Pass the Salt:

An Observational Analysis of Twitch Streamers

By

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Rodrik Giles. You don't know it yet, but your existence was the ultimate driving force for me to complete this thesis. I did it for you, my son. I love you.

Abstract

        Previous research has shown violent video games can lead to temporarily heighted

aggressive states and desensitization to violence in gamers. Within video game communities,

there exist elevated levels of overt toxic behaviors and standards, including sexism, racism, and

heterosexism. Most often these behaviors and standards are normalized by the dominant group

within the gaming community – white men. In addition to violent video games, heightened

masculinity also correlates with increases in aggression. Those considered outsiders within the

video game community – women, people of color, and homosexuals – often experience

aggression from the dominant group. Previous studies have focused on the correlation between

aggression and playing violent video games, typically through laboratory experiments to measure

aggression. Little research has been conducted on the new media Twitch.tv, however. This study

addresses the gap in literature regarding streaming broadcasts of video game play. Attention is

paid to sexist, racist, and homophobic comments made by male Twitch streamers, while playing

violent video games.

Key Words: Twitch; online gaming; aggression; sexism; racism; homophobia

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Chapter I INTRODUCTION

In 2015, U.S. consumers spent $16.5 billion on video games (ESA 2015) and $23.5 billion when including hardware and accessories. Additionally, the ESA found that 63% of American households have at least one person who plays video games at least three hours a week, 59% of gamers are men, and the average player is 35 years old (ESA 2016). These statistics illustrate that playing video games is a popular hobby for millions of Americans spanning a multitude of demographics. With such widespread usage, video game culture and communities have been the subject of countless studies looking to analyze the effects prolonged exposure to video games can have on players. Of particular interest is the role violent video games play in the development of aggressive behaviors within the video game community.

According to the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, nine of the top twenty best-selling video games in 2015 involved intense violence and blood and gore; all but two games from the top twenty best-selling list involved some form of violence (ESRB 2017). With the video game community and video game culture being comprised of people from different races, genders, and sexualities, aggressive gamers will often result to the use of sexist, racist, or heterosexist comments. Where there are minorities within a culture or community – racial or gender, for example – there also exists a majority, or dominant group (Marger 2008). In the case of the video game community, the dominant group is the straight, white male (Gray 2012). In response to research on the dominant group, researchers have continued analyses of the video game community through analysis on the roles gender (Chess and Shaw 2015; Cote 2017; Fox and Tang 2014; Leonard 2006), race (Griffiths 1998; Leonard 2006; Nakamura 2009), and heterosexism (Greer 2013; Krobova, Moravec, and Svelch 2015) play within a community largely dominated by white, heterosexual men.

Though two in five gamers are women (ESA 2016), women are largely considered to be outsiders within the video game community (Fox and Tang 2014). Within society, genders are expected to subscribe to culturally and socially acceptable norms (Marger 2008) and the same is true within the video game community (Fox and Tang 2014). Females, being the minority gender within the video game community, must contend with hyper-masculinity of the dominant male group. Overt sexist comments are often used as a weapon, to be employed against any females who fall outside of the expected norms defined by the dominant group (Fox and Tang 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2012). Beyond sexist comments, mentions of rape are often used out of the literal context within the video game community.

Within the video game community, the term 'rape' is often used to indicate an action or event within the video game where a player is particularly dominant and successful (Chess and Shaw 2015; Salter and Blodgett 2012). However, even within a non-literal context, the dominant group has shown that rape goes beyond 'just joking' – threats of rape are made with startling normalcy within the video game community. An example often cited by researchers is that of the treatment of Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian by the group Gamergate (Chess and Shaw 2015; Massanari 2017; Perreault and Vos 2016). The fallout from the Gamergate case has given rise to a focus on the study of minority gamers within the video game community – women, people of color, and homosexuals, specifically – and how minority gamers are treated within the video game community.

While the topic of sexism and women within the video game community has led to many controversies – Gamergate, rape culture, etc. – social scientists have continued to expand their scope toward the treatment of racial minorities within the video game community (Gray 2012; Griffiths 1998; Leonard 2006; Nakamura 2009). Like sexism, racism is found to be prominent

within the video game community, in part due to the representation of racial minorities and white men in video games (Griffiths, 1998; Leonard, 2006). Representations of both the dominant, white male group and minority groups – including racial, women, and homosexuals – illustrate how gamers are socialized within the video game community to expect certain characteristics from different characters; white males are over-represented in video games, often displaying hyper-masculinity, while minority characters are often depicted in stereotypical ways (Daniels 2013; Gray 2012; Leonard 2006). Stereotypical representations of minority characters is a continuing issue within the video game community (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Leonard 2006), though video game developers are attempting to fix the flaws of their predecessors.

Like other minorities within the video game community, homosexuals are historically depicted in stereotypical ways within video games, and are often berated by the dominant group (Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015). Homosexual gamers are a minority within the video game community, but much like in real world communities, have carved out a niche where gay gamers – "gaymers"– can push for fair representation and treatment within the video game community (Shaw 2006). Of the modern representation of gay characters in video games, Bioware has blazed the trail for gaymers to enjoy equality of representation in the video game community (Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015). Bioware is known for developing role playing games (RPGs), with vast worlds populated by nuanced characters, including homosexual ones; however, Bioware has had its fair share of controversy surrounding dealings with the gay community (Condis 2014).

Within the video game community, the normalization of rape and sexism (Chess and Shaw 2015; Massanari 2017; Perreault and Vos 2016; Salter and Blodgett 2012), racism (Daniels 2013; Gray 2012; Leonard 2006), and homophobic slurs (Condis 2014; Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015; Shaw 2012) has been historically accepted, largely in part to the presence of the dominant group (Gray 2012). Exacerbating heterosexism, racism, and sexism in the online video game community is the prevalence of violent video games and the effects playing violent video games can have on those who play them (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014).

Violent video games are classified as such when the content within the game involves attacking another character, animal, or being (ESRB 2017). There are four classifications of violence the ESRB uses to determine which rating to give a video game, including cartoon, fantasy, violence, and intense violence (ESRB 2017). Research on the effects playing violent video games can have on game players is extensive, often looking at the short term increases of aggression after having finished playing violent games (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Adachi and Willoughby 2011b; Engelhardt et al. 2011); findings of such studies often do acknowledge that there is a correlation between violent video games and increases in aggression. Much of the research on the effects violent video games have on aggression has been conducted through laboratory observations (Adachi and Willoughby 2011b; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Hassan et al. 2013), surveys (Anderson and Dill 2000), and content analyses (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014; Griffiths 1999; Hartmann, Krakowiak, and Tsay-Vogel 2014), none of which have looked at online video game streaming communities. Further, current research involving Twitch and other online video game streaming sites – including YouTube Gaming and Beam – is limited to analysis of the streaming systems themselves (Pires and Simon

2015) and analysis of viewing patterns within the community (Nascimento et al. 2014). Existing research on aggression within online video game streaming communities has not focused on the links between violent video games and aggression. Thus, a gap in literature exists on how violent video games and aggression correlate when gamers are broadcasting themselves playing video games on sites such as Twitch. Of the video game streaming sites, Twitch was selected for use in this study due to it being the largest community (Twitch 2015).

Twitch is a live streaming video game community where gamers can watch others play video games or broadcast themselves playing video games (Twitch Interactive Inc., 2016). To address the gap in the literature regarding live streaming video game sites, this study examined Twitch broadcasts (i.e., the stream) with specific attention paid to Twitch broadcasters' (i.e., the streamer) aggressive or violent tendencies. Through an observational content analysis, this study explored the prevalence of racist, sexist, and homophobic aggressive slurs, as well as non-specific verbal aggression, referred to as generally aggressive comments in this study, within the context of the video game community. Male gamers were observed playing video games classified by the ESRB to contain violence, which studies have shown to be the most likely to increase aggression (Adachi and Willoughby 2011b; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2013; Hasan et al. 2012). The sample for this study was male Twitch streamers who had less than 10 viewers at the time of observation.

Focus will now switch to a review of existing literature about violent video games and the video game community. First, literature will illustrate the existing relationship between playing violent video games and increases in aggression. Attention will then shift to the video game community, including analysis of representation of minorities in video games and

treatment of minority gamers. Finally, previous studies on the media site Twitch will be analyzed to provide context for the current study.

Chapter II LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have found correlation exists between playing violent video games and increases in aggression. Aggression can take the form of verbal or physical aggression, as long as the intent is to cause harm to others (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a). Keeping with Adachi and Willoughby's (2011a) definition of aggression, verbal aggression in the video game community is often directed at other players, in an attempt to cause emotional harm. Verbal aggression can take the form of sexist, racist, or homophobic slurs – such as the use of 'bitch', 'nigger' or 'faggot'. Further, verbal aggression can be non-specific, through what this study refers to as generally aggressive comments, such as 'fuck you'. This literature review will provide a comprehensive background on studies which have looked at the correlation between playing violent video games and aggression. Additionally, this review of existing literature will provide background on studies which have focused on the representation of minorities within the video game community – including women, racial minorities, and homosexuals – as well as how minority gamers are often treated with aggression by white straight men within the community.

With the steady growth of the video game community, increased study of the social workings within such an online space can provide context and further understanding for what is a relatively new phenomenon. Sociological research often falls within one of three major theoretical frameworks – functionalist, interactionalist, and conflict. The current study takes a conflict approach in analyzing the video game community, by looking at how the dominant group – white males – interacts with minority groups within the community. Specifically, this study focuses on the ways in which the dominant group maintain their form of dominance within the community. There is myriad of existing research on the effects of violent video games, as well as on the experiences of minority gamers. However, there is currently a gap in the literature

regarding the emergent media, Twitch, and how gamers represent themselves to an audience. How the dominant white male group interacts with other gamers, while playing violent video games, is the focus of this study.

The video game community is comprised of billions of gamers (Todd 2015) from across the world, including various genders, races, and sexualities. Using in-game communication, many gamers are often the victims of sexist, racist, or heterosexist comments, regardless of gender, racial, or sexual identity. This study will explores the aggressive tendencies of gamers who play violent video games, through the utilization of the new media platform, Twitch. Existing scholarly research on the concepts of aggression and violence, gender, race, and sexuality set a framework from which the current study will use as a foundation.

Violence in Video Games

With the popularity of violent video games at a peak, it is imperative to look toward how violence in video games can indicate aggressive behaviors in game players. A substantial proportion of video games include some form of violent content. Violent content within video games is defined by scenes involving aggressive conflict (ESRB 2016). For the purpose of this study, violence within video games includes shooting, stabbing, killing, maiming, or otherwise attempting to do harm to other characters, either player controlled (PCs) or non-playable characters (NPCs). Aggression is defined as "behavior that is intended to harm another" (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a); for the purpose of this study, the definition as conceptually defined will be used in the context of verbal aggression. Verbal aggression constitutes racist, sexist, or homophobic slurs, as well as generally aggressive comments.

Violent video games and aggression

Of the top selling games of 2015[1], eighteen of the top twenty were rated by the ESRB as containing some form of violence; in other words – violence sells (ESA 2016). The only games to top the list which did not contain violence were sports games – *Madden 16* and *FIFA 16* (ESA 2016). Every other game in the top 20 for the year tasked players with attacking other characters in-game. With the popularity of violent video games by millions of gamers, researchers have grown increasingly interested in the effects playing violent video games can have on gamers (Adachi and Willoughby 2011b; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014).

In one such study, participants were asked to play either violent or non-violent video games; the violent video games used in the study all tasked the player with shooting and killing virtual enemies (Engelhardt et al. 2011). After playing the video games, participants in the study were shown violent imagery and their responses to the images were measured to determine desensitization to violence after having been exposed to violent video games (Engelhardt et al., 2011). Further, participants were tasked with participating in a competitive reaction time task, which would provide a second form in which to measure aggression after playing violent video games (Engelhardt et al. 2011). The competitive reaction time task asks that a participant react to a visual cue faster than his unseen competitor; the slower of the two receives a blast of noise to the ears (Engelhardt et al. 2011). The results of the aggression test showed that participants with exposure to violent games were more likely than those exposed to nonviolent games to exhibit aggression, by choosing longer and louder blasts to expose others to (Engelhardt et al. 2011).

Hasan, Bègue, and Bushman, in their study on long term exposure to video game violence, utilized the competitive reaction time task to measure aggression between a group of participants tasked with playing violent video games and another group tasked with playing nonviolent video games; violent video games used for the study all involved killing virtual enemies (2012).

Consistent with previous studies looking at the correlation between violent video games and aggression, the Hasan et al. study found that participants who played violent video games were more likely to exhibit more aggression and hostile expectations than participants who did not play violent video games (Hasan et al., 2012). While the competitive reaction time task has often been utilized to measure aggression in research studies involving aggression, other laboratory experiments have been utilized to measure aggression.

In their study on aggression and violent video games, Adachi and Willoughby had participants play one of either a violent and nonviolent game; the violent game in this study involved killing virtual enemies (2011b). To measure aggression, participants were tasked with making a hot sauce for a random participant within the study. The hot sauce could be made as hot as the participant wished, though all participants were told that the hot sauce would be given to someone who had low tolerance to spicy foods (Adachi and Willoughby 2011b). The results of the study showed that participants from both the violent video game and non-violent video game groups were found to make spicier sauces; as a measure of aggression, the hot sauce test showed that aggression increased in both groups based on making sauces that were considered quite spicy (Adachi and Willoughby 2011b).

Outside of the laboratory setting, Griffiths compiled numerous studies in his literature review on the correlation between violent video games and aggression (1999). Griffiths

concluded that studies examining the correlation between violent video games and aggression did find that participants in such studies do exhibit increased aggression after playing or watching violent video games; most studies found that there was a correlation between playing violent video games and increases in aggression (1999). In another review on the effects of violent video games and aggression, Greitemeyer and Mügge concluded that violent video games do affect social behaviors, including aggression (2014). However, in their findings, Greitemeyer and Mügge note that playing violent video games should not be considered the largest contributor to aggression, but an existing correlation between violent video games and aggression should be of concern, due in large part to the social ramifications such a correlation could be responsible for (2014).

Through the utilization of various measurement tools, researchers have found that exposure to violent video games does seem to lead to an increase in aggression in those who play violent video games. In addition to the effect exposure to violent video games can have on gamers, researchers have taken to analyzing the video game community and the groups within it (Chess and Shaw 2015; Cote 2017; Fox and Tang 2014; Greer 2013; Griffiths 1998; Leonard 2006; Nakamura 2009). In analyzing the video game community, researchers have found that minority groups are often treated with aggression – including verbal and through in-game text – by the dominant, straight, white male group (Chess and Shaw 2015; Cote 2017; Daniels and Lalone 2012; Fox and Tang 2013; Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Nakamura 2009; Salter and Blodgett 2012).

The Video Game Community

The video game community consists of over a billion gamers from across the world (Todd 2015), who congregate into various pockets of smaller communities; there are hundreds, if not thousands, of video games, all of which have some form of community. It is acceptable and common for a gamer to belong to many communities within the larger online video game community. Like most communities, the video game community is diverse – people of various genders, races, and sexualities make up the entire community, though white males are considered the dominant group (Condis 2014; Gray 2012; Todd 2015).

In the case of the video game community, women, people of color, and homosexuals are considered outsiders (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Leonard 2006; Salter and Blodgett 2012). As the popularity of video games has increased, the treatment of minority gamers within the video game community has become a major area of study in furthering the understanding of the community. Of particular interest within the scope of this study is how the dominant group – men, specifically – perpetuates racism, sexism and homophobia while playing violent video games.

Female gamers

The video game community has historically favored and been dominated by men (Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Leonard 2006; Salter and Blodgett 2012). While the most recent data from the ESA show women comprise 41% of United States gamers (2016), the figure is the lowest it has been since 2010, when an even 40% of United States gamers were women (ESA). Although women make up a sizable minority within the video game community, women are

often victims of aggression in the forms of harassment and threats (Chess and Shaw 2015; Fox and Tang 2014; Massanari 2017; Perreault and Vos 2016; Todd 2015).

Researchers have highlighted specific factors which contribute to the harassment of minority gamers – with studies on the treatment of women being of predominant focus (Chess and Shaw 2015; Fox and Tang 2014; Massanari 2017; Perreault and Vos 2016; Todd 2015). The primary factor at play is that video games have a history of being a male dominated domain, which has led to a culture where masculinity is expected and desired (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015). Any deviancy from the expected norms regarding female gamers are often met with verbal aggression (Cote 2017; Fox and Tang 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015). Beyond sexist comments, the term rape is used often within the video game community, both in literal and non-literal contexts.

The term "rape" in the video game community is often used to indicate an action or event within a video game where a player is dominant or successful (Chess and Shaw 2015; Salter and Blodgett 2012). While the non-literal usage of the term rape is used in video games, recent usage of the word rape has come to the limelight. In 2014, the events of Gamergate led to an outpouring of misogynistic and sexist attacks on prominent female members of the video game community (Todd 2015). Gamergate spawned from a blog post written by Eron Gjoni, in which Gjoni accused his ex-girlfriend Zoe Quinn of performing sexual favors with gaming journalists in return for receiving good reviews for her game, *Depression Quest* (Chess and Shaw 2015; Perreault and Vos 2016; Todd 2015). What started out as an attack of character from a jealous ex-boyfriend evolved into the movement known as Gamergate, whose members have been heavily criticized for the use of death and rape threats directed at women, though primarily at

Quinn and video game critic Anita Sarkeesian (Chess and Shaw 2015; Todd 2015). While Gjoni himself has claimed the harassment of women was not his aim when publishing his blog post (Pearl 2014), his indifference to the abuses committed by Gamergate illustrates an example of the misogyny and male-dominant ideology prevalent within the video game community. The cultural acceptance of rape within the video game community illustrates further the dominant role men play within the community, as masculinity and dominance are expected traits of a gamer (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015).

Masculinity and male gamers

Research on the subjects of video games and gender studies often cite the risks inherent in male-dominant cultures which emphasize masculine qualities (Cote 2017; Fox and Tang 2014). Masculine qualities are exhibited through "being competitive and strong, controlling one's emotions, and maintaining self-reliance" (Fox and Tang 2014:315); conformance to masculine qualities has been found to correlate with increases in sexual harassment and negative attitudes regarding gender equality (Fox and Tang 2014).

Studies on the effects of playing violent video games and heightened aggression have shown that no significant difference between male and female gamers is present; that is, aggression is found to increase for both genders (Engelhardt et al. 2011; Ferguson, Rueda, Cruz, Ferguson, Fritz, and Smith 2009; Hassan et al. 2013). Though no significant difference has been associated with increased aggression along gender lines, men are typically found to be more aggressive than women on average (Engelhardt et al. 2011; Ferguson et al. 2009). Masculinity, heightened innate aggression, and playing violent video games all affect aggression in male

gamers, who, owing to ascribed dominant status within the video game community, sets a standard for normative masculinity (Fox and Tang 2014). When gamers deviate from the expected norms of the dominant group, minority gamers experience more verbal aggression, in the form of harassment, from white male gamers (Chess and Shaw 2015; Cote 2017; Daniels and Lalone 2012; Fox and Tang 2013; Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Nakamura 2009; Salter and Blodgett 2012).

Gaymers

Another minority group within the video game community that is often stereotyped as non-conforming to the masculine expectation are gay gamers, or 'gaymers' (Shaw 2012). Within the video game community, homosexual slurs are often used to denote weakness when used against other gamers (Krobova et al. 2015). Exacerbating the issues associated with homosexual representation in video games is that gaymers are a minority population (Shaw 2009) and, perhaps because of minority status, game developers often depict gay characters in stereotypical ways (Shaw 2009).

An example of stereotypical representation of gay characters in video games is that of Zevran the male elf, from the game *Dragon Age: Origins* (Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015). Zevran is a non-playable character who, upon first meeting the player, is attempting an assassination on the player character. When the player character manages to fend off the assassination attempt, dialog is opened between the player character and Zevran. In addition to seeking admittance into the player character's adventuring group, Zevran attempts to flirt with the player character – regardless if the player character is male or female. This sequence on its own provides the player controlled character opportunity to express sexual preference in-game; a

prospect not often considered in video games (Greer 2013). While interactions with Zevran produce a fully developed non-playable character with specific sexual interests, Bioware, the developer of *Dragon Age: Origins* did receive criticism for the representation of homosexuals (Greer 2013; Krobova et al. 2015). The primary criticism came from gaymers who objected to Zevran's "stereotypically promiscuous image of bisexuality or the framing of homosexual desire as a fluid bisexuality in order to make homosexuality more palatable to a mainstream audience" (Greer 2013:14). Findings from Krobova et al.'s study on gaymers experiences in a culture largely dominant by heterosexual gamers showed similar complaints to that of the Greer study, with criticisms of Zevran stemming from the portrayal of the character (2015). According to interviewees from the study, Zevran represents negative stereotypes of homosexuals because "elves are often portrayed as feminine and gentle characters, and this is why the developers picked an elf as a token homosexual" (Krobova et al 2015:7).

In addition to stereotypical representation of homosexual characters in video games, homophobic slurs and actions are common in video games. In 2006, a survey conducted by Jason Rockwood found that over 80% of the more than ten-thousand respondents used homophobic slurs in a derogatory manner within the video game community (Sliwinski 2007). Further, homophobic tendencies within the video game community may be compounded by game developers attempting to, ironically, stop the use of homosexual slurs.

In 2009, it was announced that an online forum for the video game *Star Wars: The Old Republic* would be implementing an automatic censor that tagged inappropriate words (Condis 2014). Due to the frequent, derogatory use of "gay" and "queer" within the video game community, Bioware chose to include those and similar words in their content filter; the use of any filtered words would be censored upon posting to the forum (Condis 2014). The decision to

censor the words associated with the gaymer community caused an outcry from gaymers themselves, with one suggesting that in trying to provide solutions to homophobia, Bioware's decision would "further marginalize the gay and lesbian community, making it difficult for gay and lesbian players to find each other online if they so desire by marking the labels they have chosen to describe themselves as 'taboo' and 'dirty'" (Condis 2014:5). The implication of such a claim is that when a word or term has a socially understood duality – gay gamers referring to themselves as 'gaymers' in contrast to a significant percentage of gamers using 'gay' as a derogatory term – the removal of such labels only serve to negatively affect one group. Those who would use the derogatory terms are barred from using homophobic slurs at the expense of those who identify as gay, lesbian, etc.

As existing research illustrates, gaymers must contend with their own unique problems within the context of the video game community. Like female gamers, gaymers are marginalized and stereotyped within a largely heterosexual, male dominant culture, which values masculinity – a trait not typically associated with women and homosexuals.

Racial minority gamers

Racial representation in video games is consistent with findings on the composition of the video game community; player controlled characters are often white males (Leonard 2006). Like women and gay characters, racial minority characters are frequently portrayed in stereotypical ways – for example, black characters are depicted as members of gangs or as athletes (Daniels and Lalone 2013; Leonard 2006). Black characters also conform to negative tropes, such as inner city blacks favoring fast food or being unable to escape a life of crime and violence, while white characters can (Daniels and Lalone 2013). In his study on racial representation in video games,

Leonard provides data which paint a poignant picture of how minority characters are represented in video games: of 53 games, the hero was white in forty-six, Asian/Pacific Islander in less than 8%, black in 4%, and Latino in 2% (2006:84). Leonard further states the stereotypical presentation of Asians and martial artists, Arabs as terrorists, and Latinos as criminals (2006:85). The stereotypical representation of racial minority characters in video games leads to the conditioning of younger gamers, who may come to view such stereotypes as normal behaviors for minority characters (Griffiths 1999). The implication of such conditioning is that the dominant group is more likely to harbor stereotypical thoughts and expectations about racial minority gamers, which can lead to racist thoughts and actions.

Being a racial minority in the video game community can lead to racial interactions with others; specifically, interactions where racist comments are directed at racial minority gamers. Gray (2012) illustrates such interactions in his study on the experiences of black gamers over Xbox Live[2], in this way:

> …racialized harassment is always linked to the body, an aspect out of gamers' control. Many gamers who used racist language recited offensive black and/or immigrant jokes, challenged the penis size of black men, challenged citizenship of Latino sounding gamers, explained disgust for big lips, criticized the use of Ebonics, and even disrespected black mothers. The purpose of this provoking seemed to be a means to situate blackness as inferior which confirms the domination of whiteness over the other within the space. (P. 269)

While voice-to-voice interaction provides opportunity for racist comments to materialize, racism can be directed in community driven initiatives as well. Take for example the treatment

gold farmers experience in the game *World of Warcraft (WoW)*. Gold farmers are workers who spend their time in-game mining virtual currency – gold – in the hopes of selling the gold for real world money (Nakamura 2009). Gold farming is looked down upon by the *WoW* community primarily because it allows gamers to bypass time constraints to afford better equipment for in-game characters; the implication being that those who buy their gold with real money are cheating a system in which 'legitimate' gamers had to actually put in time and effort to acquire their gear (Nakamura 2009). There is a negative stereotype associated with gold farmers that suggests all gold farmers are Chinese workers, selling in-game currency in order to acquire real world currency that is worth much more than the Chinese Yuan; gold farming is so widespread that gamers have taken to calling specific areas of the in-game world China Town. (Nakamura 2009). Gamers in the *WoW* community responded to gold farmers in particularly hostile ways, often calling for their death or extermination from the game (Nakamura 2009).

The consequence of anonymous communication over the Internet is that overt racism is a relatively common occurrence; the systemic, overt racism which is now considered taboo in real life interactions has instead shifted to the virtual realm (Gray 2012). Given the historical context of racism in the United States, the results of these studies are sadly not surprising. It is likely through anonymous interaction that the perpetuation of racist, sexist, and homophobic slurs is so common within the video game community. With the advent of Twitch, communications between gamers can be visualized and not just heard.

Twitch.tv

Twitch.tv is a new form of media in which gamers can broadcast themselves playing video games; other gamers can choose to watch anyone who chooses to broadcast their gameplay. While hundreds of millions of viewers frequent Twitch, most of those viewers are

watching the same streamers; according to Max Sjöblom and Juho Hamari, "10% of individual streamers account for 95% of all viewers" on Twitch (2016:2). The meteoric rise in popularity can be partially attributed to the equally stunning ascension of e-sports[3] (Sjöblom and Hamari 2016). With the prevalence of aggression within the video game community in mind, Twitch streamers have had to contend with aggression from their viewers.

Perhaps the most well-known case of aggressive behavior taking place on streaming websites like Twitch.tv is that of "swatting." Jaffe defines swatting as a situation "where the victim is engaged in gaming on the Internet, the swatter calls 911 and reports that there has either been a crime or some other type of emergency, and the 911 dispatcher then summons the SWAT team or the police" (2016:456). The perpetrator of such as crime is often a viewer of the stream who manages to gain identifying information about the streamer – including an address. Such instances leave the victim traumatized and the perpetrator is often never caught or punished (Jaffe 2016). If a perpetrator were caught, a legal ruling, *Elonis v. United States,* has made prosecution of perpetrators even harder, due to the ruling indicating that intent of the perpetrator is the focus in such cases, not the reasonable interpretation of the police, dispatcher, etc. (Jaffe 2016).

As illustrated in this literature review, violence and aggression are frequent themes within the video game community, with sexism, racism, and homophobia being the main demonstration of such behaviors. With such prevailing themes within the gaming community, it would stand to reason that such behaviors are present in new forms of video game media as well. Though there is an extensive collection of research regarding the use of aggressive methods – including harassment and threats – against minorities within the video game community, this study

addresses a gap in literature by taking a qualitative approach in the observation of aggression

within the Twitch community.

Chapter III METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative, observational content analysis study which utilizes the public video game streaming platform Twitch.tv, to determine the prevalence of verbal aggression in an emergent media, in a community which historically tends to be aggressive. This study aims to provide further research into an emergent form of media that has proven to be incredibly popular among the video game community. Due to Twitch being a new form of media, research regarding Twitch is extremely limited. Further, the study of violence and aggression within the context of the Twitch community is nearly non-existent.

Participants

Participants involved in this study are 12 male Twitch streamers, with varying numbers of viewers; at the time of observation, no participant had more than 10 viewers. Because Twitch is a public domain, all Twitch streamers are voluntarily putting their content online, which can be viewed by anyone with an Internet connection. Twitch has an option that allows a streamer to be visible while conducting live streams of their gameplay. For the purpose of this study, only broadcasters who were visible on their live streams were considered in order to observe behavior for data collection. It should be noted that only those who broadcast on Twitch have the option to be physically visible – viewers are not. Because Twitch is accessible to the public, specifically a public forum for video game play, the individuals who stream are placing themselves in a public environment with the knowledge that anonymous individuals will be watching them play. Therefore, informed consent was not needed to include participants in this study. Furthermore, the only identifying information that was collected from Twitch streamers was their gender and username; usernames are substituted with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Participants were located through nonrandom sampling procedures, specifically purposive sampling so as to include participants who play one of the games used for this study. Participants were all English-speaking males.

No vulnerable populations were targeted in this study. Twitch streamers are aware that their streams are visible on a public domain, which allows anonymous users to view their streams, as well as communicate with the broadcasters and other anonymous users in the community. Additionally, anyone under the age of 18 was excluded from this study. According to the Twitch Terms of Service, age verification is required of Twitch users. Only streamers playing *CS: GO*, *Overwatch*, *League of Legends*, and *Super Smash Bros. 4* were considered as participants for this study. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, Bakersfield.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through observational content analysis of 12 Twitch streamers playing video games with various degrees of violence. Field notes were taken to keep track of data and all notes are kept in a private personal computer that only the researcher as access to. This approach to data collection allows Twitch streamers to go about their typical routines, without intervention from the researcher; such an approach provides the most natural results for such a study. To provide ample time for proper analysis and interpretation of findings, data was collected over the course of two weeks. Gamers were observed playing *CS: GO*, *Overwatch*, *League of Legends*, and *Super Smash Bros. 4*; all games used were selected based on their inclusion of violent content. *CS: GO* and *Overwatch* are both First Person Shooters (FPS), where a gamer controls a first-person perspective of a gun. The goals of both games are similar –

defend or attack objectives on the in-game map, while attempting to kill members of the opposing team. Gamers are awarded points for kills, playing the objective, and helping their teammates.

League of Legends (LoL) is a Massively Online Battle Arena (MOBA), where teams of five players each pick different heroes to battle on an in-game map. The purpose of the game is to destroy the other team's base – the first team to successfully do so wins the match. Players level up their chosen hero by killing enemy minions – NPCs which reward experience and gold – destroying enemy towers which defend their side of the in-game map, and killing players from the other team. *Super Smash Bros. 4* is a fighting game, whose roster includes many popular Nintendo characters, such as Mario, Yoshi, and Donkey Kong. Players fight each other and the player with the most kills at the end of the match is the winner. Unlike in the aforementioned games, *Super Smash Bros.4* does not depict the actual deaths of characters. Instead, characters 'die' in cartoonish ways, such as by disappearing as a blink in the sky or bursting into a puff of smoke when reaching the boarders of the arena.

This study was an observational content analysis, focusing on 12 male Twitch streamers divided into four groups. Streamers were observed over the course of two separate periods. First, groups of three streamers were observed playing four different games of varying violent content and realism over the course of forty-five minutes each, for a total of 2 hours and 15 minutes for each group – 9 hours of observation total. Over the course of the second observation period, the groups, streamers, and the game played all remained the same. For the second observation period, streamers were observed for thirty minutes each, for a total of 1 hour and 30 minutes for each group – 6 hours total. Over the course of the study, streamers were observed for a total of 15 hours. Attention was paid to sexist, racist, homophobic, and generally aggressive comments.

Examples of sexist comments include players calling others 'bitch' and 'ho', referencing rape, and other sexually implied slurs and comments. Racist comments include utterances such as 'nigger' and other racially implied slurs. Homophobic comments include 'faggot', 'gay', and other homophobic slurs. For the purpose of this study, sexist, racist, and homophobic comments are referred to as classified forms of verbal aggression. Generally aggressive comments encompass other verbal or vocal cues of aggression that do not fit into one of either, sexist, racist, or homophobic classifications; examples include comments about murder or killing and expletives and phrases including 'fuck, 'oh, my god,' etc.

To further organize data, verbal aggression is divided into different forms of usage. Direct insults are aggressive vocalizations used by observed streamers which are meant to be taken as insults by the victim of the vocal aggression. For example, streamers who referred to another player as a 'bitch' did so with the intent of insulting others. Exclamations are aggressive vocalizations without direction toward another player. Exclamations can take the form of classified or general vocal aggression; for example, a streamer yelling 'bitch' or 'fuck', respectively. Descriptors are aggressive vocalizations which are used by streamers to describe a situation. During the study, descriptive vocal aggression was only used with classified forms of vocal aggression; for example, 'that's gay' and 'hurts like a bitch' are used to describe a situation that a streamer experienced in-game. Two other forms of usage fell into homophobic and sexist forms of vocal aggression – homophobic phrases and rape phrases, respectively. Phrases are comments made by observed streamers that are three words or more.

All data collected was kept in an electronic journal, on the researcher's password locked personal computer, which only the researcher has access to. Data was then analyzed and

tabulated to provide a visual representation of which kinds of verbal aggression occur most often within the Twitch community.

Chapter IV RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to observe Twitch streamers use of vocal aggression. Specifically, vocal aggression includes sexist, racist, and homophobic slurs, as well as generally aggressive comments. Further, based on previous literature on the effects playing violent video games can have on increasing aggression, the Twitch streamers were observed playing video games which depicted various degrees of violent content, ranging from intense violence to cartoon violence.

After tabulating the data from both observational phases, there does appear to be an increase in the amount of aggressive comments as the violent content of a video game increases. Specifically, as violent content in video games increased, the Twitch streamers were more likely to display verbal aggression. Data across both observation periods shows how frequently verbal aggression was displayed by each group and how as the violent content of the game increases, so too does the total number of verbally aggressive comments. Within the scope of this study, comments are classified as any combination of words which are used as verbal aggression; comments can be one word or five. Table 1 represents data from the first observation period and Table 2 represents data from the second observation period.

Table 1	Verbal Aggression Frequency – First Observation				
	Sexist	Racist	Homophobic	General	Total
SSB4	0	0	1	9	10
LoL	3	0	2	13	18
Overwatch	3	1	1	15	20
CS: GO	5	1	5	17	28
Total	11	2	9	54	76

Table 2	Verbal Aggression Frequency – Second Observation				
	Sexist	Racist	Homophobic	General	Total
SSB4	0	0	2	7	9
LoL	3	0	1	10	14
Overwatch	3	0	0	12	15
CS: GO	4	1	1	10	16
Total	10	1	4	39	54

Consistent with previous research (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014), the data shows that as exposure to violent content increased, the use of sexist, racist, homophobic, and generally aggressive comments also increased. Twitch streamers who were observed playing *Super Smash Bro. 4* used three homophobic slurs and sixteen generally aggressive exclamations. Across both observation periods, *League of Legends* and *Overwatch* Twitch streamers used sexist comments with the same frequency, but *Overwatch* streamers used one racist slur and four more generally aggressive exclamations than *League of Legends* streamers. *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* was the most violent game of the four used for this study, and streamers who played the game were found, on average, to be the most aggressive. *CS: GO* streamers tallied nine sexist comments, six homophobic comments, one racist comment, and twenty seven generally aggressive comments.

Further analysis of the data shows that sexist comments were used seven times more than racial slurs and homophobic comments were used nearly five times more often than racial comments. These findings are consistent with previous research that shows that, due to the video game community being a male-dominant space, masculinity is often expected within the community (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015). Though it's nearly impossible for the streamer to

know who is controlling opposing characters in-game, sexualized comments were often used to insult other players. Examples include a *League of Legends* player simply calling an opposing player using a female avatar a "ho", or the consistent use of the sexualized comment, "bitch" to describe other players. Comments followed a one-way flow of communication during this study, meaning only the streamer was heard vocalizing; any opposing players and teammates were not audible.

The following sections provide a review of the data and an in-depth analysis of specific comments made by Twitch streamers, over the course of both observation periods. The results are presented verbatim and are presented as data used within this study. There are uses of expletives and vulgarity, but offense is not meant to anyone who reads this paper.

Sexist Comments

Sexist comments were the most frequently used classified verbal forms of aggression – that is, not including generally aggressive comments – in all but the *Super Smash Bros. 4* group. For the purpose of this study, sexist comments included comments spoken by the Twitch streamer which were gendered; all sexist comments that occurred during the observational phase were female gendered. The slur used most often by streamers was 'bitch', which was used eighteen times, followed by 'pussy', 'ho', and 'gangbanged', all used once.

From the *League of Legends* group, 'bitch' was used twice during the first observation. The first utterance was used as a direct insult towards another player in the game who was not attacking the enemy team when the streamer was, leading to the streamer's death in-game. The second use was used as a direct insult towards another player who had killed the observed streamer. 'Ho' was used to insult a player an observed streamer had killed in-game. During the

second observation of *League of Legends* streamers, 'bitch' was used three times. The first occurrence was a direct insult toward the observed streamers teammate. The teammate was caught out of position on the in-game map and was killed by the opposing team. The second occurrence was used as a direct insult toward a teammate who was playing the role of a healer. The healer not involved in a team fight – a situation where both teams attempt to kill one another – and the streamer was upset that he had died. The last occurrence was used as a direct insult at the entirety of the opposing team, after the streamer's team had won the match.

From the first observation of the *Overwatch* group, 'bitch' was used twice and 'gangbanged' was used once. The first instance of 'bitch' was used as a direct insult when the observed streamer was being attacked by an opposing player. The second instance was used in a sarcastic exclamation after the observed streamer died in-game, saying "thanks, bitches!" to his teammates. The use of 'gangbanged' was used when an observed streamer was being consistently attacked and killed by many members of the opposing team; the word is associated with rape. References to rape are often used within the video game community to indicate when a player is getting dominated by an opposing player (Chess and Shaw 2015; Salter and Blodgett 2012). The second observation of *Overwatch* streamers showed the same amount of sexist comments, though none were associated with rape. Two comments were direct insults and one was an exclamation after having died in-game.

Finally, from the first observation of the *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* group, 'bitch' was used four times and 'pussy' was used once. The first instance of 'bitch' was used as a direct insult by the observed streamer. The second instance was used as a descriptor for how hurt the observed streamer's in-game character was from being shot, saying, "That hurt like a bitch!" The third and fourth instances were directed insults after the observed streamers had died in-game.

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'Pussy' was used as a direct insult of another player by the observed streamer, due to the opposing player using a long rang sniper rifle from relative safety. From the second observation of the *CS: GO* group, 'bitch' was used four times. Streamers used the word three times as a direct insult and once as an exclamation. Table 3 shows the distribution of sexist comments, categorized by type, across both observations.

Table 3	Types of Sexist Comments				
	Exclamation	Insult	Rape	Descriptor	Total
Comments	3	16	1	1	21

The data shows that sexist comments were the most used classified forms of verbal aggression to occur during this study. Because all games selected for this study are played online, the observed streamers have no way of knowing what sex players of the opposing team could be. That every gendered comment made during this study was exclusively associated with women illustrates the persistent presence of masculinity within the video game community, as numerous studies have reported (Daniels 2013; Fox and Tang 2014; Gray 2012; Krobova et al. 2015; Massanari 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015). Additionally, sexist comments being the most used classified forms of verbal aggression provide further support for the claims that masculinity is a desirable trait of a gamer (Fox and Tang 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015).

More than simply masculine norms, these results suggest misogyny within the community is largely apparent. While masculine norms dictate preference for strength and competition (Fox and Tang 2014), what was observed during the course of the study was a contempt, or anger, of women in general. When streamers refer to other players as a 'bitch' or

'ho' it is meant as a direct insult toward the opposing player. An implication of a streamer utilizing sexist forms of verbal aggression is that those who killed the streamer were not the streamer's equal, thus the streamer used forms of aggression often used to insult women, who are viewed as outsiders of the video game community (Fox and Tang 2014). Such implications continue with the view of women as weak and inferior, which goes beyond masculinity and into the realm of misogynistic behavior. Documented misogyny has been looked at through Jenson and Castell's (2013) look at the prevalence of misogyny within the video game community: "…UrsulaV tweeted 'Because our lead designer used to yell about there being 'a vagina in the room' and nobody called him on it, boss included" (P. 74). Misogynistic views permeate the video game community, from those who play them to those who create them. Such a view of women within the community speaks to a larger issue than just masculinity – there seems to be legitimate prejudice against women within the video game community.

Exclamations and descriptors refer to the use of 'bitch' when not used explicitly as an insult. Examples within the data include the *Overwatch* streamer sarcastically thanking his teammates after his in-game death ("thanks, bitches") and the *CS: GO* streamer describing his characters pain in-game ("hurt like a bitch"). While the *Overwatch* streamer could potentially mean to insult his teammates, the observation of the streamer suggested that, unlike the use of 'bitch' as an insult by the majority of streamers in this study, the *Overwatch* streamer was noticeably sarcastic. However, the use of the word still illustrates the misogynistic factor present in the video game community; that his teammates failed to save him is not the fault of the *Overwatch* streamer, but of his teammates who he views as inferior. In the case of the descriptor use of 'bitch', the *CS: GO* streamer had been shot in-game by an opposing player, but had not died. The phrase, "hurt like a bitch" is meant to describe a negative feeling; in the case of the streamer,

'bitch' was used to describe the pain his character was in, which is not a direct insult. However, the use of the word is inherently gendered, thus attributing negative connotations. The implication is that 'hurting like a bitch' is undesirable – the use of sexist aggression emphasizes such a point, as the streamers were attempting to emasculate opposing players.

The use of 'gangbanged' by an *Overwatch* streamer was used in the context of the streamer being attacked by many players from the opposing team. The term 'gangbang' within the video game community alludes to what is known as 'gang rape' outside the virtual realm. Thus, the use of the word by an *Overwatch* streamer is consistent with the findings of previous research that has found mentions of rape to be commonplace within the video game community (Chess and Shaw 2015; Salter and Blodgett 2012).

Homophobic Comments

Homophobic comments were used among all groups, with streamers playing *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* using homophobic comments with the most consistency. For the purpose of this study, homophobic comments were considered to be comments made my Twitch streamers which are used to insult members of the homosexual community, such as 'faggot' or 'gay', or suggestive homosexual behaviors. Of the slurs and references to suggestive behaviors used by the streamers, 'faggot' was used five times, 'suck my dick' was used twice, and 'gay' and 'fuck my ass' were each used once.

Twitch streamers observed playing *Super Smash Bros. 4* were the least likely of any group to exhibit aggressive behaviors and were responsible for three comment among all classifications. The classified form of verbal aggression used by a *Super Smash Bros. 4* streamer was homophobic in nature. "That's pretty gay" was used three times by an observed streamer to

describe situations after he was killed in-game by an opposing player. The phrase was used once during the first observation and twice during the second observation. The phrase was not meant as a direct insult towards the player that killed the streamer, but as a description of the event itself.

From the first observation of the *League of Legends* group, 'faggot' was used twice. One instance was used as a directed insult by a streamer, after getting killed by an opposing player in-game. The second occurrence was used as a direct insult by a streamer, after a teammate arrived late to a battle, causing the streamer to die in-game. The second observation of the *LoL* group yielded one homophobic comment; 'fag' was used as a direct insult toward an opposing player who killed the streamer in-game.

From the *Overwatch* group, the phrase 'fuck my ass' was the only homophobic phrase used. The observed Twitch streamer had died multiple times in a row, and upon dying for the last time, exclaimed the phrase in frustration. During the second observation, *Overwatch* streamers were not observed saying any homophobic comments.

From the observation of the *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* group, 'faggot' was used three times and the phrase 'suck my dick' was used twice. The first instance of the slur 'faggot' was used as a direct insult by a streamer against a teammate who was not moving into the objective area they were required to attack. The second and third instances were used as a direct insults by a streamer against opposing players who were thought to be cheating. The accused cheater had killed a streamer. Both instances of the phrase 'suck my dick' were used by a streamer after having killed opposing players in-game. During the second observation of the *CS: GO* group, the phrase 'that's gay' was used once by a streamer. The streamer used the phrase to

describe a situation after missing multiple shots at an opposing player. Table 4 shows the

distribution of sexist comments, categorized by type.

Table 4	Types of Homophobic Comments				
	Exclamation	Insult	Phrases	Descriptor	Total
Comments	0	6	3	4	13

Data from the study shows that homophobic comments were the second most used

classified form of verbal aggression. As with gender, because streamers are playing online video

games, sexual orientation of opposing players was not known by the streamers observed in this

study. Similar to gendered comments, homophobic comments were primarily used to insult other

players in-game. This is consistent with previous research on the treatment of gaymers within the

video game community, which shows homophobic verbal aggressions are often used against

other gamers to denote weakness (Krobova et al. 2015). The implied weakness associated with

homophobic slurs also suggests that masculinity is the desirable trait within the video game

community, and deviation from that expectation is met with verbal aggression meant to paint the

victim as weak and non-masculine (Fox and Tang 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015).

Within the study, 'faggot' was used by streamers universally as a direct insult against

other players. Streamers were observed using the slur in a verbally aggressive way each of the

times it was used. The implication of such use is that the victim of the verbal aggression is

viewed as weak in the eyes of streamer. Indeed, each case in which the term was used overtly

implied weakness. Further, gaymers are not viewed as part of the gaming community as much as

they are "gaymers" specifically (Shaw 2009). This outsider status and prevailing view of

inherent weakness has led to a minority status that is perpetuated by the gaming industry itself

(Shaw 2009).

Once during the observation, 'faggot' was used to describe an opposing player who was thought to be cheating. Cheating in a video game is seen as weakness due to the cheater having to rely on exploits or outside software to gain an advantage over legitimate competition. In one case during *CS: GO*, the cheater was using an aim-bot – software used in First Person Shooters which allows the cheater to automatically aim at opposing player's heads.

Two other uses of the slur 'faggot' occurred when teammates of the streamer were not doing what is expected while playing *CS: GO*. In one case, a teammate of a streamer was not attacking an in-game objective; to win in *CS: GO*, the attacking team must plant a bomb in a specific objective area. The teammate was likely apprehensive to assault the objective on its own, due to the opposing team having superior numbers and better position on the in-game map. The second case involved a streamer dying to a group of opposing players and calling his teammate a 'faggot' for not showing up to the battle. In all four cases, the slur was used to as verbal aggression by streamers to denote weakness of the victim. In *League of Legends*, a streamer referred to his teammate as a 'faggot' when the teammate did not arrive to a battle in-game, leading to the majority of the streamer's team dying. This same streamer also referred to the opposing player who killed him in-game as a 'fag'.

In this study, the use of homophobic phrases were all references to a streamer himself. Of the three occurrences, two were used by the same streamer – part of the group who played *CS: GO*. The streamer used the phrase 'suck my dick' after killing in-game opposing players. The use of the phrase in this context suggests domination by the streamer over the opposing players; the opposing players are viewed as submissive and weak. This is consistent with Thus, the use of the phrase aligns with previous research on the presence of masculinity within the video game community, leading to males displaying masculine norms – in this case, domination (Fox and

Tang 2014; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Todd 2015). The third use of a homophobic phrase was used by an *Overwatch* streamer, who after succumbing to numerous deaths in a row, exclaimed 'fuck my ass'. The implication in this case is the streamer was being beaten and in a weakened state, which runs counter to the expectations of masculinity – being strong and competitive (Fox and Tang 2014:315). While there may not be conscious homophobia in the video game community, gaymers are a minority that has recently been fighting for fairer representation in the community at large (Shaw 2009).

Racist Comments

Racist comments occurred the least of the sexist, homophobic, and racist classifications. For the purpose of this study, racist comments are defined by negative racialized comments or slurs. Racist comments occurred twice during the first observation phase of this study, and in both cases the racial slur used was associated with the black community. The slur 'nigger' was used twice during observations of the subjects. Both instances were used as a direct insult by the observed Twitch streamer toward a player on the opposite team. During the second observation phase, a *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* streamer used the slur 'jigaboo' to directly insult an opposing player who killed the streamer in-game. Interestingly, racial slurs only occurred in groups which were playing *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* and *Overwatch*; both games are FPSs and are games rated on the high end of inherent violent content used for this study.

Among streamers, racial slurs were used more than seven times less than sexist comments and nearly five times less than homophobic slurs. Exact explanations for such a rate are unclear, though it's possible the representation of black characters within video games plays a role. Black characters are often stereotypically depicted as athletes and gangsters (Daniels and

Lalone 2013; Leonard 2006), of which neither representation suggests a lack of masculinity. To

the contrary, such depictions perpetuate masculine identity (Daniels and Lalone 2013; Leonard

2006). Thus, it could be that unlike sexist and homophobic vocal aggressions, racial vocal

aggressions are not predicated on the lack of masculinity of the racial minority group.

Generally Aggressive Comments

The most commonly occurring forms of aggressive comments were those classified as

generally aggressive. For the purpose of this study, generally aggressive comments are

considered vocalized exclamations. Examples of these exclamations include expletives (curse

words) as well as phrases such as 'oh, my God' and 'God damn'. In total, 130 generally

aggressive comments were used by observed Twitch streamers, with various uses of 'fuck' used

most often, with 58 different instances. The word occurred most often as an undirected

exclamation, meaning streamers would simply yell 'fuck!' Such instances were exclusively used

when a streamer was killed in-game. Other forms of the word were used in a directed

exclamation by the observed streamers. Variations of 'fuck you!' occurred 11 times during the

observational period, with 5 instances stemming from one streamer in the *Overwatch* group. The

second most used generally aggressive comment was 'shit' and it's variations. 'Shit' was

exclusively used as undirected exclamations when the observed streamer was killed in-game.

'God damn' and 'oh my God' were both used two times each, always as undirected

exclamations.

In two cases during the first observational period, comments that did not fit into any of

the classifications used for this study occurred. In both cases, the observed Twitch streamer used

the derogatory term, 'retarded' to refer to other players in-game who were not doing well. Both

instances of the term 'retarded' were used by streamers playing *Counter Strike: Global Offensive.*

Generally aggressive comments were the most used forms of vocal aggression throughout the study. Due to the general application of such comments, such a finding is not surprising within the context of the study. The correlation between playing violent video games and increases in aggression within the video game community has been the focus of previous studies (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014), and the results of the present study are consistent with the findings of prior studies: as violent content of video games increases, aggression seems to also increase. As Tables 1 and 2 show, the least violent game used within the study, *Super Smash Bros. 4*, also had the least amount of vocalized aggression. As the games increased in violence – from *League of Legends*, to *Overwatch*, and finally *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*, the amount of vocally aggressive comments also increased.

Overall, the results of this study agree with findings of previous research on the effects of violent video games on aggression. As the content of the games used in this study became increasingly violent, the groups playing the games displayed increased usage of sexist, homophobic, and racial slurs, as well as increases in generally aggressive comments. The most prevalent slurs were sexist and homophobic in nature, which is consistent with previous research on male-domination and masculinity in the video game community.

Chapter V Discussion and Conclusion

Though research on the effects of violent video games dates back more than three decades, evolving and emerging technologies have created new gaps in video game focused literature. The purpose of this study was to help fill in such a gap, created by the creation and increasing popularity of Twitch and other video game streaming services, by building upon previous studies on the correlation between playing violent video games and increases in aggression. However, the present study also proved to be a step toward a new form of observational analysis. Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and Beam present new ways in which observational and ethnographic research can be conducted. A classical observational methodology was utilized, but upon reflection, such a method as used in this study is not "classical." Naturalistic observations were conducted in an online space, within a specific community. Twitch and other video game streaming sites provide this unique form of observational analysis that has not been done before. Hopefully, such an approach can be utilized in the future by others to continue to build upon the understanding of a large and growing community.

Based on the findings of previous studies (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014), the suggested correlation between playing violent video games and increases in aggression is not surprising. Digging into the findings showed that as the in-game content became more violent and realistic, the observed Twitch streamers became more likely to use vocalized aggressive comments. Additionally, these findings suggest that the concepts of masculinity within and male-domination over the video game community are substantiated. The classified forms of vocalized aggression used most by

subjects of this study were sexist and homophobic by a large margin; racial slurs were used seven times less than sexist comments and nearly five times less than homophobic slurs.

An emerging theme that may be the focus of future research is the depictions and treatment of disabled characters and gamers in the video game community. The slur 'retarded' was used twice by streamers during the observational period. As for future research regarding Twitch, more studies need to be done to gain a further understanding of how the video game community is growing and evolving. Beyond Twitch, Microsoft recently launched Beam, a new streaming service with a budding community (O'Brien 2016). With millions of players worldwide, furthering understanding of online groups and communities can lead to fairer representation of minorities and information on the effects video games can have on those who play them.

In addition to the continued study of relationships and representation of minority players within the video game community, this study has shed light on just how toxic the community can be. As the current study illustrates, the use of language within the video game community is largely full of expletives and vulgarities. Within society, such flippant use of vulgarity is still considered inappropriate behavior, though within the video game community, the norms of a "real world" society are abandoned in favor of calling others overt sexist, racist, and homophobic slurs. Future research should certainly look into the effects and reasons for this moral breakdown within the video game community, and perhaps the online community in general.

Limitations

As stated, Twitch provides new ways in which to conduct observational research. Twitch streamers can be observed in a naturalist setting, without interference from researchers.

The same is true for content analyses which look at chat feeds within these new communities. However, in the context of the present study taking place exclusively as an observational analysis of online streamers, limitations arise due to the unique setting Twitch presents. Due to the nature of online video games, players do not see one another while playing. The findings of the study show that sexist and homophobic comments were the most used forms of classified verbal aggression used by streamers. Use of specific forms of verbal aggression – sexist, racist, and homophobic – are used without knowledge of who is controlling other in-game avatars. It is possible that streamers increased knowledge of other players – including gender, race, or sexual orientation – could affect future findings. Another limitation associated with the nature of Twitch is that it is difficult for the researcher to identify a streamer's sexual orientation and race. While research (Fox and Tang 2014) has shown straight, white men are the dominant group within the video game community, the only observation that can be made is gender, though with the rise of gender identity (Galupo, Stuart, and Siegel 2015), certainty in gender selection could be problematic as well. Due to these limitations, research cannot be generalized to the population.

The results of this study suggest there are parallels between the real and virtual world regarding the treatment of minority groups within a given society or culture. Within American society, gender, race, and sexual orientation are all viewed as belonging to different hierarchies, but the overall theme is that straight, white men are considered the dominant group (Marger 2008). As in American society, within video game communities, straight, white men are viewed as the dominant group (Fox and Tang 2014). Dominant groups in both the real world and the virtual world can use the power they hold to subjugate the minority groups, though the processes in which such subjugation is done vary.

As Condis showed in her analysis of the Bioware incident, when a game developer takes proactive steps to combat aggression in the video game community, it can often have negative effects for the minority group (2014). Other steps taken by game developers, including outright bans of gamers from using specific games, often fail due to the ability of a banned player to simply make a new email, thus accessing the game with a different username. In the real world, there are real consequences for sexist, racist, and homophobic behaviors. Many laws exist to protect citizens based on gender, race, and sexual orientation; the same cannot be said for the video game community.

This study does not suggest policing the video game community, but there are legitimate concerns involving verbal aggression directed at other people. Consistent with previous research (Adachi and Willoughby 2011a; Anderson and Dill 2000; Engelhardt et al. 2011; Greitemeyer and Mügge 2014), the current study suggests that playing violent video games can have an effect on aggression. Through future research on the effects violent video games can have on those who play them, as well as on emergent media such as Twitch, researchers can provide potential solutions to the problems plaguing the video game community.

Future Research

Due to the lack of literature currently available, future research of Twitch and similar sites have countless opportunities to further our understanding of these emerging video game communities. The present study showed that violent video games do seem to increase aggression, but also showed some concerning emerging trends as well. Of particular interest for future research should be the lapse of morals within the video game community. Streamers observed during this study used nearly 150 vulgarities over the course of the study. Such use of

expletives, particularly directed slurs, runs counter to societal norms and expectations. Future research could look into these trends and examine the potential effects such toxicity could have on the members of the community.

Future studies of Twitch and other online video game streaming sites can address the issues presented through a larger scale study. However, such a study would likely not be naturalistic in nature due to the inability to know a streamers race or sexual orientation without some form of contact between the researcher and the subjects. Further, research of online video game streaming communities is also limited. Twitch allows streamers to monetize their streams once they attain a large following; future research could look at whether or not the presence of a large amounts of viewers or the potential to earn money affects vocal aggression in streamers. Due to time constraints and relatively small sample size, future research can expand upon the present study to potentially produce further validity of data.

Further, the role women and other minorities play within communities such as Twitch should be the focus of future research. In the context of the present study, it would be interesting to see if women, racial minorities, and gaymers fall into the expected norms of the dominant community, which appears to be rife with a lack of moral standards, including sexism, homophobia, and the casual use of vulgarity.

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[1] Top selling games 2015: (1) Call of Duty: Black Ops III, (2) Madden NFL 16, (3) Fallout 4, (4) Star Wars Battlefront, (5) NBA 2K16, (6) Grand Theft Auto V, (7) Minecraft, (8) Mortal Kombat X, (9) FIFA 16, (10) Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, (11) Batman: Arkham Knight, (12) LEGO: Jurassic World, (13) Battlefield Hardline, (14) Halo 5: Guardians, (15) Super Smash Bros., (16) The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, (17) Dying Light, (18) Destiny: The Taken King, (19) NBA 2K15, (20) Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

[2] Xbox Live is an online service which allows gamers playing on an Xbox video game console to connect to other gamers over the Internet. Through Xbox Live, gamers can play competitive or cooperative video games with other gamers, talk to other gamers, and share recorded video and pictures with other gamers. Xbox Live is a sub-community of the larger video game community.

[3] E-sports are officially sanctioned video game leagues where teams, often sponsored by brands such as *Monster Energy, IBM*, and *Logitech* compete against one another for cash prizes. In most e-sports, there are three seasons per year, with each season being around three months long. After each season, the top teams retain spots for entry into the Championship, which takes the place in the final month of the last season of the year. E-sports have grown to be a multi-million-dollar business for professional gamers and teams; the prize pool for the most popular e-sport game, *League of Legends*, was worth over $5 million in 2016 (Howell 2016).