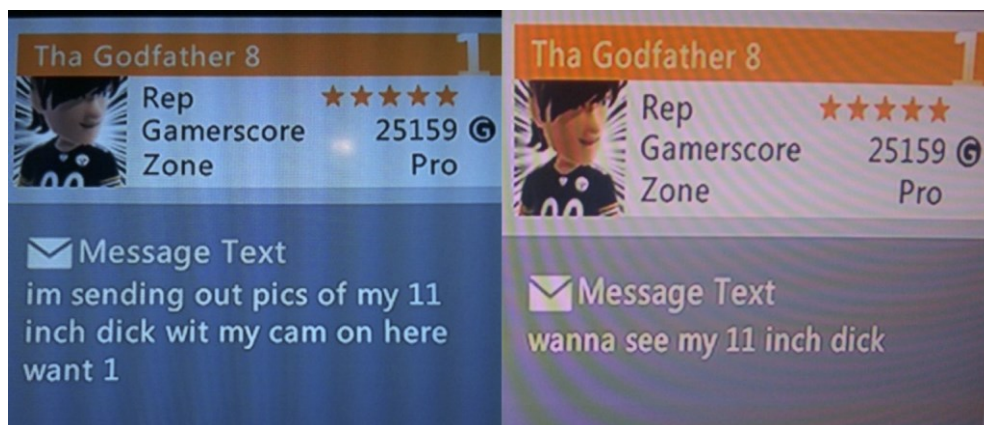
Figure 9. Example of a male player sending almost identical harassing messages to two different female gamers ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

In the first example a similar language style is used in the series of messages sent to one female gamer (left side of Figure 8) to that found in the other two messages. The messages are structured as questions, the term sexy is repeated, as well as the same send date in two of the three cases. In the second example (see Figure 9), the language of the messages and the nature of the solicitation requests are nearly identical for both female gamers being targeted.

The examples illustrate that male players feel comfortable sending these types of harassing comments many times to different targets, demonstrating the great extent to which sexual harassment is normalized within gaming culture. While trash talking and trolling were once themselves considered a subversive activity within gaming, they have become a dominant and expected part of gamer culture through their continued and repeated use (C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Vergel et al., 2023; Vossen, 2018). The same has happened with sexual harassment in gaming, the repetitive use of it, along with its mis-characterization as "trolling or trash talking," has allowed it to become a socially normalized part of gamer culture (Vossen, 2018). Over time, the repetition is self-reinforced, with the frequency and prevalence of sexual harassment used continuously to justify its normalcy as "just part of the game" (C. Cook et al., 2018; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Vergel et al., 2023), further reinforcing the cycle of normalization (Cote, 2020).

Harassment by One, Harassment by All

The final mechanism that normalizes sexual harassment in gaming culture is demonstrated through the sheer ubiquity of the sexually harassing behaviours within online gaming spaces. Ubiquity was observed in the data set in multiple ways. First, in examples that highlighted how many harassing messages (of various natures) can be received by a female gamer in a short amount of time. In Figure 10, the submitter described her submission as "a typical day of turning on my Xbox after a good night of gaming" where she has shared a screen capture of her Xbox direct message inbox showing all the different inappropriate messages she has received from different male players.
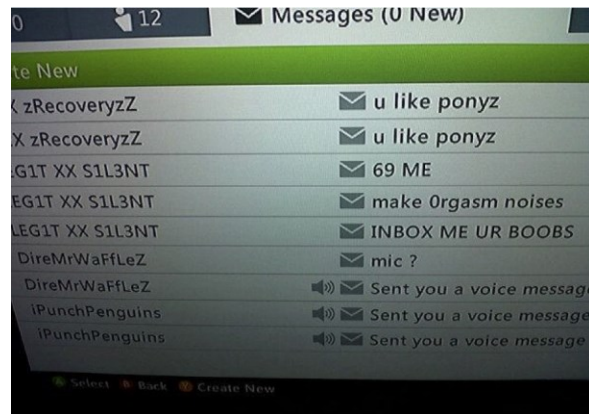
Figure 10. **A female gamer's Xbox direct message inbox after what she described as "good night of gaming." In the message list there are voice and text based harassing messages sent by different male players ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

The screenshot displays several usernames of players who have sent harassing messages, with both text and audio messages sent by different male players. This example demonstrates the ubiquity of these behaviours and is an indication of the frequency with which a single female gamer can receive these types of messages. The second example (see Figure 11) is a screen capture of the direct message inbox on a female gamer's Xbox, that is full almost entirely of unsolicited friend requests, from different male players.

61
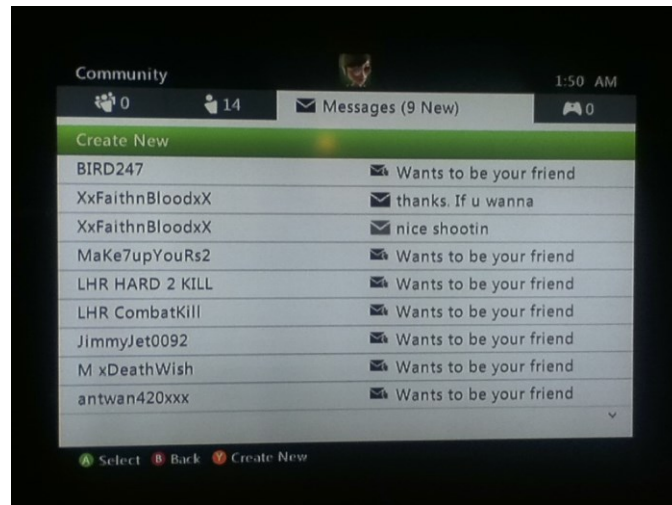
Figure 11. A female gamer's Xbox direct message inbox showing all of the unsolicited friend requests that have been sent by male gamers ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

The unsolicited friend requests are a type of solicitation. While these solicitous messages and unsolicited friend requests are at the somewhat less offensive end of the spectrum of solicitation,

> each event taken in isolation is troubling enough, but chaining them together into a timeline demonstrates how the individual links are not actually isolated incidents at all but illustrate a pattern of a misogynistic gamer culture and patriarchal privilege attempting to (re)assert its position. (Consalvo, 2012, p. 1)

Thus, while the individual messages may be unremarkable, the frequency with which female gamers receive such messages showcases the ubiquity of sexual harassment more broadly within gaming culture. Shifting our conceptualization of these incidents to view them as a common pattern of behaviour is the first step towards reversing the normalizing of sexual harassment in gaming spaces.

The second form of ubiquity showcases the prevalence of sexual harassment occurring in different online games instead of focusing on prevalence only from an individual's perspective. Multiple instances of sexual harassment documented within the same game were common across all types of games. Figure 12 shows four screen captures from four separate incidents, experienced by four different female gamers while playing the same game.
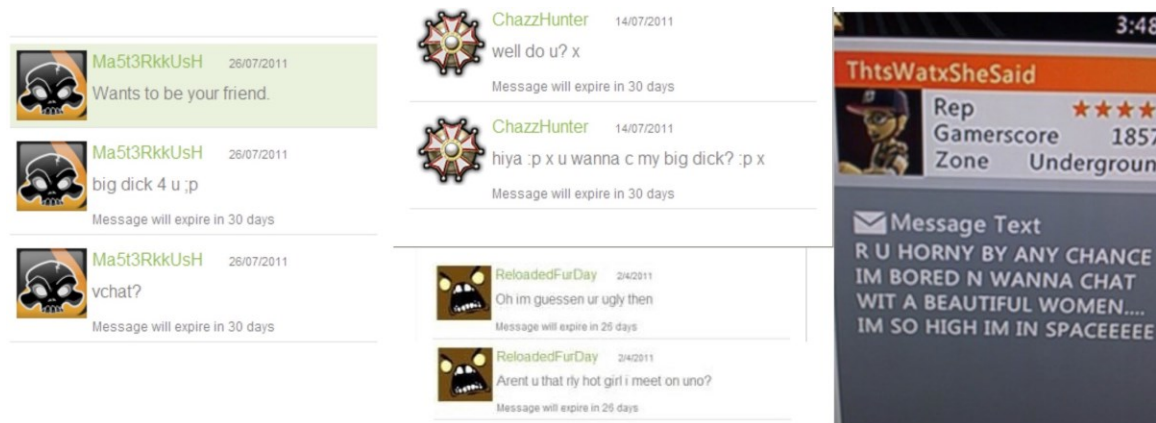
Figure 12.   Four different harassing messages all sent to different female gamers while playing the same game. ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).

This example is not intended to single out a specific game; rather it illustrates the frequency of sexual harassment regardless of the game being played. The fact that many female gamers playing video games in an online setting receive these inappropriate and harassing comments emphasizes the importance of looking at the behavioural aspects of these incidents, not as individual occurrences, but as part of an overall pattern (Cruz et al., 2018; Poland, 2016b) even when the content of those individual incidents "can seem generic, predictable and almost tedious as a result of their ubiquity" (Jane, 2014a, p. 566).

The ubiquity of sexual harassment was also notable during in-game interactions, when a feminine-sounding voice sometimes triggered a cascade or pile-on effect. Generally, the sequence started with the female gamer saying something innocuous, like "good game," using in-game voice chat, a male player would immediately respond with an inappropriate comment, quickly followed by other male players jumping in, often using similar language to that used by the first player. Below, a female gamer answers "yes" to a male friend's question, and another male player immediately replies with a harassing comment. A second male player jumps in to agree, the first male player continues and then a third one jumps in and comments as well. The female gamer's verbal response to a simple question with a single word, identifies her as female to the male players in the game and triggers a cascade of sexual harassment.

Phoenix: Are we playing?

FP: Yes.

RMP1: UH OH. UH OH. We got an Xbox LIVE slut in here! Oh SHIT YEAH.

RMP2: THAT'S RIGHT. THAT'S RIGHT.

RMP1: She gonna fuckin' blow my fuckin' shotgun!

RMP3: Hey, I got dibs first, I got first dibs, I got dibs!

[lobby switches]

RUNVus: Alright guys.

This cascade effect also occurred in situations in which both the female gamer and/or other male players responded to male harassers to stop or deflect the behaviours, although typically their efforts did not deter additional male players from jumping in with harassing comments. These types of cascading or pile-on incidents during live in-game interactions further highlight the broad cultural acceptability of these behaviours that continue to be actively normalized through repeated use/occurrence. These types of cascading or pile-on incidents, have many parallels with recognizable flashpoint events like #Gamergate (Braithwaite, 2016; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Deng, 2023; Gray et al., 2018); the Perez and Day *Twitter* incident[21] (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015); the Dickwolves incident from Penny Arcade.com[22] (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012); the onslaught of vitriol directed at Anita Sarkeesian in response to her *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* project[23] (Shaw, 2014); and countless other incidents that have made headlines where

---

[21] A 2012 incident where video games journalist Ryan Perez attacked female video game celebrity Felicia Day on *Twitter*. The *Twitter* attack was aggressive and misogynistic, questioning her contributions in the industry and referring to Day as "nothing more than a glorified booth babe" (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015, p. 623). The incident gained significant attention at the time, resulted in Perez losing his job, and increased public awareness about misogyny in video game culture (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015).

[22] A public discourse in 2010 about the "issues of hypermasculinity and sexism within the gaming community" (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 401) after Penny Arcade, the prominent gaming website and organizers of the PAX video game convention, were publicly criticized for publishing the "Dickwolves" comic featuring an imaginary creature with phalli instead of limbs and dialogue that included a rape joke (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). After public outcry, Penny Arcade published additional content mocking those who were offended by the joke and even started selling a "Dickwolves" t-shirt in their online store (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). The case highlighted the often-hostile nature of gender discourse in video game culture.

[23] In 2012, Anita Sarkeesian, a gamer, feminist media critic, and founder of the non-profit organization *Feminist Frequency*, announced a crowd-funding campaign for a new video series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, that would "explore, analyze and deconstruct some of the most common tropes and stereotypes of female characters in games" (Shaw, 2014, p. 1). Both the request for backers and the subsequent release of the video series (including one episode whose release coincided with the events of #Gamergate) triggered an onslaught of online sexual harassment against Sarkeesian, including rape and death threats, doxing, and hacking of her

cascades of sexual harassment and vitriol are directed at women involved in gaming culture. The only difference is that the "everyday" incidents, often characterized as "trolling or trash talking" that is just "part of the game," do not garner the same level of attention as a serious social problem (Citron, 2014; Consalvo, 2012; Cote, 2020, 2021; Cruz et al., 2018; Jane, 2016). These cascade events also further highlight the broad cultural acceptability of these behaviours that are continuously normalized, through repeated usage, by male players who are comfortable engaging in these behaviours to reinforce their existing power and privilege within gaming spaces (Cote, 2020; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2017).

The final example of ubiquity of sexual harassment occurring in gaming was the volume of examples collected from the second website, *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com*. This site documented Jenny's personal experiences of harassment, with all entries examples of incidents where she was targeted directly. Between August 24th, 2011, and September 13th, 2014, Jenny shared 216 separate interactions that she had deemed problematic and inappropriate. This number represents only the minimum number that she experienced since Jenny only posted one interaction at a time and did not post an entry every single day[24]. Consequently, 216 interactions in under three years are an underrepresentation of the frequency with which Jenny experienced sexual harassment incidents. Documenting the frequency of individual incidents of sexual harassment online and sharing them with others has been done in other online contexts (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), with the intent of emphasizing the ubiquity of the harassment by providing "a more visceral experience of the overwhelming nature of aggressive or objectifying comments and the regularity with which they occur" (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017, p. 8). Highlighting the regularity is done to encourage a discourse that recognizes "this [as] a phenomenon which demands consideration not only as a collection of individual

---

website and social media pages ("Anita Sarkeesian," 2024). An online game that encouraged players to beat and bloody a picture of Sarkeesian was circulated online and threats were made against her life, triggering an FBI investigation and forcing her to leave her home. In 2014, Sarkeesian's public speaking engagements were subjected to bomb and mass shooting threats ("Anita Sarkeesian," 2024). Sarkeesian's ongoing experiences with sexual harassment and violent threats are "held up as exemplars of the sexism that plagues the game industry, and gaming more broadly" (Shaw, 2014, p. 2).

[24] In the About section of the *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* website, Jenny explained that she had been recording her experiences with harassment while gaming since 2010, but did not start sharing those recordings publicly until 2011. Additionally, every blog entry was dated, and, in several entries, Jenny acknowledged that she was unable to post daily because of other things going on in her life.

incidents but en masse as a significant social problem" (Jane, 2016, p. 287). This significant social problem is "sustaining a culture of inequality that has isolated women and other marginalized groups" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 1).

These subthemes establish common language, as well as repetition, and the ubiquity of sexual harassment in online gaming, as normalizing sexual harassment within gaming culture. The frequent and repeated mis-characterization of these individual incidents as just "trolling or trash talking," further contributes to normalizing because of how culturally accepted, and even expected, those behaviours have become (Coles & West, 2016; C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; Cote, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2017a; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Jane, 2015; Lim et al., 2024; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a, 2020, 2019b; Vergel et al., 2023). In essence, the everyday instances of sexual harassment demonstrate that it is a standard part of the "normal operating procedure" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 4), where that widespread acceptance perpetuates sexism and misogyny needed to continue privileging the "male identity" in gaming culture and thus preventing equitable participation by others (Condis, 2018; Cote, 2020; Ortiz, 2020; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2017; Sobieraj, 2018; Tang et al., 2020). Ultimately, normalizing is no more apparent than the fact that

> when you put their statements side-by-side, they all sound like *the exact same guy*. And when you look at what they're saying, how similar these slurs and insults and threats we get actually are, they always sound like they're speaking to *the exact same woman*. When men are using the same insults and sentiments to shut down women … we know that it's not about us; it's about gender. (Doyle 2011 as cited by Jane, 2014a, p. 566 emphasis in original)

This persistent normalizing of sexual harassment in gaming culture is dangerous because it will continue to be utilized as a cultural mechanism to defend a status quo that is dismissing the impacts of harassment as "just a game" and excusing systemic abusive behaviour by falsely framing it as a natural part of "play" (Ortiz, 2020; Poland, 2016b). To deconstruct and change this dangerous cultural normalizing of sexual harassment in gaming, we need to dismantle the myth of the justification that "it is just a game".

Trashing the "It is Just a Game" Justification

The notion that sexual harassment in gaming culture is acceptable because "it is just a game" is a damaging cultural myth that protects the status quo and is the rationale for normalizing the behaviour. The perceived acceptability of sexual harassment in gaming culture is routed in the framing of those behaviours as merely "trolling or trash talking" that is "just part of the game." Trash talking or trolling is a normalized part of gaming culture that is part of the competitive nature of video games (C. L. Cook et al., 2023, 2024; C. Cook et al., 2018; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lim et al., 2024; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Vergel et al., 2023). However, the notion that sexual harassment is just trash talking/trolling is a false premise, as demonstrated by the very techniques male players use to engage in harassing behaviours. Saying that "it is just a game" implies quite directly that these behaviours are restricted to gameplay itself and thus, would only be expected to occur immediately during gameplay interactions and not on other platforms beyond the game or at other times when gameplay is not occurring. This theme demonstrates that, in fact, the very opposite is true with harassment that started in-game continuing on other platforms and/or at different times, confirming the illegitimacy of the "it is just a game" justification.

The illegitimacy of the "it is just a game" justification is demonstrated through instances where male players went out of the way to continue harassing behaviours, either through messaging other people the female gamer was playing with or tracking them down on other social media platforms. This theme also has a strong element of persistence over time, where male players would continue the harassment of female gamers for extended periods of time during in-game play and/or well beyond the end of the gameplay interactions. Two examples of this broadening of the harassment beyond the initial female gamer are seen in the interactions below.

"He got really mad and started harassing me after I wouldn't 1v1[25] him after a match. Hour or 2 later he sends this to my boyfriend. I'm still waiting for the link."

Figure 13. **Quote and screen captured message that were part of an interaction where the male player started by harassing a female gamer and then subsequently also chose to harass her boyfriend. ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

"beyblade 247 not only repeatedly messaged the submitter of these shots, but went on to harass anyone with a seemingly feminine gamertag on her friends list."
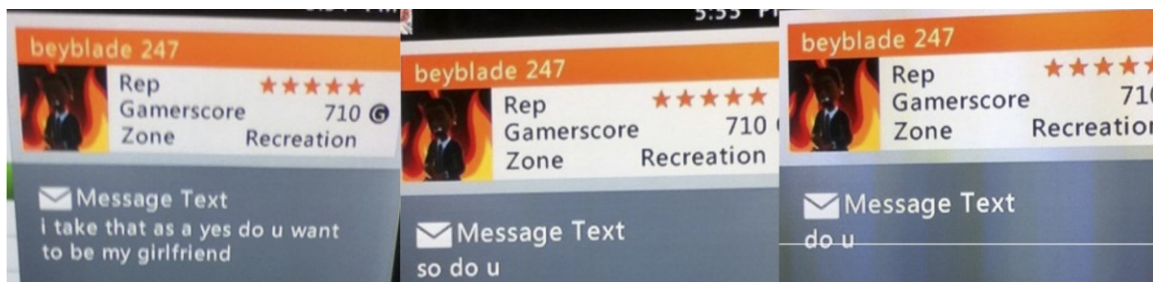
Figure 14. **Quote and screen captured messages that were part of an interaction where a male player sent a female gamer repeated harassing messages (screen captured images) but also subsequently went on to harass other people in that gamers friends list who he also believed to be female. ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

---

[25] 1v1 is shorthand for the phrase "one versus one," typically used in reference to two players competing head to head to demonstrate their superior skill ("1v1," n.d.).

Figure 13 is an example where a male player started by harassing a female gamer who declined a request to play one on one. Then, a couple of hours later, the male player sent a message to her boyfriend using gendered slurs and alleging he had raped her and would post it on *YouTube*. In Figure 14, a male player starts by harassing a single female gamer with repeated requests to be his girlfriend, before going on to harass anyone else in her friends list who had what appeared to be a feminine gamertag (username). These examples demonstrate the ways in which the sexual harassment went beyond being about the game by targeting other people who had not participated in the original interaction. These types of behaviours goes beyond the definition of trash talk (C. Cook et al., 2018; Yip et al., 2018), as they are no longer occurring as part of a competitive interaction and also targets other individuals who were not players. Instead, individuals who were not a part of the in-game play were also being deliberately targeted with sexual harassment, in direct contradiction of the idea that this is just "part of the game."

Another way the illegitimacy of the "it is just a game" justification is demonstrated was through instances where a male player would continue the harassment by tracking a female gamer down after an in-game interaction to continue harassing them on another platform, typically through some form of social media. An example of this is seen in the following interaction, where, as the female gamer explains, it started as an in-game interaction, after which the male player proceeded to look her up on *Facebook*:

> "Guy loses to me in a match, screams at me, and then looks me up on Facebook to message me. Nothing but class."
>
> Transcript of In-Game Voice Chat Interaction:
>
> RMP1: [singing] Turn on your hack light! Ol' Jenny the hacker.
>
> [final kills replays; the connections lags]
>
> RMP1: LOOK AT THAT LAG SWITCH!! [giggles] LOOK AT THE LAG SWITCH!!!

Figure 15.   **Example where a male player had a very brief in-game interaction with a female gamer but then subsequently chose to track her down on Facebook (see screen captured image) and send her additional messages (Haniver, n.d.).**

In Figure 15, we see an interaction that starts with a male player yelling at a female gamer during play, falsely claiming that she was cheating by using a game hack and escalates to looking her up on *Facebook* to continue messaging her unsolicited advice. Taking the time to look up a female gamer after a brief, in passing, in-game interaction, completely contradicts the "it is just a game" justification by taking the harassment

beyond the game and the gaming context altogether. His repeated insistence that the female gamer must have used some type of hack to cheat, just because he lost, reinforces the historically driven stereotype, as discussed in Chapter 3, that women lack the technical skills required to play (Paaßen et al., 2017; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Seo et al., 2022; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015). Insults rooted in the stereotyped assumption that women *do not*, and *should not*, have any skills in gameplay, further demonstrates the hypocrisy of the "it is just a game" justification, because it exposes that it is not about the game, but about male players continued need to rationalize away the presence of women within "their" space (Fox & Tang, 2014; Holz Ivory et al., 2014; Jagayat & Choma, 2021). These behaviours are a mechanism to de-legitimize women's participation in gaming, while at the same time insisting that "it is just a game" in an effort to transparently and disingenuously justify the continued existence of sexism and misogyny in gaming. Figure 15 also demonstrated that male players will take time to go out of their way to continue harassing behaviours beyond the game.

Taking extra time to harass female gamers is something that was observed to occur both during in-game interactions and well after in-game interactions had ended. Below are two examples (see Figures 16 and 17), one in-game and the other after gameplay has ended.

"We both reported this individual in Dota2's own report system, and Steam's report system. I'm not sure if they were ever banned. This game went on for more than 50 minutes with this user and his friends threatening to rape and kill my GF. Also, saying sexist remarks all game and harassing my GF the entire time by following her in the game and stealing gold, XP, kills and blocking her so she would die to the enemy team."

Figure 16. **Interaction where several male players spend over 50 minutes harassing a female gamer, including with rape and death threats ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

In Figure 16, the submitter describes how several male players go out of their way to harass his girlfriend for over 50 minutes while she is trying to play and shares screen captures of the text messages that she received during that time, including rape threats

and death threats. The fact that multiple harassers are involved in this persistent harassment again normalizes the behaviour. Preceding the rape threat, we also see one of the male players threaten to look up the female gamer on *Twitter*. This threat to track down the target of the harassment on social media contradicts the "it is just a game" justification, by threatening to take the behavioural aspects of the incident beyond the game itself. In this interaction, we also see the harassers going out of the way, over a considerable period of time, to intentionally and repeatedly harass and create a miserable experience for the female gamer instead of just focusing on their own gameplay. In this example, there is prolonged and deliberate sexual harassment that has been culturally normalized to the point where it is an accepted part of gameplay (Condis, 2018; Cote, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Vergel et al., 2023).

"I didn't respond to any of these messages… Notice the date difference between the first and then the most recent message."
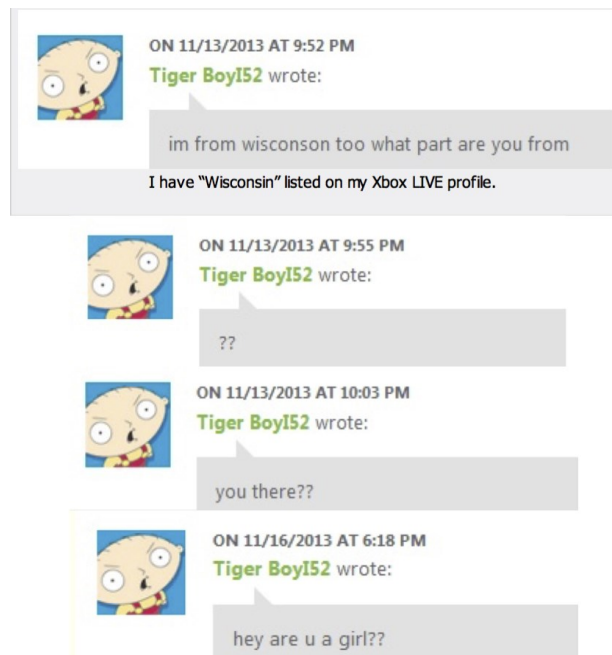
Figure 17. **Interaction where a female gamer receives several messages from a male player within a few minutes, does not respond to any of them, but still receives another message a few days later ("Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com," n.d.).**

In Figure 17, the female gamer describes how she did not respond to any of the messages, while also highlighting that the last message from the male player was sent three days after the previous ones. This example demonstrates how the passage of time

does not deter male players from continuing to message a female gamer after an in-game interaction. The follow-up message occurred several days later, but there were also examples in the data where it was several hours after the initial in-game interaction with a male player had ended, before the female gamers would receive the first of a series of harassing messages. These interactions demonstrate the falsity of the "it is just a game" justification because the passage of time is contrary to the very definition of trash talking/trolling as something that occurs before or during the game (Yip et al., 2018). As these interactions are not occurring as part of the game, but some time afterwards, they should not be justified as trolling/trash talking and thus dismissed as a normal part of the gameplay experience. These times lapses between messages from male players discredit the legitimacy of saying "it is just a game" to minimize the behaviours (C. Cook et al., 2018; Cote, 2021; Poland, 2016b). With behavioural aspects of incidents continuing well after the initial in-game interaction, it further reinforces the hypocrisy of the justifications being deployed within gaming culture in an attempt to normalize sexual harassment as just "trolling and trash talking."

The core premise of the "it is just a game" justification is the social construction that sexual harassment is just "trash talking/trolling" and thus a completely normal and acceptable part of the game, something that happens to everyone, and you either learn to put up with or leave (Coles & West, 2016; Condis, 2018; C. Cook et al., 2018; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Poland, 2016b; Vergel et al., 2023). However, this theme has demonstrated the false premise upon which this justification has been socially constructed, with male players taking their harassment beyond the game completely, by targeting people who were not playing the game and by continuing the harassment well beyond the game itself. Normalizing sexual harassment and the rationale that it is "just part of the game" has allowed for these incidents to be dismissed as individual instances instead of conceptualizing them as what they truly are, a deliberate social mechanism where, as discussed in Chapter 3, sexualized violence, both real and symbolic, is being used to marginalize and delegitimize female gamers with the intent of forcing their retreat from a cultural space dominated by a perceived male majority (Barak, 2005; Cote, 2020; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Mantilla, 2015; Paaßen et al., 2017; Poland, 2016b; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015). Normalizing sexual harassment in gaming culture, and the social construction of that deviant behaviour, as simply a normal part of gaming culture has created social mechanism through which the privileged male identity in gaming culture is

using sexual harassment continuously "to police the spaces of games culture to ensure that marginalized players stay out" (Vossen, 2018, p. 213).

The cycle of normalization of sexual harassment is socially maintained "by denying that any patterned behaviours exist" (Mantilla, 2015, p. 160) which closely parallels the historical cycles of normalization that previously surrounded sexual harassment in the workplace, where it was dismissed as "workplace flirting," perceived as a social norm to be tolerated, rendering the systemic nature of the problem invisible (Citron, 2014; Condis, 2018; Mantilla, 2013, 2015). In order to combat sexual harassment in online gaming, "we need to dispel the myths that have prevented us from taking it seriously" (Citron, 2014, p. 100). To do so, we need to normalize women's presence online gaming in an effort to combat harassment. "When diverse groups are accepted as members of the gaming community, the kind of exclusionary language required for trash-talk is likely to fall out of use, as harassment needs social norms to support it" (Cote, 2020, p. 170). We also need to dismiss any notion that sexual harassment online is less real or less harmful, and instead accept that "just as harm in the workplace and home have profound social consequences, so does harassment in networked spaces" (Citron, 2014, p. 102).

4.3. Conclusion

It is easy to imagine the push back this chapter will receive from some male players, and it is easy to predict many of the counter arguments that will be made – "trash talk is an essential part of gaming culture," "it is part of the experience," "it is just good natured ribbing," "it is not hurting anyone." These arguments, while notionally valid, fail in a very fundamental way, they are built on that very false premise that trolling/trash talking and sexual harassment should be conceptualized in gaming culture as the same thing. They are not the same thing and gaming culture needs to immediately begin shifting away from that false equivalization. Some females gamers have commented regularly about the distinction between trash talk and harassment, and the line for them is simple, if you are attacking someone because of their identity, whether that be gender, race, sexuality, etc., and not about their actual play or game skill, then you are crossing that line from trash talk to something more (Haniver, n.d.). We need to move away from calling incidents where identity is the basis upon which an individual is being targeted as trolling/gender trolling, e-bile, trash talk, or even sexist trash talk, and call it what it really

is – a systemic problem of sexual harassment and violence against women in gaming culture. Only by honestly recognizing and naming the issue, instead of continuing to frame it in ways that minimize the severity of the problem, can we begin to look for ways to make systemic change.

Reconceptualizing sexual harassment in gaming culture as a form of systemic gender inequity, rather than individual incidents justified as "trolling or trash talking" that is "just part of the game" is a necessary step toward being able to deconstruct these harmful social norms and move towards cultural change. This study used a qualitative content analysis approach to examine individual behavioural incidents of sexual harassment in online gaming, identifying the behavioural commonalities that are typically employed to minimize the pervasive nature of this social problem. The first theme demonstrated how normalizing sexual harassment is occurring through the existence of a common lexicon, the use of repetition, and the broad cultural acceptability and sheer ubiquity of the behaviour. The second theme deconstructed the commonly used justification of "it is just a game" which is used to dismiss sexual harassment as a normal part of gameplay. This analysis was done by exploring how individual behavioural incidents frequently occur outside of direct gameplay, demonstrating the hypocrisy of the justification and further contributing to the cycle of normalization.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment and how patterns of common behaviours are part of a socially constructed framing that has led to sexual harassment in gaming culture being systematically minimized and dismissed as a normal everyday occurrence that should be tolerated and remain unquestioned. Properly naming these behaviours and recognizing them as a systemic pattern of abuse (Cote, 2020; Gray et al., 2017; Mantilla, 2015) is essential for ensuring that sexual harassment is understood "through the structural and institutional lenses sustaining a culture of inequality that has isolated women and other marginalized groups" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 1). To accomplish this, sexual harassment needs to stop being falsely equated with trolling and trash talking or justified as "part of the game." Instead, sexual harassment must be framed as exactly what it is - the continued and widespread use of real and symbolic violence to systematically diminish and discount the contributions of women in gaming culture. Only through deconstructing the current social norms can we begin to enact effective social

change and promote prevention techniques like bystander intervention (Fairbairn, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017b; Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Mantilla, 2015).

Chapter 5.   "How come you're only talking to her like that?": Exploring active bystander intervention in online gaming spaces

5.1. Literature Review

Sexual harassment in online gaming is a culturally normalized, mainstream social problem which uses real and symbolic violence to systematically dimmish and discount the contributions of women in gaming culture. Despite its ubiquity, there has been limited research focus on techniques available for challenging the current social norms in order to develop prevention and intervention strategies for responding to sexual harassment in online gaming. The use of active bystander intervention in online gaming is a promising, but under-researched, technique that warrants further exploration. Before discussing techniques, the fundamental concepts on bystander intervention in online contexts need to be established. Bystanders are usually defined as

> witnesses to negative behaviour (an emergency, a crime, rule violating behaviour) who by their presence have the opportunity to step into provide help, contribute to the negative behaviour or encourage it in some way, or stand by and do nothing but observe. (Banyard, 2015, p. 54)

Typically, being a bystander is characterized as a passive activity, where witnesses observe the negative behaviour as it occurs but do not take any action to intervene (Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Keashly, 2019). The circumstances under which a bystander chooses to respond to witnessing a negative behaviour has been extensively researched and is commonly explained using the Bystander Intervention Model, developed by Latané and Darley in 1970 (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Banyard, 2015; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Herry & Mulvey, 2022; Jenkins, Fredrick, & King, 2023; Keashly, 2019). According to this model, for a bystander to successfully intervene they must "(1) notice the situation; (2) recognize the need for assistance; (3) feel personally responsible; (4) believe they are able to help; and (5) consciously decide to intervene" (Allison & Bussey, 2016, p. 184). The purpose of the Bystander Intervention Model is to explain the social phenomenon known as the bystander effect, which

> posits that individuals are less likely to exhibit prosocial behaviour during an emergency situation if other bystanders are present than if they are not. Specifically, as the number of other people present increases, any

individual bystander feels less compelled to intervene. (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016, p. 96)

Additional variables that impact a bystander's motivation to intervene, include:

- diffusion of responsibility: a decrease in a sense of personal responsibility when others are present (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Banyard, 2015; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Markey, 2000; Rudnicki, Vandebosch, Voué, & Poels, 2023; You, 2023; You & Lee, 2019);

- evaluation apprehension: a bystander is self-conscious that they will be judged negatively for any action taken (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Banyard, 2015; Markey, 2000; You & Lee, 2019); and

- pluralistic ignorance: bystanders interpret the inaction of others as a reason not to take action themselves (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Banyard, 2015; Markey, 2000; Rudnicki et al., 2023; You, 2023; You & Lee, 2019).

Additional intervention variables specific to the online context include:

- anonymity: individual's identity can remain hidden and could incentivise inaction, as the choice would remain unexposed (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; You & Lee, 2019) or could incentivize intervention, if a bystander believes the target is aware of their presence and expects them to intervene (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Davidovic, Talbot, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Joinson, 2023) and/or because of the decreased risk to personal safety for the bystander (Dillon & Bushman, 2015);

- relational closeness with the victim: bystanders who know or are friends with the individual being targeted increases the likelihood of the bystander taking action to support that individual (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Davidovic et al., 2023; Rudnicki et al., 2023); and

- multi-media distractions: situational variables that can distract a bystander in the online context (Banyard, 2015; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Herry & Mulvey, 2022).

While the bystander effect has been consistently supported in offline contexts, research demonstrates that while the bystander effect occurs in online contexts (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Guazzini, Imbimbo,

Stefanelli, & Bravi, 2019; Rudnicki et al., 2023), it is not as consistent a model for explaining bystander intervention in online situations, especially in circumstances where harassing behaviours are taking place (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Butler, Graham, Fisher, Henson, & Reyns, 2022; Dillon, 2014; Henson, Fisher, & Reyns, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2023; You & Lee, 2019).

The traditional Bystander Intervention Model, usually framed intervention as a one-time action taken by a bystander, with that single helping action being the end-point of any intervention by a bystander (Banyard, 2015). This approach was inconsistent with the lived experiences of individuals in cases of sexual violence or interpersonal violence, where bystander intervention is often "a process of helping or a series of actions that [unfold] over time" (Banyard, 2015, p. 57). In recent years, focus has shifted towards bystanders as more active participants, especially in the contexts of sexual violence and interpersonal violence. Banyard (2015) argues that active bystander intervention is now considered a "promising prevention initiative that gives everyone a role to play in ending violence by promoting efficacy and a sense of responsibility combined with skills for stepping in to help others and change social norms" (p. 1) and developed a revised bystander intervention model specific to cases of sexual violence or interpersonal violence. Banyard's Bystander Action Coil Model intentionally "includes specifications of the decision making process; contextual factors that impact decision processes as well as how the event may be related to outcomes; characteristics of the event itself; and outcomes of bystander action" (Banyard, 2015, p. 69).

This revised model recognizes that sexualized violence, including sexual harassment, is a spectrum of behaviours, requiring bystanders to be comfortable identifying a wide range of behaviours as being problematic to trigger the initiation of any helping process (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Banyard, 2015; Dillon, 2014; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Herry & Mulvey, 2022). Step one requires the bystander to consider that a behaviour being witnessed is a threat and/or has the ability to cause harm to the target (Dillon, 2014; Herry & Mulvey, 2022). Thus, noticing, within the context of the model, typically requires the behaviour to be a rare or unusual occurrence that is neither predictable nor expected, and thus requires an immediate response from the bystander through the range of available actions (Dillon, 2014; Herry & Mulvey, 2022; Rudnicki et al., 2023). The cultural context of online video gaming has normalized pervasive sexual harassment as part of gaming interactions (as discussed in Chapter 4), thereby reducing

the likelihood that individual incidents witnessed by bystanders will be considered rare, unexpected, or potentially harmful because these behaviours are often dismissed as "just part of the game."

Thus, while the revised Bystander Action Coil Model is well positioned as a framework for understanding bystander intervention in the context of sexualized violence and interpersonal violence, it focuses on bystander intervention during in-person interactions, rather than technology-facilitated interactions in online contexts. Bystander intervention as a catalyst for cultural change must recognize the unique context of online spaces. The current study highlights the various techniques of bystander intervention in online video gaming to inform the potential of the bystander intervention model in this context.

Considerations for Bystander Intervention in Online Gaming Contexts

Studies of bystander intervention during incidents of cyberbullying have identified different bystander roles and the different mechanisms through which bystanders can take action when witnessing (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Dillon, 2014; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Guazzini et al., 2019; Henson et al., 2020; Keashly, 2019; Markey, 2000; Shultz, Heilman, & Hart, 2014; You & Lee, 2019). These roles and mechanisms have relevant application to bystander intervention in the context of sexual harassment in online video gaming. When witnessing a particular incident, bystanders can play a constructive or destructive role (Keashly, 2019). Constructive roles "tend to involve active engagement such as intervening, defending or defusing, and the more behind-the-scenes/screens work of sympathizing and empathizing" (Keashly, 2019, p. 143). In contrast, destructive roles can "include actively joining in or assisting the actor, passively succumbing by becoming another victim or abdicating opportunities to engage" (Keashly, 2019, p. 143). Within these two distinct roles, an intervener can use a variety of mechanisms to take many different actions. Previous research on bystander intervention in cyberbullying shows that the relationship between the bystander and the target influences the likelihood of a witness taking constructive actions to intervene (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2023). Moreover, individuals are more likely to assist someone they know or an individual who is a member of their in-group (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Bastiaensens

et al., 2014; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2023; Rudnicki et al., 2023).

Intervention motivated by bystander familiarity occurs in both constructive and destructive roles, with the latter more likely to have an active response that reinforces the bully (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Zhao, Chu, & Rong, 2023), and the former more likely to actively respond in support of the victim including direct defending, if the bystander is friends with the victim and/or part of their in-group (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2023; Rudnicki et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014). For in-person contexts, bystander intervention is an action that is usually taken by a physically present witness, whereas online, based on the type of media and/or platform in use, a wide variety of mechanisms through which a bystander can take action exist, and vary depending on the context (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Butler et al., 2022; Davidovic et al., 2023). For example, the types of actions available during an asynchronous chat exchange differ from those during a synchronous live gameplay interaction with direct voice interaction between players (Dillon, 2014; Guazzini et al., 2019). Additionally, previous research identified "the familiarity a person has with online interactions has a significant association with [their] tendency to help" (Guazzini et al., 2019, p. 153).

Bystander intervention is either destructive or constructive based on who a witness is intervening to support, the target or the harasser. Available action choices to intervene are passive or active in nature (Davidovic et al., 2023; You & Lee, 2019) and can be either direct or indirect, as outlined in Table 2 for destructive interventions.

Table 2. **Examples of direct and indirect destructive interventions which can be active or passive in nature.**

Destructive Interventions	Active	Passive
Direct	Witness joins the negative commentary/harassment, reinforcing the harmful behaviour (Shultz et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2023).	Praising the behaviour of the harasser in a manner visible to the target or other witnesses, but does not join in on the harassment directly (Shultz et al., 2014; You, 2023; You & Lee, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023)
Indirect	Supporting the behaviour of the harasser in a manner not visible to the target and/or other witnesses (Shultz et al., 2014; You & Lee, 2019).	Inaction, where a witness chooses to ignore the situation and simply passively observes (Davidovic et al., 2023; You & Lee, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023). This scenario does not directly cause harm to the target, however the choice to remain silent reinforces cultural normalizing of inappropriate behaviours.

In the context of constructive intervention, the actions that a bystander can take are often described by the 4D's of active bystander intervention: direct, distract, delegate, and distance (Banyard, 2015), as outlined in Table 3. These different action types have different levels of immediacy depending on whether the bystander takes action during an incident or afterwards (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Davidovic et al., 2023).

Table 3. **Examples of direct and indirect constructive interventions which can be active or passive and align with the 4D's of bystander intervention.**

Constructive Interventions	Active	Passive
Direct	**Direct:** includes confronting the perpetrator and/or defending the target (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Davidovic et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014; You & Lee, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023).	**Delegate:** bystander chooses to intervene by asking others to step in and help, including other witnesses and/or relevant authorities, and can also include supporting/encouraging the target to seek help directly (Banyard, 2015; Davidovic et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014; You & Lee, 2019; Zhao et al., 2023).
Indirect	**Distract:** diffuse a situation by changing the subject and/or taking steps to redirect attention of the perpetrator away from the target (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Davidovic et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014).	**Distance:** removing the perpetrator and/or target from the situation all together (Banyard, 2015).

Bystander action types apply to the online video gaming context, but some are more visible than others depending on the specific mechanisms through which communication is occurring (e.g. synchronous/asynchronous and/or text-based/voice-based communication). Direct and distract techniques are likely to be more visible to other players in online gaming contexts than delegate or distance, which are more likely to happen through mechanisms that are not visible to other players. The visibility of actions is an important consideration for bystander intervention because calling out the issue draws attention to the behaviour (Keashly, 2019), and challenges the normalizing of sexual harassment in gaming culture. Bystander interventions that take immediate action to support/protect the target, and simultaneously challenge the longstanding social norms and model positive behaviours can begin shifting the cultural norms away from the status quo (Banyard, 2015). These challenges do more than defend or support an individual target by modeling a different social norm, and by becoming resisters and trendsetters who shift the narrative towards prevention and systemic change (Banyard, 2015). This shift is demonstrated through some techniques active bystanders use to intervene, which can include direct challenges to stereotypes and cultural norms.

Techniques for Intervention

In online video gaming, techniques used by bystanders for intervention during incidents of sexual harassment are relatively unresearched. Instead, research has focused on techniques women use to prevent or respond to harassment in online contexts, including in online video gaming. Bystanders within these contexts may use the same techniques, so there is value in examining how the prevention and response techniques used by women might inform their use by bystanders. The techniques used by female gamers to respond to sexual harassment can be classified into several broad categories: social coping, avoidance, confrontation/negotiation, and advocacy (Cote, 2017). However, current strategies are usually reactive, not preventative, and put the onus on women, as targets, to adopt reactive stances to protect themselves from harassment and abuse (Cote, 2017, 2020; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b). Furthermore, these strategies require women to "constantly be aware of how others will interpret their behaviour, username, voice, or skill, and they must carefully manage these aspects to ensure a positive gaming experience" (Cote, 2020, p. 168). Consequently, these prevention strategies create "an inaccurate model of victimization" (Henry &

Powell, 2017, p. 250), in which women "bear the overwhelming and unjust burden of taking proactive precautions to 'manage their safety'" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 251) and are still at risk of victimization even when these techniques are implemented. Additionally, these prevention strategies "render the perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment invisible, while at the same time 'denying women a right to be safe'" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 251).

Previous research identified nine different techniques women use in response to harassment in online video gaming, or other similar online spaces (Cote, 2017, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; Jane, 2016; Poland, 2016b; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), and while only half were directly observed being used by bystanders in this study, the usefulness of these techniques for bystanders is still to be determined and warrant further exploration.

Leave Online Gaming

Leaving online gaming is a widely documented avoidance technique women use to respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence in online gaming spaces (C. L. Cook et al., 2024; Cote, 2017, 2020; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; Henry & Powell, 2017; Schulenberg, Freeman, Li, & Barwulor, 2023; Vergel et al., 2023). This technique forces women to withdraw their participation from the online space (C. L. Cook et al., 2024; Cote, 2020; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Poland, 2016b; Vergel et al., 2023), either by "choosing a single player option, or leaving that particular game or lobby" (Fox & Tang, 2017a, p. 1298). While this technique allows women "to enjoy games even when the multi-player experience is unwelcoming, the fact that some committed players are driven away from online gaming helps contribute to the perception that games are more for men than for women" (Cote, 2017, p. 143). The belief that women are not present in online gaming, in turn reinforces the stereotype that women are outsiders and should not be permitted within the space (as discussed in Chapter 3), which in turn perpetuates the cycle of harassment directed at female gamers for their mere presence in gaming spaces (Cote, 2017, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a). Not all incidents of harassment require interaction, sometimes it simply requires a male player seeing a username/gamertag that they perceive to be female, which may trigger harassment before they have interacted with a female player in any way.

Flirting

Female gamers feel uncomfortable with flirtation as a social coping strategy to address sexual harassment in online gaming (Cote, 2017, 2020). Female gamers who were interviewed about their strategies for coping with harassment felt that flirting simply reinforced the existing stereotypes of female gamers, and current social norms, as it "encouraged harassment from men because it became the expected norm for female behaviour" (Cote, 2017, p. 149).

Blocking/Muting

Blocking and/or muting a harasser is a reactive social coping technique that relies on the technical solutions available on the specific platform, and thus its effectiveness varies greatly depending on the specific context (C. L. Cook et al., 2024; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Poland, 2016b; Schulenberg et al., 2023). While blocking or muting a harasser can empower women in online spaces (Poland, 2016b), it has drawbacks, especially in the gaming context, where it is an unpopular solution because it can interfere with gameplay, particularly in multi-player games (Cote, 2017, 2020).

Camouflaging Gender

Concealing or camouflaging their gender is a commonly documented avoidance technique women use in online video gaming spaces to prevent sexual harassment (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; Henry & Powell, 2017; Jagayat & Choma, 2021; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Schulenberg et al., 2023; Vergel et al., 2023). To implement this technique, female gamers typically use gender-neutral avatars and screen names and generally avoid using voice chat, especially when playing with strangers, to reduce the likelihood other players will identify their gender (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deng, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Vergel et al., 2023). This technique may prevent potential harassment of female gamers, yet it "repeatedly excludes women from the general gaming community by treating them as anomalies, rather than as regular players" (Cote, 2017, p. 145), thereby reinforcing the stereotypes that women are not present in gaming spaces and/or do not play video games (Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Tang et al., 2020; Vergel et al., 2023). Female gamers also find that not using voice chat to conceal their gender sacrifices parts of the gameplay experience, especially in multi-player games where voice chat is essential for team coordination and

strategizing (Cote, 2017, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017a). Female gamers who use voice chat and/or a screen name that identifies gender may treat that choice as a form of activism and "deliberately chose feminine usernames, [and] are willing to provoke harassment if it means showing other players that women enjoy video games and can be good at them" (Cote, 2017, p. 146).

Avoiding/Ignoring Strangers

Past research suggests that avoiding playing with strangers is a common social coping technique used by female gamers to avoid harassment (C. L. Cook et al., 2024; Cote, 2017, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017b, 2017a; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Vergel et al., 2023). Female gamers noted the benefits of playing with friends because they were less likely to face unwanted advances, because they perceive strangers as more likely to engage in sexual harassment (Cote, 2017, 2020). Female gamers also indicated that in scenarios in which strangers were unavoidable, "friends input helped players ignore or dismiss harassers" (Cote, 2017, p. 144).

Adopt Aggressive Persona

Female gamers also frequently respond to sexual harassment using a confrontational strategy that adopts more aggressive traits and tactics (Cote, 2017, 2020; Vergel et al., 2023). When using this technique, women typically dish out insults and/or sarcasm in response to the harassment being targeted at them (Cote, 2017, 2020). The use of sarcasm also allowed female gamers to find "allies who found it funny while driving away harassers who did not get the joke" (Cote, 2020, pp. 164–165). This aggressive persona tactic "shows male players that their female colleagues can stand up for themselves" (Cote, 2017, p. 147) and may reduce the amount of harassment directed their way. However, this type of more aggressive response, using sarcasm, insults, or both, can provoke further harassment and/or lead to accusations that women are too sensitive/emotional and took the incident too seriously when "it is just a game" (Cote, 2017, 2020). Further harassment in response to this technique serves to further reinforce existing stereotypes.

Humour

Another confrontational technique, that avoids adopting a more aggressive persona, is the use of humour to respond to sexual harassment (Amundsen, 2021; C. L.

Cook et al., 2024; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017). Vitis & Gilmour (2017) found using humour to respond to sexual harassment in other online contexts had the effect of making "common assumptions 'visible, and their stereotypical distortions laughable'" (p. 10). In these contexts, humour is a form of resistance to sexual harassment and encourages those who witness the incident to question "'common sense', social structures and hierarchies" (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017, p. 10). In these circumstances, humour becomes an advocacy technique that challenges the systemic sexism that underpins the social normalization of sexual harassment (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017). However, there are risks with this technique, as ascribing humourous meanings to sexual harassment behaviours can "frame them as something that is fun and hence not to be taken too seriously" (Amundsen, 2021, p. 1475), further normalizing the behaviours.

Deploying Skills/Experience

Female gamers emphasizing their skills and experience with gameplay is another, previously documented, social coping technique to respond to sexual harassment during online gaming (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deavours, 2023; Deng, 2023; McLean & Griffiths, 2019). This technique dismisses harassment and re-frames it as jealousy over the female gamer's superior skills or experience playing a particular game (Cote, 2017, 2020). By emphasizing skill, the female gamer "delegitimize[s] other players' insults and provide[s] herself with psychological protection against what they were saying; rather than taking their harassment seriously, she [is] able to dismiss it as anger motivated by jealousy" (Cote, 2017, p. 146). Female gamers either ignore the harassers and simply play better than them or directly point out their superior skill in response to harassing comments (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deavours, 2023; McLean & Griffiths, 2019). This technique, however, is not without limitations as it necessitates a continued level of skill and experience all female gamers may not have, especially if they are newer to gaming and/or a particular game. Additionally, female gamers may feel increased pressure to keep up their skill level sufficiently to reduce/prevent harassment (Cote, 2017, 2020; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Wong & Ratan, 2023) and/or they may experience feelings of self-blame when harassment increases because they do not maintain a certain skill level (Fox & Tang, 2017b; Wong & Ratan, 2023). Furthermore, the acquisition of a high skill level may be regularly doubted unless proof of their skill is continuously provided (Cote, 2020).

Male Assistance

Assistance from male players, whether friends of, or strangers to, a female gamer, can be either social coping or confrontational strategies depending on the specific circumstances and techniques used. Previous research indicates that while relying on male players for assistance may happen in online gaming contexts (Fox & Tang, 2017b; Vergel et al., 2023; Wong & Ratan, 2023), it is not a popular choice for female gamers (Cote, 2017, 2020). While some female gamers believe playing with male friends decreases harassment, others do not find it effective or felt it decreased their independence as female gamers (Cote, 2017, 2020). Despite not being a preferred technique (Cote, 2017, 2020), it may be a key catalyst for social change in online gaming spaces. Male players must take a more active and "preventative role of challenging male peer cultures of support for sexual violence and harassment and social norms more broadly" (Henry & Powell, 2017, pp. 251–252) to shift the status quo. Experts advise

> that men start expressing support for women on a one-on-one basis, considering how their response will affect the woman they see being harassed, supporting a woman's work rather than simply noting the ways she is being victimized, taking on some of the conversations to distract harassers (without keeping the original target involved), and becoming aware of their relative power in online situations. (Poland, 2016b, p. 193)

Conceptualizing bystander intervention as a method that offers men the opportunity to play an active role in shifting sexist cultural norms and bridges an existing gap in both academic research and prevention practice. Studying intervention techniques used by bystanders, not just female gamers, is a way to begin shifting the burden away from female gamers as being solely responsible for their own safety. The purpose of this study is to classify the different ways in which active bystander intervention manifests within online gaming contexts and to better understand a previously under-researched topic. To bridge this existing research gap, this exploratory qualitative study was guided by the following research question: What are the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming? The qualitative content analysis undertaken (as explained in Chapter 2) resulted in the identification of five major themes demonstrating different active bystander techniques used to intervene during in-game interactions when a female gamer is being harassed.

5.2. Results and Discussion

The five themes identified are different active bystander intervention techniques used by players when intervening in an incident of sexual harassment. Data analysis shows overlap and intersection between different approaches to bystander intervention, with multiple techniques often used sequentially in the same interaction, and/or multiple techniques used simultaneously by different players intervening in the same incident. Thus, while these themes are presented distinctively for reader clarity, in practice they frequently co-occur within a single in-game interaction. The five themes discussed are 1) the "shut down!" interjections, 2) the "is that the best you can do?" reactions, 3) the attention redirection technique, 4) the skills and kills defence, and 5) the stereotype challengers.

Most examples in the identified themes below are from voice-based interactions between players in first-person shooter games. Thus, the bystander intervention techniques identified in this data set are those that can be more easily deployed during live voice-based interactions. Techniques observed in other forms of communication, like chat-based interactions, may differ from the findings in this study. Additionally, gauging the potential effectiveness of these different techniques was beyond the scope of the current study. Typically, three groups of individuals participated in any interaction: the female gamer; friends of the female gamer (usually male) playing with her when an incident occurred; and other random[26] male players who happen to be playing[27] with and/or against the female gamer and her friends at the time. For this study, I intentionally examined how female gamers responded directly to harassment to document consistencies (or differences) where they occurred between a female gamers' response techniques and those of bystanders.

---

[26] *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* used the term random in reference to players who were unknown to the female gamer and her friends. In this context, the term is not intended to refer to a random sample for the purposes of statistical analysis.

[27] The happenstance nature of these interactions is the result of how game mechanics function in massively multiplayer online games. In these types of games, there may be 1,000s to 10,000s of people playing online at any one time in different game lobbies. Each game lobby will have a smaller number of players, e.g. 16 players – 8 per team. Each time you join a game lobby a computer algorithm may assign a player to play with a random group of other players. When playing with friends, players are basically instructing the computer algorithm to keep the group of friends together. For example, if 6 friends are playing together, each time they join a new game lobby the 10 other players could be different every time.

The "Shut Down!" Interjections

The first theme are the interjection techniques used by bystanders in their attempts to shut down the conversation and/or simply call attention to the inappropriate comment. These efforts were often short and direct comments made by the female gamers, her friends, and other random male players participating in that in-game interaction. Female gamers who experienced harassing comments like "shut up cunt" or "I'm gonna put my dick in your rear shocks" often used short responses like "no" or "nope," sometimes with additional statements such as "that's not how this works buddy" or "not gonna happen." Sarcasm[28] was also commonly used by female gamers to respond to and shut down harassment, often by sarcastically claiming the harassers' comments were funny or sarcastically calling out sexism and/or sexist stereotypes as shown below:

RMP1: Hey Jenny, how YOU doin'?

FP: Not nearly as good as you think I am.

[laughter]

RMP2: Shut down!

RMP3: Oh my goodness, that was hilarious.

Here the female gamer responds to a common solicitous comment with sarcasm in an effort to shut down the conversation. The specific line "not nearly as good as you think I am" (delivered sarcastically), was found multiple times in the data set. Female gamers shutting down a harasser, directly or using sarcasm, often prompted other male players to support the female gamer. In this case, two other male players use an indirect confrontational strategy and respond to the sarcastic response with humour and additional shut down comments. These indirect confrontational strategies are consistent with previous literature, where calling out inappropriate behaviour with a less direct approach employs humour and sarcasm instead of being directly confrontational (Amundsen, 2021; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Cote, 2017; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Henson et al., 2020; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017). Male bystanders also express support

---

[28] During the data analysis process, sarcasm was identified both by tone of voice from the audio recordings, and/or through notations the owner of *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* made in her transcripts of the audio recordings, identifying when certain remarks were made sarcastically.

for the female gamer, reacting to her response in a positive and kind way. While not direct intervention, the responses of male players demonstrate social support and reinforces the female gamer's tactic and emphasizes the humour of her shutdown response. Shut down interjection techniques are consistent with confrontational indirect intervention techniques that require less involvement from bystanders, with the added element of humour as a form of resistance to social norms (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Shultz et al., 2014; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017).

Male players who interject and support the female gamer also used short direct comments that suggest they felt the harasser had gone too far. Examples include "nasty" and "damn man" with a tenor that signals disapproval of the language used. More direct responses were also used, such as:

> RMP1: Yeah, because I couldn't fucking kill you, you stupid cunt.
>
> Everyone all at once: HEYYYY WTF.
>
> RMP2: Watch the language!
>
> Daerf: Damn!

In this example, a male player targets a female gamer with a gendered slur. All the other players react immediately, and one player directly calls out the use of inappropriate language. In this interaction, the friend of the female gamer responds using the same type of short and direct response intended to signal disapproval with the harassment. Occasionally, male players who witnessed an inappropriate interaction, were more direct as shown below.

> RMP4: Hey, I'm out ya'll.
>
> RMP1: Why you scared of Jenny? Scared of Jenny yo
>
> RMP4: Ain't nobody scared of that bitch!
>
> RMP1: Oh! Hey. Now that was disrespectful.
>
> RMP3: Disrespectful little bastard.

When one male player insults the female gamer, two other random male players directly call out the disrespectful behaviour. A second method of interjection that typically follows a shutdown response from the female gamer involves male players responding to the harasser to indicate an end to their conversation with the female gamer.

RMP1: Oh! Well, then that's just even better. It means I can flirt with you then.

FP: No it doesn't, because I have a fiance.

RMP1: I said 'flirt', I didn't say… [unintelligible as we talk over each other]

RMP2: See that's, that's, that's like, the end of the conversation right there. Oooooh, shit!

[laughter]

FP: Shockingly enough, most girls don't play Xbox Live to get hit on.

Above, a male player "hits on" a female gamer (after asking her to disclose her age), and she responds with a direct "no." Another male player acknowledges that the female gamer's response ends the conversation and does so in a way that elicits laughter from other players in the game. Later, in the same interaction, the male player once again calls out the harasser, who continues to target the female gamer (who is now ignoring him):

RMP2: Dude the conversation was over a long time ago.

Consistent with previous studies (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Shultz et al., 2014), these examples show that male strangers use supportive bystander intervention techniques to shut down the harasser and call out the inappropriate language or conduct. The first two examples highlight the inappropriateness of the harassers' language and actions, and the third example, shows that a male player supports the female gamer's choice to ignore the continued harassment, demonstrating active support for the female gamer without her having to remain involved in the interaction. These bystander techniques are consistent with previous research on bystander intervention techniques in cases of cyberbullying (Davidovic et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014) and the self-defence and coping techniques used by women in various online contexts (Cote, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2017b; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b).

Friends who witnessed harassing comments directed at their female friends also interjected with shut down comments. Their interjections frequently combined the direct shut down responses (sometimes with sarcasm) typically used by female gamers, and reactionary responses with the tone of disapproval technique used by strangers. Friends

often gave very short responses such as "wow," "hey," or "oh my god" using a disapproving tone. Sometimes these initial reactions were accompanied by sarcasm or direct acknowledgment, as shown below.

RMP1: First off, I didn't say nothin' about ham, bitch.

[laughter]

FP: What??

RMP2: Go cook me something to eat. Talkin' 'bout some ham.

Bantut: Wow.

Phoenix: Go negative again.

FP: It gets the whole thing done.

[hiphop in the background]

RMP1: Yeah, wow. Well at least she sounds single... I wonder how much she is?

Wildcat: Wow. How much are you?

At times, friends used more direct shut down interjections to protect their female friend during an inappropriate interaction. In the below example, a male player proposes asking the female gamer for her number, but her friend immediately shuts down the idea, directly stating that she does give her number out.

RMP1: Should I ask that girl for her number?

Pie: You can try, but Jenny doesn't like to give it out.

Once again, these examples of shut down techniques used by male friends demonstrate supportive intervention techniques intended to end the conversation, allowing the female gamer to remain removed from the interaction, consistent with the current literature (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Cote, 2017; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Poland, 2016b; Shultz et al., 2014). These bystander intervention examples demonstrate that men show support for female gamers with small direct actions to shut down harassing interactions, or by reinforcing shut down techniques female gamers use to put a stop to

an incident. These types of individual interventions, if used regularly, could help shift cultural norms and combat ongoing normalizing of sexually harassing behaviours.

The "Is That the Best You Can Do?" Reactions

The second theme highlights intervention techniques where bystanders use humour/sarcasm, sometimes accompanied by insults, to directly insult harassers or call out their inappropriate behaviour when intervening in incidents of sexual harassment. Occasionally, insults were more direct, without any use of humour to soften the delivery. Female gamers, friends of the female gamer, and random male players used these techniques.

Friends of the female gamer, used humour to push back against inappropriate comments, often making fun of the comments by questioning the quality of the insult in funny and sarcastic ways. These responses occurred both as one-off comments and as part of longer interactions, sometimes with multiple friends using humour and sarcasm in their responses, as shown in the two examples below.

RMP1: I'm gonna teabag you Jenny.

Phoenix: Ah, he was up all night thinking that one up

RMP2: [heavily accented] Hey, Jenny, you suck my big dick?

FP: [barely suppressed laughter]

Phoenix: That's the best you've come up with?

Above, Phoenix immediately reacts to an unknown male player's inappropriate comment. In both instances, Phoenix jokes that the insult is not new or creative to humorously respond to the inappropriate comments directed at his friend. Humour was also used when the female gamer was first to respond, and a friend jumped in to continue the humour-based response. For example:

RMP2: Hey. Hey girl. If you were a lightbulb, I would turn you on.

FP: You're like, ten! Don't say those things!

RMP2: Do you work for, do you work for . Cuz I wanna frost your flakes!

95

Mopie: He's rehearsing. He's got his list out

Here the female gamer responds to the solicitous comment first and following the same player's second solicitous comment, Mopie replies with a humorous comment. Like previous examples, Mopie uses humour to showcase a lack of creativity in the comments directed towards the female gamer. He humorously suggests that the male player is rehearsing from a list, implying a lack of originality and scripted predictability to the harassment, indirectly acknowledging the ongoing normalizing of these behaviours (as discussed in Chapter 4).

More sustained interactions, often shift from a humorous and/or sarcastically delivered insult to more direct insults delivered by the friends of the female gamer, particularly if inappropriate conduct persisted during the interaction, as shown here.

RMP1: You know what? We're leaving. But Jenny's still a whore! [sound of RMP1 backing out of lobby]

[laughing]

Phoenix: Wow, he was up all night thinking that one up.

FP: I'm gonna say something, and then back out really fast!

Phoenix: I'm gonna say something then run away! Aaaaaaaah.

RMP1: [rejoins lobby, talking to his team] You guys were supposed to back out after I said-

Phoenix: Aaaah, I'm an internet tough guy!

RMP1: You guys were supposed to back out when I said Jenny's a whore, but you didn't back out so, JENNY'S A WHORE. Okay, now back out guys!

Mosh: Yeah… You look like an idiot.

Sprawler: I can just drop out of school right now and become a psychic.

Above, we see Phoenix, a friend of the female gamer, initially respond to the slur with humour that suggests the insult is uncreative and unoriginal. As the interaction continues, Phoenix continues to respond with humour. After repeated slurs directed at the female gamer, a second friend, Mosh, intercedes with a clear insult directed at the harasser rather than another friend continues with humorous responses. These interactions began with humour and sarcasm, usually, but not always followed by, direct

insults in more prolonged interactions when humorous interjections failed to deter further harassment.

Random male players participating in an interaction frequently used humorous insults in response to inappropriate comments, as shown below.

RMP1: Good game, Jenny from the block… But you'd be a lot cooler if you sucked on Fast Eddie's COCK!

RMP2: [laughing] What??

RMP3: Oh, we'll smash you in Kill Confirmed this time.

RMP4: I gotta mute this dude, I'm gettin' dumber listenin' to him talk.

Despite not being acquainted with the female gamer, male players used similar intervention strategies to those of the friends of female gamers, including humorous insults to indicate the harasser's conduct was inappropriate. Above, RMP4 implies that the individual making the harassing comments is an idiot by suggesting that he needs to mute him because listening to him talk is lowering the intelligence level of others.

The intervention technique of humour/sarcasm is either a social coping technique and/or a confrontational technique depending on the specific way it is deployed by bystanders. The use of humour as a non-traditional form of resistance to sexual harassment has been documented in other online contexts (Amundsen, 2021; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), but has not been studied as a technique for bystander intervention in the online gaming context. Humour and sarcasm challenge the creativity and originality of the solicitous comments and satirizes the harassment, to make it visible, and subtly challenge the pervasiveness and cultural normalization of these types of harassing comments (Amundsen, 2021; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017). Male bystander responses to the harassment of female gamers that suggest insults are uncreative or rehearsed indicate prevalence as they essentially tell other witnesses "we have heard that one before." Using humour in this context may be seen as a form of resistance to sexual harassment (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), yet it also risks minimizing the severity of the interactions and/or the systemic nature of the issue (Amundsen, 2021), especially when witnesses may not understand the broader cultural context.

In contrast to friends and strangers who humorously challenge harassers, female gamers tend to use humour differently, responding to the inappropriate and harassing

comments with direct laughter and/or sarcasm. A female gamer uses laughter and sarcasm to respond to inappropriate comments in the two examples below.

> RMP1: Dude, fuck all of you, okay? Shut the fuck up. All you guys are fuckin' fags. You're fuckin' losers. You guys don't know how to fuckin'… You guys can't get a life, okay? That's why you guys are on Call of Duty every fuckin' day. I don't even give a fuck about this game, you piece of shit.
>
> FP: [barely restrained laughter] Wha, what? What is wrong with this kid
>
> -----------
>
> RMP1: You on your period or something? Cuz you didn't do too hot. Being a leader. Of the other bitches that were on your team.
>
> FP: [heavily sarcastic] You are just adorable.
>
> RMP1: Jenny Hanoverfist. Eating chicken nuggets.
>
> RMP2: Are you… Are you fat?
>
> RMP1: Yeah, are you fat? We were wonderin'.
>
> FP: Keep talking dude. Let it all out. Let all that anger out. It's okay we're here for you, man.

In the first example, the female gamer deploys humour in the form of laughter and a witty come back in response to the inappropriate comments. In the second example, the female gamer utilizes heavy sarcasm instead of employing a more directly humorous response. In these examples, laughter and sarcasm are used by female gamers to respond to the harassment without directly calling out the inappropriate behaviour. As with the humour-based intervention techniques used by bystanders, humour and sarcasm challenges the social normalization of sexual harassment (Amundsen, 2021; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017). The deployment of humour by the female gamers, compared to bystanders, approaches a confrontational strategy, by adopting more aggressive traits, as described by Cote (2017), but using sarcasm and wit to lessen the overt nature of the strategy.

The Attention Redirection Technique

The third theme is the intervention techniques where bystanders deliberately intervene to divert attention onto themselves and away from the female gamer originally

targeted with harassment. This attention redirection technique was used (within the constraints of this data set) exclusively by friends of the female gamer during in-game interactions. The friends would pretend they were the ones being talked about and/or at by the harasser, instead of the female gamer, and respond to distract the harasser away from their original target. Friends deployed this technique using humour or sarcasm, as explained in the previous theme, and deliberately attempted to redirect the attention of the harasser onto themselves, as shown below.

> RMP1: Hey girl!
>
> Phoenix: What's up?
>
> Fank: Hey boy.
>
> Phoenix: Oh, you weren't talking to me.
>
> RMP1: You wanna have sex?
>
> Phoenix: Not really.
>
> FP: Not particularly.
>
> Fank: Yes I do.
>
> RMP1: I wasn't talking to you, shut the fuck up.
>
> Fank: You wanna be on bottom? That'll work.
>
> RMP1: I was talking to the girl, huh.

Above, Phoenix and Fank, both pretend the "hey girl" inquiry and subsequent sexual solicitation are targeted at them, not the female gamer, and respond with sarcasm. Fank maintains focus on himself as the interaction continues, giving an affirmative response to the solicitation, and providing a humorous suggestion for a sexual position. The attention redirection technique was also used in longer interactions, as shown below.

> RMP1: …Oh, you sound hot, baby!
>
> Phoenix: Thank you.
>
> Kamikaze: Thank you. I really appreciate that. Thank you, you're a nice guy.
>
> [a little later during the same interaction]
>
> RMP2: Hey Jenny, where'd you get that? Jenny?

RMP1: What up, girl?

FP: Oh boy.

RMP1: What are you wearing? What are you wearing right now?

Kamikaze: Pink panties.

RMP2: What's good? Jenny? What'd you get that for?

[laughter]

RMP1: Are you shaven?

Kamikaze: He's talking to me.

RMP1: I like a hairy bush.

Phoenix and Kamikaze both use sarcasm to respond while pretending the inappropriate initial comment was directed at them. After the harasser starts soliciting the female gamer for intimate personal information, Kamikaze continues pretending he is the intended target, and directly states the harasser is talking to him. These attention redirection techniques are classic examples of the second of the 4D's of active bystander intervention – distraction (Banyard, 2015). In both examples, friends immediately intervene, pretending they are targets to redirect attention away from the female gamer, consistent with bystander intervention distraction techniques in both cyberbullying and sexualized violence situations (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Rudnicki et al., 2023; Shultz et al., 2014). These distraction techniques diffuse the situation, and take the burden off the female gamer to be solely responsible for defending herself against harassment (Banyard, 2015; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b).

In addition to redirecting attention by pretending to be the target, friends also sometimes used humorous redirections to indirectly call out the harasser's inappropriate comments. Below, the female gamer provided additional context, affirming that her friend "sometimes like to mess with the RMPs by pretending they are talking to him" (Haniver, n.d.), often using sarcasm.

RMP1: Shut up cunt.

FP: No.

Phoenix: I'm sorry, was I talking? Or wait, who are you talking to?

FP: That's not how this works, buddy.

RMP1: I'm talking to the bitch that should, that should be makin' me a sandwich. Yeah. That's right.

FP: Nope.

Phoenix: Whats your mom doing? I didn't quite catch that. Your mom's making you a sandwich? You shouldn't call your mom a cunt man, that's pretty rough.

RMP1: All you're good for is your vagina.

Here, RMP1 insult's the female gamer, which results in both shut down interjections from the female gamer and sarcastic attention redirection from Phoenix. The harasser persists, providing clarification that he is "talking" to the female gamer. In response to the second insult, the female gamer continues to use shutdown interjections, while Phoenix switches tactics and responds with humorous insults, deliberately pretending the insult was about the harasser's mom and suggesting that's not something the harasser should say. By redirecting the attention in this way, Phoenix is also indirectly commenting on the inappropriate nature of the interaction, saying that it is not an insult the harasser would call his mom, implying that he should not be calling the female gamer that either. The use of humour as a primary mechanism for redirecting attention reinforces the previous theme, demonstrating that humour can be the foundation for distraction intervention techniques used by bystanders in the online gaming context, which is not discussed in current bystander intervention literature (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Shultz et al., 2014). However, consistent with current research, humour is also used to challenge the acceptability of behaviours, directly implying the insults are inappropriate, breaking down stereotypes, and calling into question the ongoing normalizing of the behaviour (Poland, 2016b; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017).

In one incident, gameplay conversation, instead of humour, was the mechanism used by friends to redirect attention away from the female gamer being harassed. The example below is an excerpt from a longer conversation that took place during a prolonged interaction. This excerpt starts after the harasser has already made several inappropriate comments directed at all the other players, particularly the female gamer.

RMP1: Yeah, I'd bet you'd like that shit bitch. I'm gonna fuckin' finger the shit out of your pussy 'til it bleeds.

Kamikaze: Wow, I shot that whole fuckin' clip and nobody died.

Dirtbiker: How come…How come you're only talking to her like that? What am I, a piece of shit?

FP: [laughing my ass off]

RMP1: Yeah, you are a piece of shit. Jenny's my bitch. Jenny is my bitch.

FP: Oh my god Dirtbiker.

RMP1: Jenny, I'm gonna make you fuckin' scream my goddamn name. You're gonna be like, "OH TWREX ME" and I'm gonna be like, Twrex that fuckin' bitch.

FP: You have a lot to learn about the real world.

Kamikaze: I am just not having any luck.

RMP1: Hold the FUCK up bitch I am in the real world!

FP: Behind the bulldozer again. Or did he get you?

Dirtbiker: [unintelligible]

FP: Reminds me of that one time we played with that uh, that 12 year old who was like, "You don't know what warfare is!"

RMP1: [interrupting constantly] Hey. Jenny. JENNY. SHUT THE FUCK UP. Jenny shut the fuck up and put your goddamn lips around my dick. K bitch, that's your damn job. Pick me a fuckin sandwhich and put your lips on my dick.

Kamikaze: What the fuck, why'd I spawn in front of them?

RMP1: Shut. The fuck up everybody. Okay? I'm wanna have cyber sex with Jenny for a bit. So mute us.

FP: They're by the big construction building. Uhm… middle.

RMP1: …My fucking erection in your damn ear.

Kamikaze: Wow, I'm sorry guys. I don't know what the fuck is going on.

RMP1: Hey, I'm gonna put my goddamn toes in your vagina.

Dirtbiker: Well that's a little gross.

Prior to this exchange, the harasser had insulted and threatened the female gamer with sexualized violence, and her initial shut down interjection did not deter the harasser from continuing. After another insulting comment, both Kamikaze and Dirtbiker (friends of the

female gamer) intervene, Kamikaze using gameplay commentary to ignore and distract the harasser, and Dirtbiker using humour, asking "how come you are only talking to her like that" to redirect the harasser's attention. As the harassment persists, and becomes more threatening, Kamikaze continues his gameplay commentary while Dirtbiker uses an insult, both attempting to redirect the harasser's attention. After this excerpt, the female gamer also starts using gameplay commentary to distract and/or ignore the harasser for the remainder of the interaction.

The above example demonstrates how the attention redirection technique can overlap with an intentional focus on gameplay (as explained further in the next theme) as a mechanism used by bystanders to intentionally direct attention back onto the game at hand and/or to ignore harassers, distracting them from their initial target. This technique also allows a target and her friends to ignore the ongoing onslaught by only talking about the game and not engaging the harasser further after the initial redirection techniques fail to deter continued harassment. In online gaming contexts, the use of gameplay commentary, like humour, is a self-defence and coping technique used by women (Cote, 2017, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017b; Vitis & Gilmour, 2017), but has not been previously documented being used by bystanders. Bystanders commenting aloud on gameplay developments as they occur, developments which usually go unspoken, creates an additional mechanism by which to ignore the harasser and possibly redirect their attention away from the target and back onto the game.

The Skills & Kills Defence

The fourth theme highlights bystander intervention techniques that stress a female gamer's skills and/or wins during gameplay as a mechanism for shutting down or distracting a harasser. These techniques emphasize a female gamer's advanced skill level, contrasting their advanced gameplay skills against less skilled harassers, often using humour/sarcasm and insults to shut down a harasser. Friends of the female gamers typically used this technique, while female gamers and random male players occasionally used it as well.

Friends of the female gamer often highlight her skills or wins during gameplay using one of two mechanisms depending on the type of harassment occurring. The first mechanism was humorous sarcasm, often deployed when the harassment directed at

female gamers included insults that implied they were cheating during gameplay, as shown below.

> RMP1: There she goes camping again, like a little fucking ho.
>
> FP: Good game.
>
> RMP1: Whatever.
>
> Master P: …Carpet? [P was having a side conversation with his wife]
>
> [gunfire as final kill replays]
>
> RMP1: You camp like you're douching in the bathroom.
>
> Master P: I kinda figured you'd get the nicest, the nicest carpet for this room.
>
> FP: Okay, so…
>
> RMP2: Alright dude. Done for a little bit?
>
> RMP1: Alright man. Yeah, I hate camping bitches.
>
> Huge: I hate people who play this game better than me! [making fun of camping accusations]

Above, RMP1 accuses the female gamer of camping,[29] twice using gendered slurs. In response, Huge (a friend of the female gamer) replies with a sarcastic comment making fun of the camping accusations and implying the harasser is a sore loser because he did not play as well as the female gamer. Insults implying women are cheating, based on the stereotype that women are not good at video games, are very common (as discussed in Chapter 3). Because camping is commonly viewed as a less skilled method of gameplay, it is a commonly used insult, even when a female gamer demonstrates advanced skills. These types of insults use inaccurate stereotyped assumptions that women are inherently less capable at video games compared to men (Easpaig & Humphrey, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2014, 2017a; Holz Ivory et al., 2014; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023). Highlighting the skill set of female gamers as a technique for bystander

---

[29] Camping is an accusation made against players who are believed to be staying in one place on a game map and sniping opponents from a distance instead of being in the centre of the action. Camping is commonly viewed as a less skilled method of gameplay and is often used as an insult against players perceived to possess no gameplay skill.

intervention helps, "dismiss [the harassment] as anger motivated by jealousy" (Cote, 2017, p. 146), and indirectly challenges the underlying stereotype that women are not skilled video games players (Easpaig & Humphrey, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2014, 2017a; Holz Ivory et al., 2014; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015; Vergel et al., 2023).The second mechanism was more direct, with friends of the female gamer emphasizing her superior skills during gameplay compared to those of the harasser. This direct call out often still used some type of humour, usually implying the harasser was a sore looser. For example,

> RMP?: damn … good game
>
> RMP?: fuck you
>
> RMP3: Look who got raped by a pistol, haha.
>
> CaptDrDan: Dude, pistols are baller in this game.
>
> RMP1: [mocking] Pistols are baller! Pistols are baller, oh my god!
>
> Sprawler: You know it's the one on the bottom of the team that's talking, right?
>
> RMP2: Talk to me, Jenny.
>
> Sprawler: The one at the top ain't saying anything.
>
> RMP1: [weird voice] Hey Jenny, show me your TITS. NOW. Now, bitch. Fucking Jenny bitch.
>
> RMP?: there you have it
>
> RMP2: Oh nigger.
>
> RMP4: The guy at the bottom is still talking.

Above, RMP1 starts the interaction mocking CaptDrDan's gameplay comment, then redirects his attention to the female gamer, making gendered insults and a solicitous request. Before RMP1 even begins the harassment, Sprawler is already pre-emptively intervening, pointing out that it is the player at the bottom of the leaderboard (the harasser) whose doing all the talking and not the player who is at the top of leaderboard (the female gamer). At the end, RMP4 (a non-friend witnessing the interaction) interjects and repeats the response about the harasser being at the bottom of the leaderboard. This direct interaction exemplifies bystanders using skill as a pre-emptive mechanism for combatting harassment, to either directly defend the female gamer, or distract the

harasser's attention away from the intended target. Distraction techniques are common in previously documented bystander intervention strategies (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Shultz et al., 2014; You & Lee, 2019), however the specific use of gameplay skill may be more unique to the online gaming context. Direct intervention by bystanders that emphasizes a female gamer's skillset has not been researched but is consistent with previously documented self-defence and coping techniques used by women to combat harassment while gaming online (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deavours, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2017b; McLean & Griffiths, 2019).

Female gamers also emphasized their own gameplay skills to deter harassers from continuing to target them. Like the techniques used by bystanders, female gamers used sarcasm or humour to respond, as shown below in two examples.

RMP1: You got a stink pussy, you fuckin'… cunt.

[laughter]

Kamikaze: Stop calling me names.

RMP1: FUCK YOU.

FP: It's okay, I understand, I went 32 and 7, and you went 14 and 32. That's cool.

RMP1: Hey Jenny, like all seriousness aside, are you definitely like a 300-pound fat bulb of shit?

[silence]

RMP1: Ahhhhhhhh, no comment I guess-

FP: [heavily sarcastic] Oh, I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you all the way down there on the leaderboards- hah, my bad!

RMP1: Ohhhhh! I'm right underneath you. [note: he wasn't] It's true though. Eat little… Call of Duty brownies every morning when you wake up, huh?

FP: Do you even listen to the shit that comes out of your mouth, or do you just like… Go with whatever you feel like saying, and think about it later?

RMP2: Get him some of those brownies, he needs it.

RMP1: Yeah.

In the first example, RMP1 makes a gendered slur towards the female gamer, prompting a response from her friend Kamikaze (who uses the attention redirection technique), and from the female gamer, who makes a sarcastic and humorous comment. The comment emphasizes her kill/death (K/D) ratio from the round of play that just ended. The female gamer explicitly emphasizes her high K/D ratio compared to the harasser's and implies he is targeting her because he is a sore loser. In the second example above, RMP1 targets the female gamer with stereotyped and gendered insults, and she responds sarcastically, saying she is unable to hear him because he's all the way down the leaderboard (i.e. he had a poor K/D ratio). A sarcastic comment about leaderboard position is a less direct use of the skills and kills defence compared to stating K/D ratio stats. However, both approaches show the female gamer emphasizing her superior gameplay skills to deter further harassment. This technique is consistent with previous research that has explored the coping strategies of female gamers (Cote, 2017, 2020; Deavours, 2023; McLean & Griffiths, 2019) and suggests that bystanders have adapted similar techniques.

Random male players also occasionally highlighted the gameplay skills of a female gamer when witnessing her targeted during an inappropriate interaction. Random male players used the skills and kills technique both in advance of and during an unfolding incident to praise the female gamer and subsequently to support calling out the harasser, as shown below.

FP: Good game.

RMP1: Hey, hell no, we can't have Jenny and you on the same fuckin' team.

RMP2: I'm just bein' honest with ya. She put that motherfuckin' Warthog up there, [unintelligible].

[laughter, gunshots as final kill is replayed]

RMP3: hey she keep gettin' that motherfucker with ease, too.

RMP2: Man, she was 17 and 0 when I seen it.

RMP1: Motherfucker ain't said she was camping, 'cause she wasn't.

RMP2: (singing) bogeey babe bogey babe, turn me on, bogey babe bogey babe, say what you want

[RMP starts singing; laughter]

RMP4: Hey, I'm out ya'll.

RMP1: Why you scared of Jenny? Scared of Jenny yo

RMP4: Ain't nobody scared of that bitch!

RMP1: Oh! Hey. Now that was disrespectful.

RMP3: Disrespectful little bastard.

Above, RMP's 1 through 3 are commenting on the female gamer's gameplay skills and her high K/D ratio. RMP1 also pre-emptively defends her against potential camping accusations by clearly telling everyone that she was not. As the interaction continues, RMP4 makes a gendered insult about the female gamer. In response, the RMP's who had previously complimented the female gamer on her skills, come to her defense, and directly call out the insult and the disrespectful individual. This example shows male strangers using the skills and kills defence to pre-emptively and directly challenge the stereotype that women are not skilled at gameplay, and as the rationale for calling out gendered insults as being disrespectful to female gamers to shut down harassment. Using shut down techniques is consistent with current bystander intervention literature (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Shultz et al., 2014), with a female gamer's advance skillset acting as the catalyst for witnesses choosing to intervene and, in doing so, challenge a common stereotype about women's skills at video games (Fox & Tang, 2014, 2017a; Holz Ivory et al., 2014). However, bystander intervention predicated on a female gamer demonstrating advanced gameplay skill means there are potential limitations to the technique.

Using a skills and kills defence as an intervention technique is not always successful and stereotyped comebacks may occur, such as a female gamer's K/D ratio not actually being hers but that of her boyfriend's and/or that she has cheated in some way. In one example, a male friend emphasized the female gamer's good K/D ratio, and a random male player responded "that's probably not her K/D. That's probably her man's." This response undermines the effective use of a skills and kills defence by reinforcing the common stereotype female gamers cannot be skilled players. The adherence to the stereotype, even when challenged on it, is a continuation of the heteronormative standard women are expected to adhere to, namely that if they do play videos games, that they have no skill – in comparison to male players – being the

implication. Stereotyped perceptions of women's gameplay skills are consistent with previous literature (Fox & Tang, 2014; Holz Ivory et al., 2014; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Seo et al., 2022; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015) and the results discussed in Chapter 3, with insults commonly used to insinuate that women who are skilled players are just cheating, or are, in some way, deviating from stereotyped gendered norms. The continued reinforcement of common stereotypes potentially reduces the effectiveness of bystander intervention techniques that seek to challenge the cultural normalization of harmful norms.

An additional caveat to a skills-based bystander intervention technique is that it presupposes a female gamer is highly skilled at gameplay and could draw on this as a defence mechanism. Not all gamers, female or not, are highly skilled at gameplay and skill can vary greatly between different game types. With this caveat, it is reasonable to believe that male strangers might be less likely to intervene as a bystander if the female gamer has not sufficiently demonstrated a high skill level (in the context of a during gameplay interaction). For example, during one gameplay interaction, a female gamer is subjected to gendered slurs and stereotyped insults about her perceived appearance. During the transcribed part of the interaction, the female gamer and her friends were both responding directly to the insults and challenging the stereotyping. In the context provided to accompany the transcription, the female gamer states the harasser ended up on her team and, as described in her own words,

> "kept talking shit. Realized I was a better player than him, and said something like (I kid you not), "Jenny. I can't give you shit anymore." Then proceeded to send me a game invitation after the match ended. What the fuck. I will never, ever be that desperate for people to play with.". (Haniver, n.d.)

Above, the male player stops his harassment as soon as he realizes the female gamer is more skilled than he, consistent with previous research documenting that "when offending players found that the women and their allies were performing to a higher level, many of them stopped their negative behaviour and apologized" (Cote, 2020, p. 163). This example suggests it is also plausible that bystanders, particularly those who are strangers, may also choose to intercede based on perceptions of a female gamer's skill level at the time an incident occurs. This type of consideration by a bystander echo the factors that mediate intervention under the conventional bystander intervention model, with bystanders being more likely to intervene to support perceived in-group

members (Banyard, 2015; Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Levine & Crowther, 2008; Rudnicki et al., 2023), but with skill level, not identity, the variable upon which perceived inclusion within the dominant social group is weighted in this context. Having skill level as the determinate of in-group status puts significant pressure on female gamers to maintain their skill level sufficiently "enough to stave off harassment" (Cote, 2017, p. 147), without any guarantee as to the technique's continued effectiveness. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Holz Ivory et al. (2014) suggest

> that female players may be evaluated negatively regardless of their game play performance; specifically, female players who perform well during game play will violate the expectations of their stereotype, whereas female players who perform poorly will confirm the pre-existing stereotype. (p. 151)

This negative perception of female gamers makes the skills and kills defence vulnerable to inadvertently perpetuating the very stereotype and behaviours it is trying to challenge and address. Furthermore, while "women's skill may combat an individual instance … it fails to change the actual foundation of sexist behaviour in gaming, allowing misogyny to continue" (Cote, 2020, p. 73) and it problematically structures "equality and the right to avoid harassment as something to be earned rather than something inherent" (Cote, 2020, p. 163). This reality makes challenging stereotypes directly even more important, instead of relying only on skill-based defences, for intervention and shifting cultural norms in gaming spaces.

The Stereotype Challengers

The final theme highlights the intervention techniques where bystanders directly challenge common stereotypes as part of their response to harassing comments directed at female gamers. Stereotypes frequently shape the nature of the harassment directed towards female gamers and "can be understood as vivid but simple representations that reduce persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, characteristics" (as cited by Baker 2000, Marchbank & Letherby, 2014, p. 263). Insults towards female gamers often draw on stereotypical assumptions about women in gaming spaces. Bystanders and female gamers use this technique by directly challenging or calling out a stereotype underpinning the harassment during an interaction. This includes challenging the broader mistreatment of women within live

video gaming interactions. This technique was used by female gamers and their friends, but very rarely by random male players, except for the occasional skills and kills defence (as explained above). Harassing comments perpetuating common stereotypes about women in gaming were sometimes called out by female gamers during an interaction. In the below example, RMP2 uses several insults rooted in common stereotypes about women and video games. The female gamer immediately challenges the stereotyped characterizations, noting that appearance and sexual orientation have no impact on her gameplay.

> RMP2: Yeah, Jenny's a fat bitch at home, lesbian, with her fuckin' mom.
>
> FP: If I was, so what? That doesn't mean I can't play the fuckin' game.
>
> RMP1: Yeah, you're fuckin' retarded.
>
> Dirtbiker: Oh, great comeback. Are you in fucking kindergarten?
>
> RMP2: No, it means that's the only thing you can do is play games.

This example connects to the previous theme, in which the female gamer uses her gameplay skill to challenge appearance and sexual orientation stereotypes. In a second example, shown below, RMP2 perpetuates a common stereotype about the appearance of the female gamer, who immediately uses humour and sarcasm to challenge that stereotype. As the interaction continues, the female gamer directly challenges the harasser for "trash talking" women because of their gender. During this interaction, there is also a variation on the attention redirection technique, with friends of the female gamer jumping in to redirect attention by providing direct examples with which to debunk the stereotype.

> RMP2: I said I can't believe we lost to a team with a fat chick on it.
>
> FP: Wow, that's like super witty of you and everything, but uh, there's no need to be a sore loser.
>
> Coolshit: Hey dude, your mom was not on our team.
>
> RMP2: You can calm down, I know you're hungry. But caaaaaalm it down Jenny.
>
> FP: No dude, all I'm saying is I'd be upset if I lost to a better team too. It sucks, sometimes it happens.

RMP2: No, I'm not complaining. I'm just, I'm just stating a fact. Hot girls don't play video games.

FP: No no no no no, I understand, it makes you feel better to trash talk women because of their gender. That's fine.

RMP2: Hot girls don't play video games. I'm not trash talking women; I'm trash talking a pig.

RMP3: [laughter]

Catalog: Wow. Because you know what she looks like.

Dirtbiker: [to RMP2] Dude, your clan tag is NERD.

RMP2: I know she's huge. She's huge. Name one hot girl that plays video games. There's zero.

FP: Jenny Fucking Haniver.

Catalog: I can name a lot.

Dirtbiker: Not gonna lie, I can think of a couple.

Catalog: Yeah, I can think of few.

The use of insults grounded in sexist and misogynistic stereotypes is a common method of sexual harassment in online contexts (Levey, 2018; Mantilla, 2015; McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020; Paaßen et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2020; Vergel et al., 2023), so female gamers who directly challenge those stereotypes are adopting a more aggressive persona (Cote, 2017; Jagayat & Choma, 2021), but in combination with other techniques, like the use of humour (Vitis & Gilmour, 2017) and the emphasis on skills (Cote, 2017). This more direct approach challenges current cultural norms by directly making visible the problematic behaviour (Banyard, 2015; Keashly, 2019), but still puts the onus primarily on women to come to their own defence (Cote, 2020; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b). Male friends coming to a female gamer's defence, who further challenge the stereotype, provide direct intervention, similar to the research of others (Banyard, 2015; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Henson et al., 2020; Shultz et al., 2014), where bystanders challenge the prevailing social norms.

Friends of the female gamer also used humour and sarcasm to challenge stereotypes perpetuated by the harassment and did so in a way that either indirectly or directly challenged the misogynistic nature of video game culture. Challenging

stereotypes of this nature counters the predominate narrative of the cultural status quo that normalizes and accepts harassing behaviour (Banyard, 2015; Gray et al., 2018; Henry & Powell, 2017; Poland, 2016b). Below, Mopie uses humorous sarcasm to point out that women are half the population of the planet to challenge the stereotype that women do not play video games.

> RMP1: Is that a chick, or a little kid?
>
> FP: Was that a serious question?
>
> Sprawler: Hey guys, I'll catch you all later, I'm gonna go play some [unintelligible].
>
> RMP1: Awww, that is a chick! Huh.
>
> Mopie: You know, women actually make up like, HALF the population of the planet?
>
> RMP1: Not Xbox Live. And if they are, they're fat.
>
> Mopie: …What?
>
> Wildcat: [chuckling] There it goes. There it is.
>
> RMP1: I'm just bringing it up.
>
> Wildcat: Of course.
>
> Mopie: There it is.

The stereotype that women do not play video games (McLean & Griffiths, 2019; Paaßen et al., 2017; Robinson, 2023; Tang et al., 2020; Vergel et al., 2023) is a common and frequently used gendered insult against female gamers (as discussed in Chapter 3). In a second example, shown below, Mopie questions why RMP2 hopes the female gamer is hot and challenges them to explain how that directly affects them. RMP2 states that it does affect him, which Mopie continues to challenge by sarcastically commenting to the female gamer that attractiveness is her only worth as a human. She responds with a tongue and cheek question about whether her skill level at gameplay has any impact, to which Mopie sarcastically replies no.

> RMP2: Hope you're hot, Jenny.
>
> [laughter]
>
> Mopie: Why?

RMP2: 'Cause if a girl plays and she's not hot, there's something wrong.

Mopie: Does that like, affect your life in some way?

RMP2: It does.

Mopie: Really? Alright.

Sprawler: Well, now I have a question for you- are you hot?

Mopie: Ya cause it will make me sad if your just like [unintelligible] at home

[laughter]

FP: I almost can't handle the level of stupidity in this room right now.

RMP2: I am. SO hot.

[laughter]

Mopie: We're gonna up it a little bit. Clearly, your, your attractiveness is your entire worth as a human being. Both male and female. Clearly that's the only valauble characteristic of anyone

FP: What about how well I play Call of Duty?

Mopie: No. Nothing to do with it.

Above, humour and sarcasm directly challenge common stereotypes about the appearance of female gamers and comment, indirectly, on the misogynistic nature of gaming culture by drawing attention to the unnecessary focus usually placed on the appearance of female gamers by male players during gameplay interactions (Gray et al., 2018; Henry & Powell, 2017; Levey, 2018; Mantilla, 2015; Paaßen et al., 2017; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). In the final example, shown below, two friends of a female gamer very directly challenge the misogynistic and systemic nature of the ways women are targeted and harassed during video game interactions.

RMP1: I think this lobby's dead.

RMP2: No, no, stay in this lobby!

FP: Yeah, you killed it- congratulations.

RMP3: Oh, what was that? Were you cookin' somethin'? I think I heard a stove in the background! Oooh, my laundry needs cleaning!

Little RUNVus: Why does everybody say some stupid ignorant shit like that, every fucking time?

RMP3: 'Cause it's TRUE!

RMP2: 'Cause it's TRUE!

Little RUNVus: You're a fuckin' idiot, dude.

RMP3: It's true!

RMP1: Nuh-uh, that's where a woman's supposed to be! Cleanin', cookin'. That's where they're supposed to be.

RMP3: Stop trying to be the better man.

RMP2: I cannot wait to drop a Swarm on you. I'm gonna laugh so hard!

RMP1: I'mma put you in your place.

Little RUNVus: Seriously?

Wildcat: I tell you what man, you got it all wrong. My wife makes 100K… Let her work.

RMP3: Yeah, let her work, heck yeah- props to you, you're the man!

RMP2: WORKS ON THE STREET MAKES A-

In this interaction, RMP3 immediately responds to the innocuous gameplay comment of the female gamer by making sexist jokes about a woman's domestic duties in the home. As discussed in Chapter 3, these types of insult are common and are used to insinuate that women are not welcome in gaming spaces, using language that reflects the historically gendered roles of women (Kimmel & Holler, 2011; Luxton, 1980, 1983). Little RUNVus responds immediately by directly asking why people make these ignorant comments all the time. This response draws attention to the sexist nature of the interaction, calling it ignorant, and indirectly expresses the systemic nature of the problem, acknowledging the frequency of these types of interactions, as discussed in Chapter 4. As the interaction continues and the male players justify their stereotyping, Wildcat intercedes citing a personal example that contradicts the stereotype.

The stereotype challengers theme demonstrates that bystander intervention can serve a dual purpose. First, the five techniques identified serve the traditional purpose of the bystander intervention model, providing mechanisms through which individuals can actively intercede in a constructive manner (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Butler et al., 2022; Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Henson et al., 2020; Keashly, 2019), in instances of problematic behaviour, specifically within online gaming contexts.

Second, the stereotype challengers theme illustrates how active bystander intervention in individual incidents can challenge systemic cultural norms that persist and fuel the sexual harassment of women in video game culture. By using bystander intervention to challenge cultural norms, it becomes a mechanism through which new and/or reframed social norms can be introduced and promoted (Banyard, 2015; Fairbairn, 2020). Research indicates that "norms influence attitudes and behaviours only to the extent that individuals identify with the people they are being asked to compare themselves to, they need to see themselves as part of the social norms reference group" (Banyard, 2015, p. 90). Studies also suggest

> that individuals who have had role models for intervention are more likely to intervene themselves, both because they have learned how and when to take such actions and because their inhibitions toward intervention have been lowered by the role model's previous behaviour. (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005, p. 298)

In this way, direct bystander intervention techniques (like stereotype challenging) by male players can, over time, challenge the cultural normalization of sexual harassment within gaming culture (Fairbairn, 2020; Morgenroth et al., 2020).

5.3. Conclusion

The role of active bystander intervention for responding to individual incidents of sexual harassment and its potential as a social catalyst for a shift in cultural norms within gaming spaces is an under-researched technique in online video game contexts. This study used a qualitative content analysis to identify different techniques used by players engaging in bystander intervention upon witnessing the harassment of female gamers during live video game play. The results of this content analysis identified five key themes: the "shut down!" interjections; the "is that the best you can do" reactions; the attention redirection technique; the skills and kills defence; and the stereotype challengers. These themes were characterized predominantly by social coping and/or confrontational strategies employed for active bystander intervention, typically using humour and/or sarcasm as a foundation for other techniques like attention redirection, skills and kills defence, and stereotype challenging. The use of more aggressive confrontational tactics as the foundation for bystander intervention techniques also occurred but were less common than the humour and/or sarcasm-based techniques.

Bystander intervention techniques using shut down interjections and/or humorous/sarcastic responses are more subtle techniques where intervention in individual incidents is indirect. Subtle techniques also highlight the ways bystander intervention can indirectly be a mechanism to challenge cultural norms. The attention redirection technique theme is a classic example of distraction, the second of the 4D's of active bystander intervention, exemplifying that classic bystander intervention techniques can be deployed in online gaming contexts. The skills and kills defence and the stereotype challenger themes are more direct bystander intervention techniques used in online gaming spaces. Direct techniques are used to both intervene in individual incidents and to challenge the cultural normalization of sexual harassment within gaming, thereby shifting social expectations away from women being viewed as solely responsible for their safety in online spaces.

The primary purpose of this study was to classify bystander intervention techniques currently being used during incidents of sexual harassment in online gaming. This study can serve as a foundation for future research on the application of bystander intervention models in different types of online spaces. The results focus on an under-researched area in sexual harassment, the role of active bystander intervention in online incidents, rather than in-person bystander intervention techniques, especially in cases of sexual harassment or violence. Future research should explore the factors that motivate and/or deter bystander intervention in online gaming contexts, the lived experiences of bystanders when they intervene in online contexts, and the potential future application of a bystander intervention model to the unique context of sexual harassment in online video gaming. Future research also needs more dedicated focus on the effectiveness of active bystander intervention, and other prevention and/or intervention strategies, for reducing the frequency of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces and shifting gaming away from sexual harassment being a culturally accepted norm within the community.

Chapter 6.   Conclusion

The sexual harassment of women online is a systemic social problem, and the online gaming context is no different. Like workplace sexual harassment prior to 1970s feminist activism (Citron, 2014), and street harassment prior to the awareness and activism efforts of the mid-2000s (Citron, 2014; Mantilla, 2015; Mills, 2022), sexual harassment online is the latest wave in a repeating historical pattern of women being deliberately targeted in order to dismiss and marginalize their contributions to society. At the same time, this marginalization serves to systematically minimize the severity of the problem so as to justify the social harms caused and to preserve the status quo (Mantilla, 2013, 2015). Historically, video game culture has been a gendered institution where the exclusion of women can be traced back throughout history, from the "pink games" movement of the 1980's and 1990's where games made to appeal to women were highly stereotyped (Cote, 2020; Gray et al., 2018; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015), to the early 2000's, where an increase in women's participation coincided with a new era of cultural credibility for gaming and began to challenge the default "male gamer" identity stereotype (Condis, 2018; Cote, 2020; Paaßen et al., 2017; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012, 2017; Tang et al., 2020; Tomkinson & Harper, 2015). The efforts to marginalize women permeated all aspects of gaming culture, from the underrepresentation or sexualized and stereotyped portrayals of women in game content and marketing of games, to the lack of female representation in all aspects of the gaming industry (Cote, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2017a; Nic & Easpaig, 2018; Vysotsky & Allaway, 2018). Sexual harassment of female gamers has always been just another aspect of this systemic effort to continue marginalizing women's participation in gaming culture (Cote, 2020; Gray et al., 2018), but has, until more recently, frequently been dismissed as "trolling and trash talk that is just part of the game." Today, while women are not actually a minority within gaming spaces any longer (Entertainment Software Association, 2023; Entertainment Software Association of Canada, 2020), the deeply rooted misogynistic ideals that permeate gamer culture have been slow to change, with current efforts to diversify gaming being met with Gamergate 2.0 (Parrish, 2024).

The purpose of this dissertation was to demystify and challenge the status quo acceptance of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces as a normal, natural and inevitable part of day-to-day gaming experiences. The research undertaken addressed

three main research questions: 1) What are the different types of sexual harassment that typically occur within online gaming contexts? 2) What are the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment in online gaming that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours? and 3) What are the different active bystander techniques used to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming? As detailed in Chapter 2, qualitative content analysis examined previously documented examples of sexual harassment experienced by women during online video game play. The data set used was the complete contents of two publicly accessible websites, *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com* and *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com*, created by female gamers, as platforms for themselves and others to share their experiences. These websites were purposively selected because they were relatively well known in the gaming community (at the time of data collection), actively encouraged women to share their experiences, and contained numerous examples of text and voice-based interactions that female gamers publicly shared online. Multiple rounds of inductive, line-by-line coding were completed to allow for themes to emerge naturally from the data, to address each research question.

Chapter 3 categorized the types, styles and language of sexual harassment targeted at women during online gaming interactions. The results identified four key themes: the spectrum of solicitation; insults abound; no girls allowed; and threaten the women away. These themes were characterized predominantly by active, verbal types of sexual harassment, typically in the form of written text-based messages or voice-based messages and conversations. Instances of active, graphic gender harassment (also known as image-based sexual harassment) and passive, verbal sexual harassment, were less common, but also occurred. The language used to frame sexually harassing comments was often a mix of both common, derogatory terms for women (e.g., *slut*, *cunt*, and *bitch*) and common stereotypes about women (e.g., appearance, intelligence, and skill). A notable range of severity in the harassment, from symbolic violence, using insults and slurs, and gendered microassaults, based on sexual objectification, to direct threats of death, rape and genital mutilation was found. Sexual harassment was used to marginalize female gamers and was frequently rationalized by male players using common stereotypes about women who play video games.

Chapter 4 explored the problematic social constructions of sexual harassment as simply individual instances of "trolling or trash talking" that is "just part of the game." This

construction normalizes the behaviour and minimizes the severity of the problem by framing it as natural and inevitable. Reconceptualizing sexual harassment as a pattern of systemic gender inequity is a way to begin deconstructing these harmful social norms. The results identified the behavioural commonalities typically observed during individual incidents that highlight the pervasive nature of the social problem. The first theme demonstrated how normalizing sexual harassment is occurring through the existence of a common lexicon, the use of repetition, and the broad cultural acceptability and sheer ubiquity of the behaviour. The second theme deconstructed the commonly used justification of "it is just a game" which dismisses sexual harassment as a normal part of gameplay. This analysis explored how individual behavioural incidents frequently occur outside of direct gameplay, demonstrating the hypocrisy of the justification and further contributing to the cycle of normalization. Sexual harassment needs to stop being falsely equated with trolling and trash talking or justified as "part of the game." Instead, cultural normalization needs to be challenged and sexual harassment needs to be reframed as exactly what it is, the continued and widespread use of real and symbolic violence to systematically diminish and discount the contribution of women to gaming culture.

Chapter 5 explored the under-researched area of active bystander intervention for responding to individual incidents of sexual harassment in online video gaming contexts. The results identified five key themes: the "shut down!" interjections; the "is that the best you can do" reactions; the attention redirection technique; the skills and kills defence; and the stereotype challengers. These themes represent different techniques used for bystander intervention, characterized predominantly by social coping and/or confrontational strategies using humour and/or sarcasm as a foundation for other techniques like attention redirection, skills and kills defence, and stereotype challenging. Instances where the use of insults, and more aggressive confrontational tactics, were the foundation of different bystander intervention techniques, were less common than the humour and/or sarcasm-based techniques. Certain techniques, such as the attention redirection technique, align closely with the 4D's of active bystander intervention – in this case distraction. In contrast, other techniques (skills and kills defence and stereotype challengers) were more directly confrontational, with direct intervention in incidents challenging the cultural normalization of sexual harassment in gaming. This study serves as a foundation for future research on the application and potential effectiveness of bystander intervention models in different online spaces.

"If I were starting over what would I do differently?" – this is the almost perfunctory question every academic asks themselves as they reach the end of any major research project. My reflections, though, are perhaps more personal than procedural. A decade has elapsed since I first proposed undertaking this research topic, and over those 10 years the research has, at various times, felt both less relevant and more relevant than ever. Less relevant because of the wealth of new research and academic literature that has emerged in this area since 2014. Back then, researching sexism, misogyny and harassment in online video gaming was still on the "fringes" of acceptable academic inquiry, whereas today it has moved firmly and proudly into the mainstream. As this research project comes to an end, it is more relevant than ever because of the current social context. The COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone to live huge parts of their lives online, exposing more people to the dark side of the hate and harassment that exists in online spaces. Simultaneously, the political rise of Donald Trump, and other right-wing politicians, has contributed to normalizing harassment and hate speech as acceptable public discourse on a scale previously unimagined. The dark side of online spaces are now, unfortunately, just a short scroll down. A mental and emotional toll has come with immersing oneself in this type of research for such a long time. Looking back, the impact of the data collection and analysis process on my mental health in those early years was far greater than I realized. Today, the impacts of the work on my mental health feel more manageable[30], and in some respects, easier to set aside. However, that too gives me pause – have I become jaded and reached a point where I have started believing nothing can ever change? I have had those thoughts, and yet when they cross my mind, turning my attention back to completing the research has brought a sense of purpose, of "contributing to hope." And so, the work continues as the baton is passed to future researchers.

The overall purpose of this research was to contribute to an evolving area of social inquiry in an effort to demystify sexual harassment in online gaming spaces, recognize it as a systemic social problem, and explore intervention techniques that could

---

[30] This conclusion was written before my thesis committee requested the addition of a more detailed demonstration of reflexivity within the methods chapter. The process of writing that addition (see Credibility section starting on pg.14) led to an emotional breakdown, a tumultuous evening of writing, followed by a strong sense of catharsis at finally putting into words almost 10 years of semi-repressed feeling and emotion. Thus, my claim of manageability may have been partly aspirational, but now also feels more realistic after finally putting a clinical description to my personal experience of completing this PhD research.

help shift existing cultural norms. These studies focused specifically on the sexual harassment of women in online gaming spaces. As research begins to explore the experiences of transgender and non-binary people in online gaming (Kosciesza, 2023), a deliberate attempt should also be made to examine their unique experiences with sexual harassment in online gaming. Another relevant area for future inquiry observed in the data, but beyond the current scope of inquiry, was the persistence of rape culture[31] and the lack of respect for consent in gaming interactions. The examples of continued harassment and threats against female gamers despite a clearly articulated lack of consent, warrants further academic study. Similarly rape culture more broadly persists, from the use of the term "rape" as slang for victory or conquest over obstacles and fellow players (Cote, 2020; Oliveira, Goncalves, Maia, Silveira, & Evangelista, 2018; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012) to incidents of virtual in-game rape during play (Dibbell, 1998; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2017; Sampat, 2016; Vossen, 2018). While various elements of rape culture in gaming have been researched, a more holistic exploration, building off the current research, would support further examination of the cultural norms that allow sexual harassment to persist in online gaming.

The current research did not specifically explore whether there are variations in sexual harassment between different platforms, games and game genres, and differences in player experience/skill level in those contexts. Understanding the cultural uniqueness of different types of online games/platforms to develop bystander techniques specific to intervention in those circumstances will be important. Additional research is also needed on the use of specific blocking and reporting options and whether they are used by female gamers who experience harassment, the variations in these formal response mechanisms across different games and platforms, and their potential effectiveness for responding to incidents of sexual harassment. The non-consensual sharing of intimate images (e.g. dick pictures) was briefly acknowledged in this research as something that commonly occurs in online gaming but that was beyond the scope of information included in the data set. Further research is needed to understand the true extent to which unsolicited dick pictures are sent to female gamers, and the impacts being subjected to those images have on gamers lived experiences of harassment.

---

[31] Rape culture is "defined as a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women" (Henry, Flynn, & Powell, 2015).

Future research that assesses the effectiveness of active bystander intervention, and other prevention and/or intervention strategies, for reducing the frequency of sexual harassment in online gaming spaces and shifting gaming away from sexual harassment being a culturally accepted norm within the community is crucial. One method through which to accomplish this will be to engage in more holistic ethnographic studies observing bystander behaviours through studying livestreaming of online play. Future research should also explore the factors that motivate and/or deter bystander intervention in online gaming contexts, the lived experiences of bystanders when they intervene, and the potential future application of a bystander intervention model to the unique context of sexual harassment in online video gaming. As more research starts to explore women's experiences with harassment in unique video gaming environments, like eSports[32] (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018; Nexø, 2023; Ruvalcaba, Shulze, Kim, Berzenski, & Otten, 2018) and virtual reality (Deavours, 2023; Schulenberg et al., 2023), the potential application of bystander intervention techniques in these contexts should be considered.

Finally, future research needs to revisit and rethink traditional definitions of sexual harassment (particularly in the legal context) and how sexual harassment in online gaming, and other online mediums, may require a re-conceptualization of traditional approaches to legal remedies. A cultural shift in the discourse on sexual harassment is also vital to future success changing current social norms. Both academic literature and public discourse need to move away from calling incidents where identity is the basis upon which an individual is being targeted trolling/gender trolling, e-bile, trash talk, or even sexist trash talk, and call it what it really is – a systemic problem of sexual harassment and violence in gaming culture.

"Is this [research] just an excuse to play video games?" – the answer I would give to this question today is very different from the wholly inadequate answer I gave almost a decade ago. If asked today I would say that systemic sexual harassment in online gaming has been falsely characterized as "just trolling and/or trash talking" that is a

---

[32] eSports is the "competitive play of video games in public settings (e.g., in online settings or streaming gameplay for spectators). Forms of competitive video game play include, but are not limited to, playing against other players in person or online, playing for trophies or points, and playing for speed (i.e., competing for the fastest completion time in a game)" (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018, p. 296).

natural and expected part of gaming (Condis, 2018; Cote, 2017, 2020; Ortiz, 2019a; Poland, 2016b; Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Vergel et al., 2023). The existing cultural acceptance of trolling and trash talking on the Internet more broadly made it easy for social norms to ascribe these same terms to individual incidents of sexual harassment during gaming and subsequently minimize the severity of the problem, while normalizing each individual incident as "just part of the game"(Coles & West, 2016; C. Cook et al., 2018; Poland, 2016b). This socially constructed and culturally reinforced normalizing has resulted in systemic sexual harassment being excused and justified as the cultural equivalent of an environmental hazard that cannot be changed (C. Cook et al., 2018; Poland, 2016b; Vergel et al., 2023). Only by deconstructing these existing social norms, and reconceptualizing sexual harassment as the continued and widespread use of real and symbolic violence to marginalize women in gaming culture, can we begin to enact effective social change.

Consider the broader cultural context, with the normalizing techniques used in online gaming also used more broadly by men's rights activists and the alt-right movement (Condis, 2018; Cote, 2020) and where flashpoint incidents like #Gamergate persist, despite stronger push back from within the gaming community (Parrish, 2024). Ultimately, sexual harassment in online gaming "is merely one of several reactionary outbursts arising out of the cultural backlash against feminism, antiracist activism, and gay rights activism" (Condis, 2018, p. 97), making it even more important that academic research continue exploring techniques for challenging the current state of normalization. Shifting social norms on a wide scale starts with implementing techniques for intervening in individual incidents and establishing intervention and intolerance as the new cultural norm for sexual harassment. The use of active bystander techniques in online gaming contexts, is a new area of inquiry with potential as a social catalyst to begin shifting cultural norms in gaming spaces. Bystander intervention presents an opportunity to intercede during individual incidents and shut down harassment as it is occurring and/or challenge the social norms and stereotypes that underpin it. Intervention, in turn, allows the cultural normalization of sexual harassment to be challenged in more direct ways within gaming, while also shifting social expectations away from women being viewed as solely responsible for their safety in online spaces.

References

1v1. (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2024, from
https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=1v1

Adams, E. (2010). *Fundamentals of Game Design* (2nd ed.). Berkley, CA: Pearson
Education.

Adinolf, S., & Türkay, S. (2018). Toxic behaviors in eSports games: Player perceptions
and coping strategies. In *CHI PLAY 2018 - Proceedings of the 2018 Annual
Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play Companion Extended
Abstracts* (pp. 365–372). https://doi.org/10.1145/3270316.3271545

Allison, K. R., & Bussey, K. (2016). Cyber-bystanding in context: A review of the
literature on witnesses' responses to cyberbullying. *Children and Youth Services
Review*, *65*, 183–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.026

Amundsen, R. (2021). 'A male dominance kind of vibe': Approaching unsolicited dick
pics as sexism. *New Media and Society*, *23*(6), 1465–1480.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820907025

Anita Sarkeesian. (2024). Retrieved February 17, 2024, from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anita_Sarkeesian#As_a_target_of_harassment

Anti-Defamation League. (2021). *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social
Experiences in Online Games 2021*. Retrieved from
https://www.adl.org/resources/report/hate-no-game-harassment-and-positive-
social-experiences-online-games-2021

Banyard, V. L. (2015). *Toward the Next Generation of Bystander Prevention of Sexual
and Relationship Violence*. New York, NY: Springer International Publishing.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23171-6

Barak, A. (2005). Sexual harassment on the internet. *Social Science Computer Review*,
23(1), 77–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439304271540

Basford, T. E., Offermann, L. R., & Behrend, T. S. (2014). Do you see what I see?
Perceptions of gender microaggressions in the workplace. *Psychology of Women
Quarterly*, *38*(3), 340–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313511420

Bastiaensens, S., Vandebosch, H., Poels, K., Van Cleemput, K., Desmet, A., & De
Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2014). Cyberbullying on social network sites. An experimental
study into bystanders' behavioural intentions to help the victim or reinforce the
bully. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *31*(1), 259–271.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.036

Bishop, J. (2014). Representations of "trolls" in mass media communication: a review of media-texts and moral panics relating to "internet trolling." *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *10*(1), 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2014.058384

Blodgett, B. M., & Salter, A. (2013). Hearing "Lady Game Creators" Tweet: #1ReasonWhy, Women and Online Discourse in the Game Development Community. *Selected Papers of Internet Research*, *3*, 1–3. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org/index.php/spir/article/view/694/289

Boellstorff, T. (2008). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bowes-Sperry, L., & O'Leary-Kelly, A. M. (2005). To Act or Not To Act: The Dilemma Faced by Sexual Harassment Observers. *Academy of Management Review*, *30*(2), 288–306.

Brail, S. (1996). The price of admission: harassment and free speech in the wild, wild west. In L. Cherny & E. R. Weise (Eds.), *Wired Women: Gender and new realities in cyberspace* (pp. 141–157). Toronto, ON: Princeton University Press.

Braithwaite, A. (2016). It's About Ethics in Games Journalism? Gamergaters and Geek Masculinity. *Social Media + Society*, *Oct-Dec*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116672484

Brody, N., & Vangelisti, A. L. (2016). Bystander Intervention in Cyberbullying. *Communication Monographs*, *83*(1), 94–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1044256

Brunner, E., & Partlow-Lefevre, S. (2020). #MeToo as networked collective: examining consciousness-raising on wild public networks. *Communication and Critical/ Cultural Studies*, *17*(2), 166–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2020.1750043

Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2002). Killing Like a Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl Gamers' Visibility. In *Proceedings of Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference* (pp. 243–255). https://doi.org/10.1.1.97.9334

Burgess, M. C. R., Stermer, S. P., & Burgess, S. R. (2007). Sex, Lies and Video Games: The Portrayal of Male and Female Characters on Video Game Covers. *Sex Roles*, *57*, 419–433.

Butler, L. C., Graham, A., Fisher, B. S., Henson, B., & Reyns, B. W. (2022). Examining the Effect of Perceived Responsibility on Online Bystander Intervention, Target Hardening, and Inaction. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *37*(21–22), NP20847–NP20872. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211055088

Camping. (n.d.). Retrieved May 10, 2024, from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=camping

Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L., Corman, L., Hamit, S., Lyons, O. B., & Weingerg, A. (2010). The manifestation of gender microaggressions. In D. W. Sue (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestations, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 193–216). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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 and Electronic Media*, *59*(1), 208–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2014.999917

Citron, D. (2014). *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coles, B. A., & West, M. (2016). Trolling the trolls: Online forum users constructions of the nature and properties of trolling. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *60*, 233–244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.070

Collier, C. N., & Raney, T. (2018). Understanding sexism and sexual harassment in politics: A comparison of westminster parliaments in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada. *Social Politics*, *25*(3), 432–455. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy024

Condis, M. (2018). *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks & the Gendered Battle for Online Culture*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Conditt, J. (2015). Nightline investigates GamerGate, online harassment. Retrieved from http://www.joystiq.com/2015/01/15/nightline-investigates-gamergate-online-harassment/

Consalvo, M. (2012). Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars. *Ada: Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, (1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.7264/N33X84KH

Cook, C. L., Tang, S. Y. C., & Lin, J. H. T. (2023). Comparing shades of darkness: trolling victims' experiences on social media vs. online gaming. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*(August), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1163244

Cook, C. L., Tang, S. Y. C., & Lin, J. H. T. (2024). Billy goats crossing the cyber-bridge: Interviews exploring the experiences, coping techniques, and intervention desires of in-game trolling targets. *Communication Monographs*, *91*(1), 126–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2023.2252487

Cook, C., Schaafsma, J., & Antheunis, M. (2018). Under the bridge: An in-depth examination of online trolling in the gaming context. *New Media & Society*, *20*(9), 3323–3340. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817748578

Cote, A. C. (2017). "'I Can Defend Myself'": Women's Strategies for Coping With Harassment While Gaming Online. *Games and Culture*, *12*(2), 136–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587603

Cote, A. C. (2020). *Gaming Sexism: Gender Identity in the Era of Casual Video Games*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Cote, A. C. (2021). On the (In)Visibility of Female Gamers. *Flow*, *27*(8), 1–14. Retrieved from https://www.flowjournal.org/2021/06/invisibility-of-female-gamers/

Criminal Code, Pub. L. No. C–46, C–46 1131 (1985). Canada. Retrieved from http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/C-46.pdf

Cross, K. (2014). Ethics for Cyborgs : On Real Harassment in an " Unreal " Place. *The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association*, *8*(13), 4–21.

Cruz, A. G. B., Seo, Y., & Rex, M. (2018). Trolling in online communities: A practice-based theoretical perspective. *Information Society*, *34*(1), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2017.1391909

Davidovic, A., Talbot, C., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Joinson, A. (2023). To intervene or not to intervene: young adults' views on when and how to intervene in online harassment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *28*(5), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmad027

Deavours, D. (2023). Virtual Allies: Why Allyship is Critical to Diversification of Virtual Reality Gaming? *Games and Culture*, *0*(0), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231208406

Deng, Z. (2023). *Run, Hide, Fight: How Female Gamers Understand and React to Sexism and Misogyny in Gaming*.

Dibbell, J. (1998). *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company Inc.

DiGiuseppe, N., & Nardi, B. (2007). Real genders choose fantasy characters: Class choice in world of warcraft. *First Monday*, *12*(5). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v12i5.1831

Dill, K. E., Brown, B. P., & Collins, M. a. (2008). Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*(5), 1402–1408. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.06.002

Dillon, K. P. (2014). The unresponsive cyberbystander: A proposed cyberbystander intervention model of the mediated social forces inhibiting intervention online. In *2014 Annual National Communication Association Conference*. Chicago, IL. Retrieved from https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/NCA_Anti-Bullying_Resources_Dillon.pdf%0Ahttps://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4f25/b7fdc988aecbc7f33a45781efcca9dd7251f.pdf

Dillon, K. P., & Bushman, B. J. (2015). Unresponsive or un-noticed?: Cyberbystander intervention in an experimental cyberbullying context. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *45*, 144–150. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.009

Dovey, J., & Kennedy, H. . (2006). *Game cultures: computer games as new media*. New York, NY: Open University Press.

Downs, J., & Smith, S. L. (2010). Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis. *Sex Roles*, *62*, 721–733.

Easpaig, B. N. G., & Humphrey, R. (2017). "Pitching a virtual woo": Analysing discussion of sexism in online gaming. *Feminism and Psychology*, *27*(4), 553–561. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353516667400

Entertainment Software Association. (2022). *2022 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry*. Retrieved from https://www.theesa.com/resource/2022-essential-facts-about-the-video-game-industry/

Entertainment Software Association. (2023). *2023 Essential Facts about the U.S. video game industry*. *Entertainment Software Association*. Retrieved from https://www.theesa.com/2023-essential-facts/

Entertainment Software Association of Canada. (2020). *Real Canadian Gamer Essential Facts 2020*.

Fairbairn, J. (2020). Before #metoo: Violence against women social media work, bystander intervention, and social change. *Societies*, *10*(3), 236–237. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10030051

Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://fatuglyorslutty.com/

Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (1995). Ambivalence and stereotypes cause sexual harassment : A theory with implications for organizational change. *Journal of Social Issues*, *51*(1), 97–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1995.tb01311.x

Fox, J., & Bailenson, J. N. (2009). Virtual Virgins and Vamps : The Effects of Exposure to Female Characters ' Sexualized Appearance and Gaze in an Immersive Virtual Environment, 147–157. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9599-3

Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2014). Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *33*, 314–320. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.07.014

Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2017a). Sexism in Video Games and the Gaming Community. In R. Kowert & T. Quandt (Eds.), *New Perspectives on the Social Aspects of Digital Gaming* (pp. 115–135). New York, NY: Routledge.

Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2017b). Women's experiences with general and sexual harassment in online video games: Rumination, organizational responsiveness, withdrawal, and coping strategies. *New Media & Society*, *19*(8), 1290–1307. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816635778

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolen sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(3), 491–512. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491

Golf-Papez, M., & Veer, E. (2017). Don't feed the trolling: rethinking how online trolling is being defined and combated. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *33*(15–16), 1336–1354. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1383298

Gray, K. L. (2012). Intersecting Oppressions and Online Communities: Examining the Experiences of Women of Color in Xbox Live. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(3), 411–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.642401

Gray, K. L. (2014). *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox Live: Theoretical Perspectives from the Virtual Margins*. New York, NY: Elsevier Inc.

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), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12458

Gray, K. L., Voorhees, G., & Vossen, E. (2018). Introduction: Reframing Hegemonic Conceptions of Women and Feminism in Gaming Culture. In K. L. Gray, G. Voorhees, & E. Vossen (Eds.), *Feminism In Play* (pp. 1–17). Chicago, IL: Palgrave Macmillan.

Guazzini, A., Imbimbo, E., Stefanelli, F., & Bravi, G. (2019). The Online Bystander Effect: Evidence from a Study on Synchronous Facebook Communications. In *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* (Vol. 11938 LNCS, pp. 153–167). proceeding, Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34770-3_12

Haniver, J. (n.d.). Not In The Kitchen Anymore. Retrieved from www.notinthekitchenanymore.com

Hayes, E. (2005). Women, video gaming and learning: Beyond stereotypes. *TechTrends*, *49*(5), 23–28. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02763686

Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2015). The Promise and Paradox of Justice: Rape Justice Beyond the Criminal Law. In A. Powell, N. Henry, & A. Flynn (Eds.), *Rape Justice Beyond the Criminal Law* (pp. 1–17). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2017). *Sexual Violence in a Digital Age*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663915624273

Henson, B., Fisher, B. S., & Reyns, B. W. (2020). There Is Virtually No Excuse: The Frequency and Predictors of College Students' Bystander Intervention Behaviors Directed at Online Victimization. *Violence Against Women*, *26*(5), 505–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219835050

Herring, S., Job-Sluder, K., Scheckler, R., & Barab, S. (2002). Searching for Safety Online: Managing "Trolling" in a Feminist Forum. *The Information Society*, *18*(5), 371–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240290108186

Herry, E., & Mulvey, K. L. (2022). Gender-based cyberbullying: Understanding expected bystander behavior online. *Journal of Social Issues*, (April), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12503

Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (2nd Editio). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hilvert-Bruce, Z., & Neill, J. T. (2020). I'm just trolling: The role of normative beliefs in aggressive behaviour in online gaming. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *102*(January 2019), 303–311. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.003

Holz Ivory, A., Fox, J., Franklin Waddell, T., & Ivory, J. D. (2014). Sex role stereotyping is hard to kill: A field experiment measuring social responses to user characteristics and behavior in an online multiplayer first-person shooter game. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *35*, 148–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.026

Ivory, J. D. (2006). Still A Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games. *Mass Communication and Society*, *9*(1), 103–114.

Jackson, N. L., & Nadal, K. L. (2017). Microagressions. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology Intersectional Theories* (pp. 1181–1185). Sage Publications.

Jagayat, A., & Choma, B. L. (2021). Cyber-aggression towards women: Measurement and psychological predictors in gaming communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *120*(February), 106753. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106753

Jane, E. A. (2014a). Back to the kitchen, cunt: Speaking the unspeakable about online misogyny. *Continuum*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2014.924479

Jane, E. A. (2014b). "Your a ugly, whorish, slut": Understanding E-bile. *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(4), 531–546. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.741073

Jane, E. A. (2015). Flaming? What flaming? The pitfalls and potentials of researching online hostility. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *17*(1), 65–87. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-015-9362-0

Jane, E. A. (2016). Online misogyny and feminist digilantism. *Continuum*, *30*(3), 284–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1166560

Jenkins, L. N., Fredrick, S. S., & King, J. (2023). Testing the Bystander Intervention Model in Cyberbullying Across Students of Color and White Students. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, *March*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00162-0

Jenson, J., & De Castell, S. (2014). Online Games , Gender and Feminism in. *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, *November*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118290743.wbiedcs116

K/D. (n.d.). Retrieved May 10, 2024, from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=K%2FD

Kasumovic, M. M., & Kuznekoff, J. H. (2015). Insights into Sexism: Male Status and Performance Moderates Female-Directed Hostile and Amicable Behaviour. *Plos One*, *10*(7), e0131613. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0131613

Kaye, L. K., & Pennington, C. R. (2016). "Girls can't play": The effects of stereotype threat on females' gaming performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *59*, 202–209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.020

Keashly, L. (2019). In the E-Presence of Others. In W. Cassidy, C. Faucher, & M. Jackson (Eds.), *Cyberbullying at University in Interntional Contexts* (pp. 141–156). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kimmel, M. S., & Holler, J. (2011). *The Gendered Society* (Canadian E). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kosciesza, A. J. (2023). Doing gender in game spaces: Transgender and non-binary players' gender signaling strategies in online games. *New Media and Society*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231168107

Kuznekoff, J. H., & Rose, L. M. (2012). Communication in Multiplayer Gaming: Examining Player Responses to Gender Cues. *New Media & Society*, *15*(4), 541–556.

Lee, T. L., Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (2010). Next gen ambivalent sexism: Converging correlates, causality in context, and converse causality, an introduction to the special issue. *Sex Roles*, *62*(7–8), 395–404. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9747-9

Levey, T. G. (2018). *Sexual Harassment Online: Shaming and Silencing Women in the Digital Age*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Levine, M., & Crowther, S. (2008). The Responsive Bystander: How Social Group Membership and Group Size Can Encourage as Well as Inhibit Bystander Intervention. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*(6), 1429–1439. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012634

Lim, E. H., Vungthong, S., & Trakulkasemsuk, W. (2024). Trash-talking versus Toxicity: An Analysis of /All Chat Exchanges between Southeast Asian Players of an Online Competitive Game. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, *17*(1), 816–856.

Luxton, M. (1980). *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work In The Home*. Toronto, ON: The Women's Press.

Luxton, M. (1983). Two Hands for the Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour in the Home. In M. Luxton, H. Rosenberg, & S. A. Koc (Eds.), *Studies in Political Economy* (Second Edi, Vol. 12, pp. 27–44). Toronto, ON: Garamond Press.

Maloney, M., Roberts, S., & Graham, T. (2019). *Gender, masculinity and video gaming: Analysing reddit's r/gaming community*. *Gender, Masculinity and Video Gaming: Analysing Reddit's r/gaming Community*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28262-2

Mantilla, K. (2013). Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media. *Feminist Studies*, *39*(2), 563–570. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/stable/pdf/23719068.pdf

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

Marchbank, J., & Letherby, G. (2014). *Introduction to gender: social science perspectives* (2nd ed.). London, Routledge.

Markey, P. M. (2000). Bystander intervention in computer-mediated communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *16*(2), 183–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0747-5632(99)00056-4

Martey, R. M., Stromer-Galley, J., Banks, J., Wu, J., & Consalvo, M. (2014). The strategic female: gender-switching and player behavior in online games. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(3), 286–300. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.874493

McLean, L., & Griffiths, M. D. (2019). Female Gamers' Experience of Online Harassment and Social Support in Online Gaming: A Qualitative Study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *17*(4), 970–994. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-018-9962-0

Megarry, J. (2014). Online incivility or sexual harassment? Conceptualising women's experiences in the digital age. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *47*, 46–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.012

Mendes, K., Ringrose, J., & Keller, J. (2018). #MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *25*(2), 236–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506818765318

Mills, M. A. (2022). *Street Harassment as Everyday Violence*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Morgenroth, T., Stratemeyer, M., & Paaßen, B. (2020). The gendered nature and malleability of gamer stereotypes. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *23*(8), 557–561. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2019.0577

Nardi, B. (2010). *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Nexø, L. A. (2023). Toxic Behaviours in Esport: A Review of Data-Collection Methods Applied in Studying Toxic In-Gaming Behaviours. *International Journal of Esports*, (Nordic Esports Workshop), 1–28.

Nic, B., & Easpaig, G. (2018). An Exploratory Study of Sexism in Online Gaming Communities: Mapping Contested Digital Terrain. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective CPGP*, *4*(2), 119–135.

Noob. (n.d.). Retrieved May 10, 2024, from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Noob

Oliveira, T., Goncalves, R., Maia, A., Silveira, J., & Evangelista, S. (2018). Sexism and the Wow Girl: A Study of Perceptions of Women in World of Warcraft. In K. L. Gray, G. Voorhees, & E. Vossen (Eds.), *Feminism In Play* (pp. 143–161). Chicago, IL: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ortiz, S. M. (2019a). The meanings of racist and sexist trash talk for men of color: A cultural sociological approach to studying gaming culture. *New Media and Society*, *21*(4), 879–894. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818814252

Ortiz, S. M. (2019b). "You Can Say I Got Desensitized to It": How Men of Color Cope with Everyday Racism in Online Gaming. *Sociological Perspectives*, *62*(4), 572–588. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121419837588

Ortiz, S. M. (2020). Trolling as a Collective Form of Harassment: An Inductive Study of How Online Users Understand Trolling. *Social Media and Society*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120928512

Ortiz, S. M. (2024). "If Something Ever Happened, I'd Have No One to Tell:" how online sexism perpetuates young women's silence. *Feminist Media Studies*, *24*(1), 119–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2185565

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*, 421–435. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0678-y

Parrish, B. A. (2024). The return of Gamergate is smaller and sadder. Retrieved April 24, 2024, from https://www.theverge.com/2024/3/18/24104799/gamergate-2024-sweet-baby-inc-diversity

Pearce, C., & Artemesia. (2009). *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Poland. (2016a). Why Naming Online Harassment Accurately Matters. Retrieved from https://womensmediacenter.com/speech-project/why-naming-online-harassment-accurately-matters

Poland, B. (2016b). *Haters: Harassment, Abuse and Violence Online*. Potomac Books.

Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J., & Waisbord, S. (2020). *Online violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts*. Retrieved from http://icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/UNESCO Online Violence Against Women Journalists - A Global Snapshot Dec9pm.pdf

Posetti, J., Maynard, D., Bontcheva, K., Hapal, D. K., & Salcedo, D. (2021). *Maria Ressa: Fighting an Onslaught of online violence*. Retrieved from https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Maria Ressa- Fighting an Onslaught of Online Violence_0.pdf

Prescott, J., & Bogg, J. (2013). *Gender Divide and the Computer Gaming Industry*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-4534-9

Raney, T., & McGregor, R. M. (2023). Beyond the Ballot Box: Sexual Harassment and Legislative Accountability in Canadian Politics. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *184*(3), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423923000203

Robinson, J. A. (2023). "I Ain't No Girl": Exploring Gender Stereotypes in the Video Game Community. *Western Journal of Communication*, *87*(5), 857–878. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2022.2130004

Rudnicki, K., Vandebosch, H., Voué, P., & Poels, K. (2023). Systematic review of determinants and consequences of bystander interventions in online hate and cyberbullying among adults. *Behaviour and Information Technology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2022.2027013

Ruvalcaba, O., Shulze, J., Kim, A., Berzenski, S. R., & Otten, M. P. (2018). Women's Experiences in eSports: Gendered Differences in Peer and Spectator Feedback During Competitive Video Game Play. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *42*(4), 295–311. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723518773287

Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2012). Hypermasculinity & Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(3), 401–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2012.705199

Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2017). *Toxic geek masculinity in media: Sexism, Trolling, and Identity Policing*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66077-6

Salter, M. (2017). *Crime, Justice and Social Media*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sampat, E. (2016). Here's How We Failed Women at GDC 2016. Retrieved March 2, 2020, from https://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/ElizabethSampat/20160321/268527/Heres_How_We_Failed_Women_at_GDC_2016.php

Sanfilippo, M., Yang, S., & Fichman, P. (2017). Trolling here, there, and everywhere: Perceptions of trolling behaviors in context. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *68*(10), 2313–2327. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23902

Schulenberg, K., Freeman, G., Li, L., & Barwulor, C. (2023). Creepy Towards My Avatar Body, Creepy Towards My Body": How Women Experience and Manage Harassment Risks in Social Virtual Reality. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *7*(CSCW2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1145/3610027

Scott, G., & Garner, R. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research: Designs, Methods, and Techniques* (1st Editio). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Seo, Y. nam, Oh, P., & Kil, W. Y. (2022). 'Into the wolves' den: an investigation of predictors of sexism in online games'. *Behaviour and Information Technology*, *41*(8), 1740–1754. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2021.1899287

Shaw, A. (2014). *Gaming at the edge: Sexuality and gender at the margins of gamer culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Shaw, A., & Chess, S. (2016). Reflections on the casual games market in a post-GamerGate world. In T. Leaver & M. Willson (Eds.), *Social, Casual and Mobile Games : The changing gaming landscape* (pp. 277–290). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501310591.ch-019

Shultz, E., Heilman, R., & Hart, K. J. (2014). Cyber-bullying: An exploration of bystander behavior and motivation. *Cyberpsychology:Journal of Psychological Research on Cyberspace*, *8*(4 (article 3)), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-4-3

Sobieraj, S. (2018). Bitch, slut, skank, cunt: patterned resistance to women's visibility in digital publics. *Information Communication and Society*, *21*(11), 1700–1714. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1348535

Solicit. (n.d.). Retrieved June 25, 2018, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solicit?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld

Steinkuehler, C. a., & Williams, D. (2006). Where everybody knows your (screen) name: Online games as "third places." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(4), 885–909. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00300.x

Suden, J., & Sveningsson, M. (2012). *Gender and Sexuality in Online Gaming Cultures: Passionate Play*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sue, D. W. (2010a). Microaggressions, marginality, and oppression: An introduction. In D. W. Sue (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestations, dynamics, and impact* (pp. 3–22). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sue, D. W. (2010b). *Microaggressions in everyday life*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

T Bag Definition. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=T Bag

Tang, W. Y., & Fox, J. (2016). Men's harassment behavior in online video games: Personality traits and game factors. *Aggressive Behavior*, *42*(6). https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21646

Tang, W. Y., Reer, F., & Quandt, T. (2020). Investigating sexual harassment in online video games: How personality and context factors are related to toxic sexual behaviors against fellow players. *Aggressive Behavior*, *46*(1), 127–135. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21873

Taylor, N., & Voorhees, G. (2018). Introduction: Masculinity and Gaming: Mediated Masculinities in Play. In N. Taylor & G. Voorhees (Eds.), *Masculinities in Play* (pp. 1–19). Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, T. L. (2009). *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Thacker, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2012). An exploratory study of trolling in online video gaming. *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning*, *2*(4), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.4018/ijcbpl.2012100102

Todd, C. (2015). COMMENTARY : GamerGate and resistance to the diversification of gaming culture. *Women's Studies Journal*, *29*(1), 64–67.

Tomkinson, S., & Harper, T. (2015). The position of women in video game culture: Perez and Day's Twitter Incident. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *29*(4), 617–634. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1025362

Vag. (n.d.). Retrieved May 10, 2024, from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=vag

Vergel, P., La parra-Casado, D., & Vives-Cases, C. (2023). Examining Cybersexism in Online Gaming Communities: A Scoping Review. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, *25*(2), 1201–1218. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231176059

Vermeulen, L., Castellar, E. N., Janssen, D., Calvi, L., & Van Looy, J. (2016). Playing under threat. Examining stereotype threat in female game players. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *57*, 377–387. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.042

Vitis, L., & Gilmour, F. (2017). Dick pics on blast: A woman's resistance to online sexual harassment using humour, art and Instagram. *Crime, Media, Culture*, *13*(3), 335–355. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659016652445

Vogels, E. A. (2021). *The State of Online Harassment*. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/

Vossen, E. (2018). The Magic Circle and Consent in Gaming Practices. In K. L. Gray, G. Voorhees, & E. Vossen (Eds.), *Feminism In Play* (pp. 205–220). Chicago, IL: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vysotsky, S., & Allaway, J. H. (2018). The Sobering Reality of Sexism in the Video Game Industry. In K. L. Gray & D. J. Leonard (Eds.), *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice* (pp. 101–118). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Williams, D., Consalvo, M., Caplan, S., & Yee, N. (2009). Looking for gender: Gender roles and behaviors among online gamers. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(4), 700–725. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01453.x

Wong, S., & Ratan, R. (2023). How Does Exposure to General and Sexual Harassment Relate to Female Gamers' Coping Strategies and Mental Health? *Games and Culture*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231177600

Yao, M. Z., Mahood, C., & Linz, D. (2010). Sexual Priming , Gender Stereotyping , and Likelihood to Sexually Harass : Examining the Cognitive Effects of Playing a Sexually-Explicit Video Game, 77–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9695-4

Yip, J. A., Schweitzer, M. E., & Nurmohamed, S. (2018). Trash-talking: Competitive incivility motivates rivalry, performance, and unethical behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *144*, 125–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2017.06.002

You, L. (2023). *The Bystander Effect : Why Do Witnesses Refrain from Acting in Cyberbullying Cases ? Leping You*.

You, L., & Lee, Y. H. (2019). The bystander effect in cyberbullying on social network sites: Anonymity, group size, and intervention intentions. *Telematics and Informatics*, *45*(September), 101–284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.101284

Zhao, Y., Chu, X., & Rong, K. (2023). Cyberbullying experience and bystander behavior in cyberbullying incidents: The serial mediating roles of perceived incident severity and empathy. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *138*(March 2022), 107484. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107484

Appendix.   Data Analysis Documentation

Figure A.1.   The 42 codes identified after the initial round of coding was completed.

Figure A.2.   The 22 codes identified as relevant to the different types of sexual harassment by looking at the language used and the nature and style of the harassment, resulting in the identification of 4 themes.
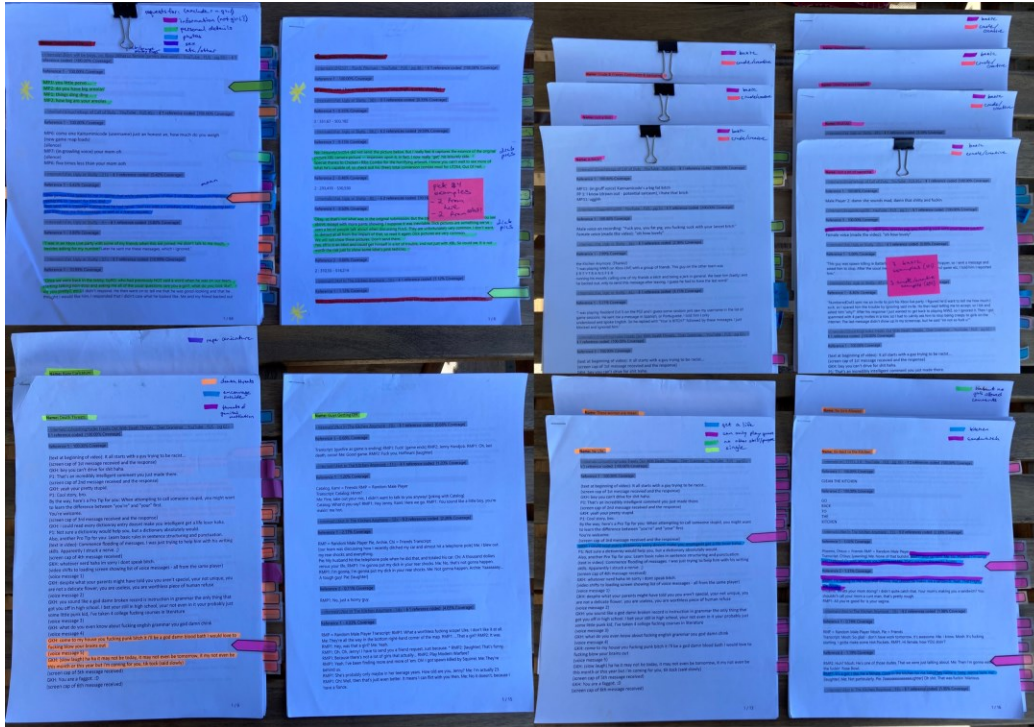
Figure A.3. Photo of all the manual thematic coding completed (using highlighters and sticky notes) to group the 22 codes into categories and subcategories, resulting in the identification of 4 themes.
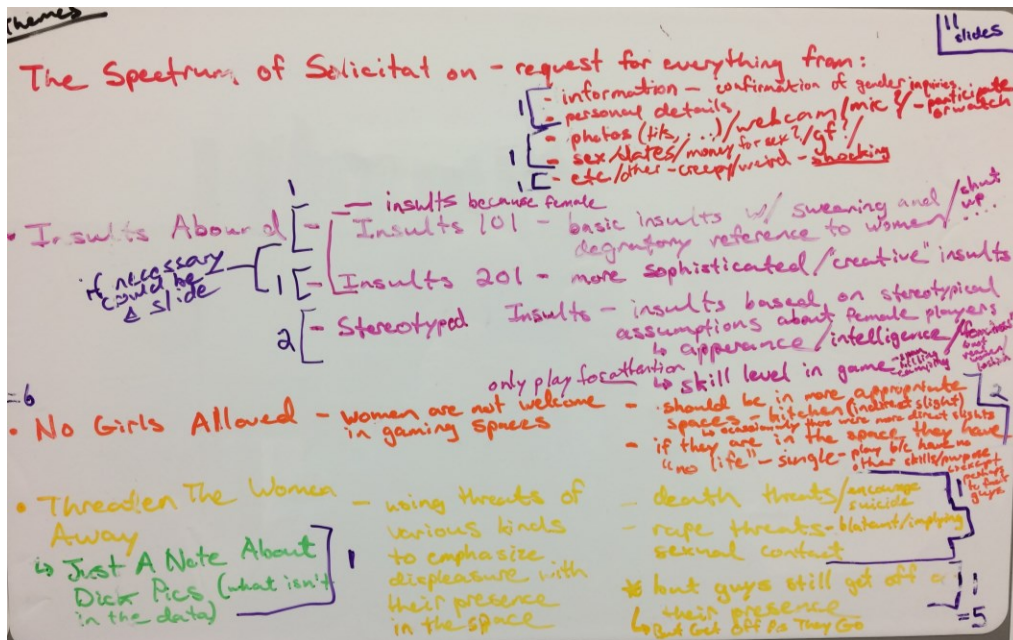
Figure A.4. Notes describing the different themes about the different types of sexual harassment as they were emerging from the data set.
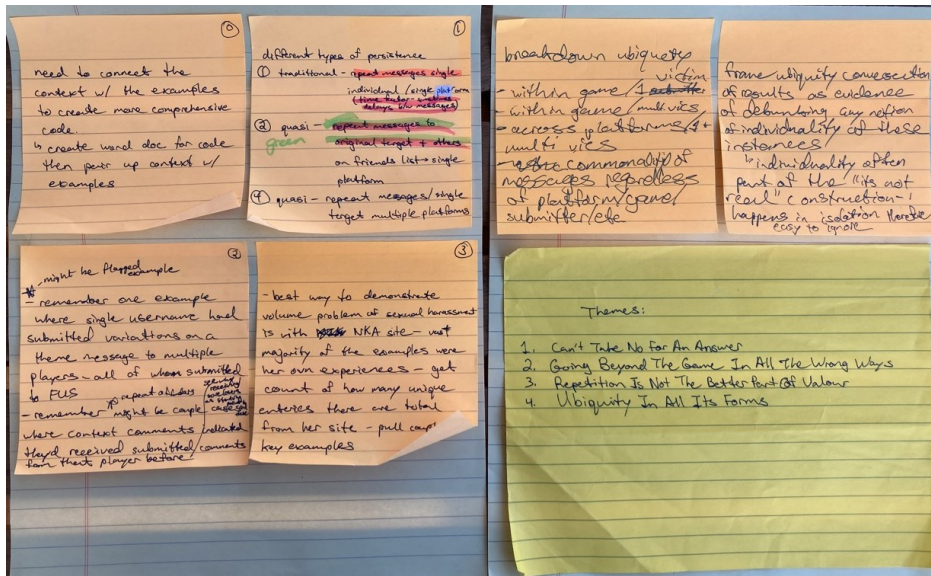
Figure A.5. Photo of all the manual thematic coding completed (using highlighters and sticky notes) to group the 3 codes into categories and subcategories, resulting in the identification of 2 themes.

Figure A.6. Notes describing the different themes identifying the commonalities amongst individual instances of sexual harassment that demonstrate the problematic normalizing of these behaviours, resulting in 2 main themes.

Figure A.7. Complete count of the number of entries from the *Not In The Kitchen Anymore.com* website.
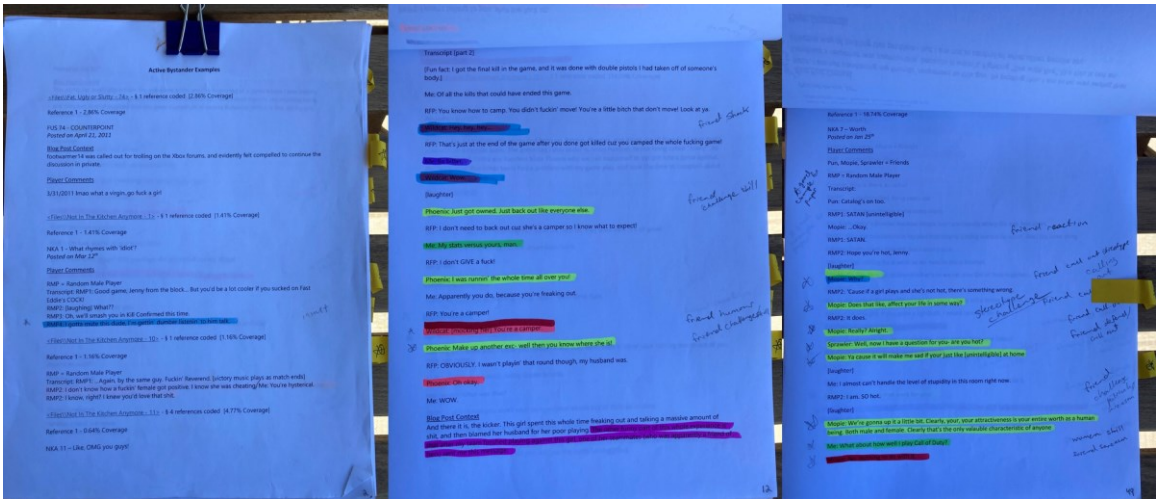
Figure A.8. Photo of the manual thematic coding completed (using highlighters and sticky notes) on the code, resulting in the identification of 5 themes.
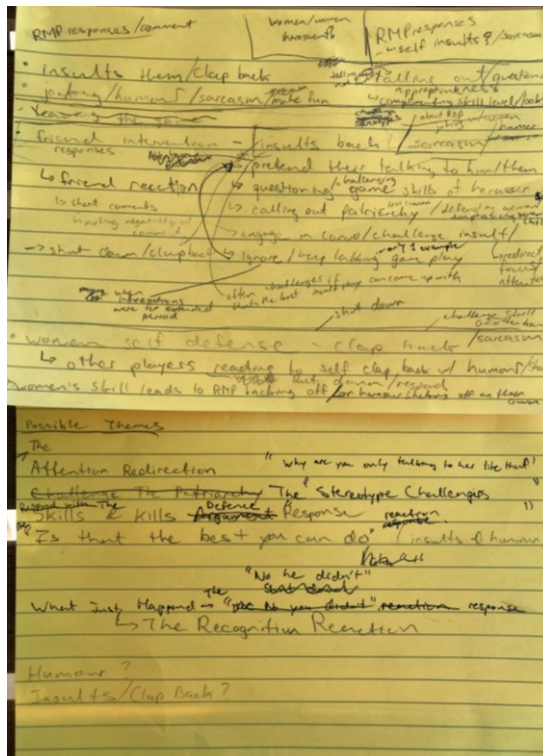

Figure A.9. Notes describing the different themes about bystander intervention techniques as they were emerging from the data set.

Figure A.10. The coding categories and the 5 different themes of bystander intervention techniques that emerged from the data set.

Figure A.11. Excerpts from my research notes, which documented only how I was progressing through the coding process and the technical issues I was encountering.

145