5 Gender and Race Online

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Videogames are one of the world's most popular and profitable forms of media. Though sales of hardware, software, and accessories in US retail stores "fell in 2013 to $810 million from $1.09 billion the same time a year prior," according to a report issued by NPD Group, largely due to declining hardware sales, *global* sales of video games were projected to grow "from $67 billion in 2012 to $82 billion in 2017" (Gaudiosi 2012). Much of this growth is due to mobile and "casual" games like *Angry Birds* and the like, a trend that is likely to continue, but for the time being blockbuster First Person Shooter (FPS) games like *Modern Warfare: Call of Duty Black Ops 2*, a 2012 release that earned $1 billion in fifteen days, continue to set records and to define the industry (Sliwinski 2012).

The gamer culture that characterizes console games such as *COD: Modern Warfare* is, in Mia Consalvo's words, often extremely "toxic" to women and minorities. How has this come to pass? What can be done about it? This chapter will evaluate the racial and gender climate in the world of console gaming, identify some causes for the pervasive sexism and racism to be found there, and assess the potential for change.

Race is a famously contentious topic, particularly in the United States. Because overt acts of racism have become less common in recent years, there is always a troubling tendency to view racism as disappearing, if not in fact completely eradicated. This view of racism as an unfortunate artifact of the past, always as something that is dying out, characterizes the "post-racial ideology." Subscribers to this ideology believe that racism manifests itself most commonly as isolated incidents of hateful speech directed from one person to another, that racism is the result of "ignorance" rather than harmful intent, and that it is ultimately personal rather than culturally systemic.

However, those who doubt that racism (and its frequent companion, sexism) is still a serious problem or who believe that it is "personal" rather than pervasive throughout societal institutions need only look to the Internet for proof that this is *not* so. This chapter will discuss how racism and sexism have continued to flourish on the Internet, and indeed to some extent have even come to *define* it, despite our supposedly "post-racial" historical moment. The title of Saul Levmore and Martha Nussbaum's book *The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy, and Reputation* (2010) attests to the often outrageous amounts of outright misogyny, racism, and other discriminatory types of communication to

be found in the digitally mediated world: one chapter on Google and Free Speech is entitled "Cleaning Cyber-Cesspools." This book is written from the perspective of legal scholarship and philosophy and is a welcome corrective to earlier work that glosses over the unpleasant realities of unbridled digital communication and its victims, who are predominantly women and minorities.

The Internet is undoubtedly a powerful tool in the quest for democracy and fairness, as other chapters in this volume eloquently attest; how did it simultaneously become a media platform practically defined by its egregious sexism and racism? Online gaming offers a unique opportunity to study this phenomenon, for as Mia Consalvo, a leading scholar in the field of gender and video games, writes in her essay "Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars,": "Of course harassment of female players has been occurring for quite some time—perhaps the entire history of gaming—but it seems to have become more virulent and concentrated in the past couple of years" (Consalvo 2012). Consalvo discovered that gaming culture was far less toxic, paradoxically, when there were *fewer* women playing:

Slowly but surely and building upon one another in frequency and intensity, all of these events have been responding to the growing presence of women and girls in gaming, not as a novelty but as a regular and increasingly important demographic.... The "encroachment" of women and girls into what was previously a male-gendered space has not happened without incident, and will probably only become worse before it (hopefully) improves.

While the rest of the Internet became more gender-balanced years ago (Wakeford 2000), the world of video games self-identifies and is seen by many of its players of both genders as fundamentally masculine despite evidence to the contrary. Despite the immense popularity of games such as *The Sims* among female players (Gee and Hayes 2010: 207), as Adrienne Shaw's 2011 ethnographic study shows, "there is a definite correlation between gender and gamer identity. Male interviewees were much more likely to identify as gamers than female, transgender, or genderqueer interviewees were" (Shaw 2011: 34). As Shaw notes, her findings are far from unusual: many other game scholars have "found that women tend to underestimate the amount of time they play and do not generally identify as gamers" (p. 34).

Conversely, men who do not play as often as women may identify with gaming and as gamers in order to solidify claims to masculinity. The identification between gaming and masculinity has become so strong that a new type of male identity, that of "geek masculinity," has acquired popular currency. John Scalzi's essay on white privilege, "Straight White Male: the Lowest Difficulty Setting" attests to the ways that the vocabulary of gaming addresses men, particularly white men, in ways that other discourses cannot (Scalzi 2012). As Scalzi writes, "men think in the language of gaming...or at least wish to *appear* to do so in front of other men and women."

Feminist game scholar Nina Huntemann employs a media industries studies' approach to this problem: her work documents how the practice of requiring workers to perform compulsory unpaid overtime at game studios, or "crunch time," produces female- and family-unfriendly workplaces. These institutional environments ensure that game production culture remains male, and this plays a role in perpetuating racist and sexist game content (Huntemann 2010). However, while women are far less likely to claim membership or standing within gamer culture or claim the identity of "gamer," this is not true for non-white players (Shaw 2011).

Dmitri Williams (Williams et al. 2009) and Craig Watkins (2009: 272) have gathered data that showed that Latino, African American, and Asian and Asian American males are better-represented in the gaming world than white males, and Rideout, Lauricella, and Wartella's study of media use among youth in the United States found that non-white youth spend significantly more time playing video games at home (Rideout et al. 2011). However, as Anna Everett and Craig Watkins have found in a qualitative study of video games, games continue to represent black and brown bodies predominantly as criminals, gangsters, and athletes (Everett and Watkins 2008).

Representations of black people as evil zombies, drug dealers, and criminals perpetuate some of the worst images found in other media, while the exclusion of images of blackness and black avatar characters from fantasy games such as *World of Warcraft* creates an artificially "blackless fantasy," as Higgin (2009) puts it. Racist representation within games can be found in every genre: simulation games like the immensely popular *Civilization* series depict non-Western culture as shot through with superstition, cruelty, and irrationality (Galloway 2006). *World of Warcraft's* Tauren, Troll, and Blood and Night Elf player classes reprise classic racist imagery of Native Americans, Caribbeans, and Orientals from previous media (Corneliussen and Rettberg 2008). It is probably not surprising that so-called casual video games, (defined by Jesper Juul as games which are "easy to learn, hard to excel at") generally lack this type of racial and gender stereotyping. The runaway success of games like the 2009 Game of the Year *Plants Versus Zombies, The Sims*, the classic *Tetris, Angry Birds, Bejeweled*, the sidescroller *Braid*, and the beautiful *Passage* may appeal to women partly for this reason.

Video Games as "Racial Discourse"

Sociologist Ashley Doane defines "racial discourse" as the "collective text and talk of society with respect to issues of race" (Doane 2006: 256). Video games are both textual objects and channels for real-time networked communication

that platform racial discourse. As such, they are prime examples of racial ideology. Doane defines "racial ideologies" as "generalized belief systems that explain social relationships and social practices in racialized language" (Doane 2006: 256). Video games, particularly networked games, create social practices and belief systems that license and permit uses of racialized and racist speech that are not believed to apply to or carry over into the "real world," but instead stay within the "magic circle" of the game.

Many gamers are resistant to critiquing racism, sexism, and homophobia within their favorite games, displaying a range of responses "from blatant racism to racial tolerance or inclusion," as Everett found in her analysis of online player discussions about race and racism in *Grand Theft Auto*. Black and brown bodies are represented and treated as expendable targets and violent stereotypes within the "urban/street" games that Everett and Watkins studied in their essay "The Power of Play: the Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games." They argue that these games produce "racialized pedagogical zones" that teach young players the proper place for raced and criminalized bodies (Everett and Watkins 2008).

As the Rideout, Lauricella, and Wartella study shows, youth of color spend more time playing games than white youth do, thus they are more vulnerable to the racial discourses within games and game-enabled communications. Doane identifies two dominant ways of understanding and talking about race in the United States. The first defines racism as the product of individual attitudes or behaviors motivated by personal hatred, stereotyping, and prejudice against people of color. The second defines racism as a set of *systemic* and institutional practices such as de facto segregation and persistent inequality and unequal access to resources such as education and safe housing (p. 267). Doane claims that the first definition is by far the most common. Individual examples of person-to-person prejudice and harassment are ubiquitous within networked video games, but it must also be remembered that systemic practices such as the exclusion of non-stereotyped characters of color and women from the game texts and storylines themselves are part of a harmful racial discourse as well.

Games scholars have spent less time or energy studying telepresent and copresent racial and sex harassment occurring in game culture, focusing instead on racist and sexist messages within the games themselves. While demographic work such as Williams et al. analyzes game content in order to trace the ways that video games as a whole exclude the experiences of people of color and women, most studies of racism in video games have focused on racial content and themes within selected game texts (Williams et al. 2009). Anna Everett (2009), David Leonard (2006), Jessica Langer (2008), Tanner Higgin (2009), David Golumbia (2009), and Alexander Galloway (2006) have written excellent essays on racism in video game imagery, narratives, and game mechanics.

In their 2009 study of profanity in video games Ivory, Williams, Martin, and Consalvo cautioned that networked play added a new and as yet understudied dimension to the study of profanity and merited additional studies. The study analyzed several popular video games representing a variety of age ratings and found that one out of five games contained one of the "seven dirty words" which are regulated in network television, as well as "words that evoke strong emotion and offense (e.g. bitch)." No mention is made of racist language, but the study cautioned that player-produced profanity may be a greater cause for concern in the age of networked gaming than pre-scripted profanity programmed into games: "The increasing popularity of multiplayer games and optional multiplayer game modes featuring voice interaction between players suggests that future studies should also examine the prevalence of profanity in online voice chat sessions" (Ivory et al. 2009).

While users have been playing with strangers on networked computers since the early days of the Internet, console gamers are newer to the world of online gaming and have been exposed to a different style of socialization. Despite this, there is plenty of remarkably racist, sexist, and even nationalist behavior to be found in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), many of which have been in operation well before consoles became popular, some of which has been documented by Douglas Thomas and Constance Steinkuhler. Thomas and Steinkuehler's groundbreaking essays on anti-Korean and anti-Chinese racism in MMORPGs such as *Diablo 2* and *Lineage 2* demonstrate the remarkable prevalence of discriminatory behavior in process-based video games, and the insights and methods employed in their work would enrich studies of television-based console gamers (Steinkuehler 2006; Thomas 2008).

The networking of the Microsoft Xbox, the Sony PlayStation, and the Wii saw the first really large group of users playing with networked strangers, a state of affairs that has become commonplace for gamers, and one that bears close watching by media scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and critical race and gender scholars. In-game communications are very challenging to study. However, it is crucial that scholars produce research on online interaction in console gaming, for since 2009 the most popular games for platforms like the Xbox 360 and the PS3 have been networked military FPS games, with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* and its expansions leading the way.

These games not only represent race and gender in one-dimensional ways, usually within a "negative fiction," they are also seedbeds for abusive racial discourse. Player–to-player voice communications via networked FPS games like the *Halo* series, the Microsoft Xbox's original tentpole AAA game title, are known for their profane and often abusive quality and are often described as "trash talk" by players and the industry alike. However, gamers themselves make a distinction between "trash talk" and discourse that crosses the line, such as use of the word "nigger."

A professional black female gamer known as "BurnYourBra," a nationally ranked *Mortal Kombat* player, explained in an interview on a gaming website that "At tournaments players talk [crap] to each other. That's just the way tournaments are. People get hyped. Players get salty when they lose, which is fine. But there is a difference between trash talking and calling other players disrespectful names. For me, I've been called a dyke, a butch, a slut, a bitch . . . I was even called a black bitch to my face along with being called a lesbian, a gorilla, and a monkey."[1]

BurnYourBra's interview produced a lengthy comment stream on the Eventhubs.com website; many of the contributors debated where the "line" between trash talking and racism lay. Some agreed that "trash talk" was inevitable, indeed an intrinsic part of the competitive culture of video game tournaments, but that it was "not the same" as racism. Others maintained that racism is best ignored and is of little consequence in a "post-racial" world, leaving it to the receiver to "shake it off." A key paradox of race, gender, and game studies rose to the top: while profanity and abuse are "trash talk," a form of discursive waste, lacking meaningful content that contributes to the game, many defended it as a distinctive and inevitable aspect of video game multiplayer culture. If it is indeed trash, the consensus opinion among gamers on this discussion board is that it is the responsibility of the receiver to "take it out."

Trash-talking is common in shared-world games in non-US contexts as well. As Holin Lin has shown in her 2011 study of Asian *World of Warcraft* players, clashes between Taiwanese and Chinese players sharing Taiwanese servers have often resulted in "open nationalist confrontations," with "indigenous" Taiwanese players dubbing Chinese "immigrants" to the gamespace "locusts" (Lin and Sun 2011).

As digital media theorists Galloway and Thacker (2007) write, "trash, in the most general sense, implies remnants of something used but later discarded . . . trash is the set of all things that has been cast out of previous sets." Once trash talk has been used to intimidate or bully another player, it is supposed to disappear, absolving its user of responsibility or even memory of the event.

If "trash" doesn't deserve notice or interpretation, as some players maintain, it is because it lacks meaning. Yet like the omnipresent trash icon on the computer desktop, a fixture of personal computer use, trash talk is part of the media ecology of digital culture. Just like videogame cheating, in-game economies, and online gender identities, all of which have been the subject of important book-length monographs in game studies Castronova 2005; Consalvo 2007; Nardi 2010), the discursive environment of sexism, racism, and homophobia deserves critical attention because it is central to games culture.

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[1] <http://www.eventhubs.com/news/2011/apr/15/dmgburnyourbra-discusses-difficulties-being-female-gamer/>, April 15, 2011 (accessed April 21, 2013).

BurnYourBra is not a particularly famous figure in video game culture, nor would she most likely define herself as a video game activist or a feminist. However, by sharing her experience of racism and sexism within the culture of gaming she is contributing towards a small but growing media campaign against video game racism and sexism, a form of speech that is often defended as just "trash talking." Likewise, user-generated blogs that are devoted to the task of confronting racism, sexism, and homophobia work to prevent us from forgetting or ignoring online "trash talk" by preserving and archiving it, using old and new media.

"Fat, Ugly, or Slutty?" Crowdsourced Campaigns Against Racism and Sexism in Gaming

As Dyer-Witheford and DePeuter (2009) write, "Games not only cultivate the imagination of alternative social possibilities; they also present practical tools that may be useful for its actualization." Gamers who love the culture but hate its racism and sexism create websites that aim to expose some of its worst excesses. Sites like *Fat, Ugly or Slutty Racialicious, The Border House: Breaking Down Borders in Gaming, Not in the Kitchen Anymore*, and *The Hathor Legacy* dedicate themselves to critiquing and publicizing game culture's problems with race, gender, and sexuality while asserting the pleasure, aesthetic value, and social importance of games. These media often flag themselves as "safe spaces" where these often-unpopular minority critiques can be expressed.

For example, *The Border House: Breaking Down Borders in Gaming* describes itself as "a blog for gamers. It's a blog for those who are feminist, queer, disabled, people of color, transgender, poor, gay, lesbian, and others who belong to marginalized groups, as well as allies." In its policies about posting, it asks users to include "trigger warnings" about content that "involves sexual assault or violence towards women and other marginalized groups, which may distress or cause readers to be triggered."

Though anti-sexist and anti-racist gaming blogs often encourage users to report abuse to game moderators before posting, the sites work to address what the game industry can't or won't by publicizing sexist interactions on popular game platforms and exposing abusive gamers to public ridicule. Most screenshots of abusive discourse in-game include the gamer-tag or in-game identity of the abuser, thus linking the behavior to a semi- (but not fully) anonymous individual. In this, their strategy resembles *Hollaback*!, a "movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology." *Hollaback!*

encourages women to take pictures of sexual harassers and catcallers on the street or in public places with their cellphones and to share them on their website, thus creating an archive for other users to access, as well as a form of accountability: "By collecting women and LGBTQ folks' stories and pictures in a safe and share-able way with our very own mobile phone applications, *Hollaback*! is creating a crowd-sourced initiative to end street harassment."

Hollaback! breaks the silence that has perpetuated sexual violence internationally, asserts that "any and all gender-based violence is unacceptable, and creates a world where we have an option—and, more importantly—a response." Similarly, the "Fatuglyorslutty site" relies exclusively on crowdsourcing to produce a rich sampling of sexist and racist "trash talk" sent from one gamer to another in the course of gameplay on game consoles, mobile devices, within PC games like *World of Warcraft,* and on every imaginable gaming device that permits strangers to contact other strangers.

The site's successful use of humor has helped it to garner positive attention in the gaming community, quite a feat given how unpopular and divisive the topic of sexism has been in recent years. *Kotaku*, a popular and widely read gaming blog owned by Gawker Media, wrote the following in 2011: "The casual racism, snarling sexism and random belligerence one encounters in online play, particularly in a first-person shooter over Xbox Live, is not at all a new phenomenon. It's sadly accepted as par for the course, in fact. But the three curators of *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*, have chosen to archive it, not so much for a high-minded ideal, but to hold a mirror up to idiots worthy of ridicule."

Indeed, *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* embodies Henry Jenkins's "critically optimistic" theories about the power of participatory media to increase tolerance and respect for diversity (Jenkins 2006).

As the *Kotaku* post above noted, racism, sexism, and homophobia are commonplace in networked console video gameplay. Though the Xbox 360, PS2/3, and Wii all require users to sign off on Terms of Service agreements regarding the use of profanity and hate speech in live gameplay, these regulations are also enforced through a system of victim-reported "tickets" that are acted upon well after the fact, if at all.[2] Users who engage in hate speech can be banned from the service, but are able to log back on after the ban period has passed. The ineffectiveness of industry regulation of hate speech has created a need for victims of gamer abuse to create their own participatory outlets to engage a wider public and increase awareness of this serious issue. The first page of *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* features a banner headline decorated with an image of a white woman wearing a dress, pearls, a conservative hairstyle, and a wink (see Figure 5.1). The header reads "So you play video games?

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[2] Computer-based online games have come up with some novel solutions to the problem of moderation. For example, *League of Legends*, a popular PC-based real-time strategy game, has a system that invites users to act as moderators of player disputes around inappropriate speech and behavior.

Figure 5.1 *"Fat, Ugly or Slutty"* front page

Are you…Fat, Ugly, or Slutty?" There are radio buttons that invite users to submit their own material, read archives, learn about the site's staff, and read "press" or media coverage that further explains the site's mission to expose in-game harassment. The side bar on the right categorizes posts under labels that express the most common expletives that users have reported hearing or seeing, including of course the old standbys, "Fat," "Ugly," or "Slutty," as well as additional ones such as "Crudely Creative," "Lewd Proposals," "Unprovoked Rage," "Sandwich Making 101," and "Pen15 club." Perhaps the most disturbing category, "Death Threats," is well-populated by posts threatening female play-ers with specific forms of violence.

Though online gamers almost never use their real names when creating avatars or identities for themselves, many of them have invested significant amounts of time, energy, and real capital in these gaming identities. "Fat, Ugly, or Slutty" publishes gamers' online identities along with the racist and sexist messages that they have sent to its readers, thereby helping these readers to avoid grouping or playing with these abusive players while simultaneously exposing them to semi-public ridicule and shame. For example, "xXSTONERXx1690," the author of a message posted to the site that reads "u will always b a spastic cunt cause ur black ya dirty slave" is unlikely to find that readers of *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* will accept his requests to play with him, and he or she may suffer other repercussions. *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*'s front page offers features radio buttons that allow readers to re-post its content to

Figure 5.2 Sexism in casual games: user-contributed capture from FatUglyorSlutty documenting harassment in *Words With Friends*

Figure 5.3 "Go back 2 halo pussy, u r a loser pussy faggot nigger spic jew"

Facebook and Twitter, and an RSS link for those who wish to add it to their newsfeeds.

The naked racism and sexist aggression displayed by xXSTONERXx1690 is far from rare on the site or in gaming culture, but neither is it the norm. While it has been argued elsewhere that fighting games like *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* and FPS games like the immensely popular *Modern Warfare: Call of Duty* and *Halo* series promote violent and abusive behavior or even real-world violence (Nielsen et al. 2008), the range of game platforms that *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* displays shows the reader that racism and sexism are global behaviors that can be found on *all* platforms within *all* genres of networked play. For example, after winning a game of *Words With Friends* on the iphone app, "Dabby Dot" sent a *Fat,Ugly or Slutty* contributor a message that reads "hi wanna suck my dick?" followed four minutes later by another reading "come ooon" (see Figure 5.2). *Words With Friends* is a casual game based on Scrabble with no gamic texts, images, or negative fictions that might refer to gender, race, or violence in any way.

Another post, filed under "Unprovoked Rage," simply lists a spate of racist and sexist words, demanding that the reader "go back 2 halo" (see Figure 5.3). Similarly, other posted messages threaten to rape, kill, or otherwise violate or harm their recipients. A particularly disturbing example sent by "MrWinnipeg" to another player in *Draw Something*, a very popular casual game based on *Pictionary*, depicts a female figure labeled "slut" performing fellatio on a smiling male figure labeled "me."

"Shall We Play a Game?" How Calling Someone a Racist Is Like Starting a Thermonuclear War

There is no doubt that the word "nigger" is "a racial insult with a special status and unique strength." In Randall Kennedy's definitive book on this topic, enti-tled *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, he asserts that "it has long been the most socially consequential racial insult" (Kennedy 2002: 25). He cites writer Farai Chideya who concurs, calling it "the All-American trump card, the nuclear bomb of racial epithets" (p. 22). This word is frequently found in *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*, and though the site collects samples of abuse that users found noteworthy enough to send in and is thus not a representative sample of what users commonly hear while playing, its casual use is cause for concern. For this word can/the worse than/being sent an racism itself. message calling them a "nigger bitch" or calling someone a "nigger" over a voice-enabled headset? Calling someone a racist has almost an equivalent charge. (Sadly, calling

someone a sexist lacks this ability to shock or anger.) Doane writes that "Today, charges of "racism"—or the use of the label "racist" –carry an extremely negative connotation and serve as perhaps the ultimate rhetorical weapon in public discourse on racial issues." The discursive act of calling someone a racist is viewed as almost equally transgressive as actually using racist language: it is deemed so devastating that presumably no thing or body can survive it.

Doane also writes that there is "significant disagreement about what racism is." This is no less true within the gaming community. Gamers greatly resent charges of racism despite its prevalence within the community. Many gamers often define racism and sexism very differently than non-gamers do, distinguishing between "trash talk" and "real racism." Many gamers who use sexist or racist language do not see themselves or their peers as racist. *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*'s goal is to collect overwhelming evidence that this speech is pervasive, harmful, and indeed both sexist and racist.

On 28 February 2012, *Kotaku* reported that a "firestorm of drama" had been set off in the already drama-laden world of video game reality television. Another popular gaming blog, *Penny Arcade*, followed suit, reporting in a story entitled "Sexual Harrassment as ethical imperative: how Capcom's Fighting Game reality show turned ugly" (PennyArcade.com, 28 February 2012) that during a recent Capcom sponsored event "contestants took part in sexual harassment and in fact argued that sexual harassment is an important part of the fighting game community that needs to continue." In a video podcast entitled Capcom's *Cross Assault*, aired on Twitch.tv, professional Tekken player Aris Bakhtanians repeatedly asked female player Miranda Pakodzi about her bra size, talked about her breasts, and otherwise made inappropriate and abusive remarks while watching her play. When she protested that he was making her uncomfortable and acting "creepy," he responded that she needed to "toughen up." Pakodzi withdrew from the tournament, Bakhtanians apologized on Twitter, but the story continued to draw attention.

This incident went viral, and Baktanians was later interviewed about it by Twitch.tv community manager, Jared Rae. When Rae asked him, "Can I get my *Street Fighter* without sexual harassment?" Bakhtanians replied bluntly, "You can't. You can't because they're one and the same thing. This is a community that's, you know, 15 or 20 years old, and the sexual harassment is part of a culture, and if you remove that from the fighting game community, it's not the fighting game community."

In this interview Baktanians retreats from his earlier position that women need to "toughen up," thus minimizing the effects of sexism, a common post-feminist claim that represents the orthodox opinion on harassment in the gaming world. Rather, this time, Bakhtanian took an entirely different tack, asserting that video game sexism may be harmful, but that it is an intrinsic part of a long-standing culture and needs to be preserved and protected as such. His argument is that the "fighting game community" has the right to engage in

sexual harassment because it is "part of the culture," regardless of the harm suffered by women. There are some obvious weaknesses in this argument—and in the wake of the controversy hundreds of gamers stepped forward to disavow their membership in this "culture," or claimed that Bakhtanians was misrepresenting it. However, few challenged the notion that gaming constitutes its own sphere of convention and condoned behaviors: that it was, in short, a "culture" with different norms, forms of speech, and customs than culture at large.

Conclusion

There is no intrinsic reason that the culture of gaming must retain its customary sexist and racist discourse, no matter how "traditional" it may be. Traditions change. Gaming culture has tremendous potential for acts of creativity, kindness, collaboration, and as Jane McGonigal (2011) writes in *Reality is Broken*, an eloquent explanation of the productive value of play in an overworked world, the "gamification" of social life can result in novel solutions to social and scientific problems. In short, she asserts that games are fundamentally *good* for us.

Indeed, digital networked games are where both the worst *and* the best behavior on the Internet are to be found. How can we honor players' legitimate claims to belonging to a distinctive and fascinating "gamer" culture while working to address its toxicity to women and minorities? There is much scholarly research on the challenges of honoring and preserving indigenous cultural traditions with fairness to marginalized populations. This work often weighs the value of "cultural authenticity" against basic human rights (McPherson 2000).

As gamer culture continues to struggle with racial and sexual difference, those of us who love to play but who do not fit the traditional gamer identity envision an expanded community based on skill, pleasure, engagement, and collaboration.

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