

DIGITAL CHALLENGES
TO OPPRESSION AND
SOCIAL INJUSTICE



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INTRODUCTION

*Not a Post-Racism and Post-Misogyny Promised Land:
Video Games as Instruments of (In)Justice*

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Amid the daily reminders on our social media feeds that racism and sexism remain defining forces in our culture, there are also moments of respite. Out of the constant turmoil that Black women experience around hair, the release of an immersive and interactive game provided a glimmer of hope in the fall of 2017. Created by Momo Pixel, *Hair Nah* allows players to customize an avatar who can “smack away as many white hands” as possible as they attempt to touch locs, twists, braids, and relaxed Black hair (Callahan 2017).

Not surprisingly, the game quickly went viral. Both the game and its resonance captured a convergence of powerful contemporary racial and gendered dynamics and histories, from Black hair politics to the history of white supremacy as it relates to the hyperpolicing and surveillance of Black women’s bodies, from the daily toll of racial microaggressions Black women face to the exhaustion of our current political moment.

Yet the game’s power reflects its rejection of these histories and its embrace of a virtual and physical clapback. As a game produced and developed by a Black woman, the shock, surprise, and hope resulting from the release of the game speaks to the whiteness of the video game industry and the systemic refusal to give voice to the experience of Black women. The game’s intervention, centering of Blackness, and embrace of resistance all embody the game’s refusal of erasure. From its conception to reception,



1.1. A screenshot of gameplay from Momo Pixel's game, *Hair Nah*, showing hands being swatted away from a Black woman's hair. Courtesy of Momo Pixel

Hair Nah exemplifies the yearning for transformative games. By centering the experiences of Black women, the existence of such a game is disruptive in itself as it illustrates the power and potential to use video games, online technology, and game culture to give voice to the experience of Black women and other marginalized communities, resisting and otherwise challenging dehumanizing representations. The game and its narrative construction locate structural oppression in the everyday. Playing this game highlights the power and potential of resistance of everyday and systemic violences within everyday cultural engagement. This game captured the essence of the *why* and the *how* of the current text.

GAMERS, NOT HATERS

We, the editors of this collection, are gamers. We play video games; we enjoy games and have done so for a very long time. We are also scholars, teachers, and critics who have long been uneasy about the costs and consequences of the racism, misogyny, and xenophobia within game culture. As a Black female scholar (Dr. Kishonna Gray) and a white male scholar

(Dr. David J. Leonard) with varied experiences and different vantage points, we have both seen the toxicity and violence that pervade gaming as well as the individualized and systemic harm gaming culture sustains. From Gamergate to the white grievance politics of the 2016 US election, to the daily experiences of white female gamers and those of color, the ways gaming is entangled with mainstream cultures of systematic exploitation and oppression is clear. While video games may be a distraction to some communities and a source of power and pleasure to others, they can at times also be a source of violence, oppression, pain, and trauma. Our identities shape these complex and messy relationships with games.

Like the contributors to this volume, we enter into the world of video games with our own identities and experiences intact. Our disparate social locations and varied privileges shape our relationship to gaming and gaming's relationship to us. From the Internet to the constructive worlds of virtual gameplay, the digital world offers spaces of play and freedom in a post-ism promised land of equality and justice, but our experiences reveal the fissures found within those spaces.

DO BLACK LIVES MATTER?

From stereotypical representations of hypersexual women to those depicting people of color in stereotypical ways, video games have the power to perpetuate injustice (Malkowski and Russworm 2017). Associated gaming communities across console and computer games of all genres also fuel toxic practices of antisocial behavior, racism, heterosexism, and misogynistic language in in-game chats. At one level, video games mirror and embody the injustices we see throughout popular culture and in society at large. For example, by signalling the impossibility of survival for Black and Brown men, the opening mission within *Battlefield 1* illustrates this trend. This first-person, World War I military shooting game allows the player to engage as a member of the Harlem Hellfighters. Given the erasure of soldiers of color within war games as well as popular culture as a whole, there was initially much praise around the inclusion of this regiment, comprised of Black men who identified mostly as African American and Puerto Rican. The game, however, still forces death upon the player, even remarking in the opening sequence that survival is not an option.

Upon the first death, a screen appears providing a fictional name and timeline of life for the gamer to preview.

The gamer then spawns the life of another Harlem Hellfighter, and he too succumbs to the violences of war. This trend continues throughout the game, causing many Black gamers on social media to reflect on their uncomfortableness witnessing and experiencing hypervisible Black Death. We liken this pattern within *Battlefield I* to the present era of consuming and sharing Black Death via associated hashtags, where we witness the final moments of Black and Brown life without context or a historic backdrop (e.g., #PhilandoCastile, #EricGarner, #TamirRice). The humanity of Black lives is lost, reducing life to the spectacle of Black Death. The pleasure in and normalization of Black Death is not limited to historical games. And the dialectics between gaming and entrenched social injustice is not limited to how games explicitly teach white supremacist ideologies.

Whether visible in the persistent color line that shapes the production, dissemination, and legitimization of dominant stereotypes within the industry itself, or in the dehumanizing representations commonplace within digital spaces, video games encode the injustices that pervade society as a whole. According to Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory, gaming is a space defined by the “systematic over-representation of males, white and adults and a systematic under-representation of females, Hispanics, Native Americans, children and the elderly” (2009, 815). The criminalization of Black and Brown bodies throughout society in general and video games specifically, and the profiling of Black and Brown gamers that is endemic to gaming culture, illustrates not only how race operates within video games but the dialectics between the virtual and the lived, the spaces of play and the spaces of the everyday.

Gaming imagines a world of good and evil, of domination and annihilation, where whiteness and American manhood characterize protectors and heroes—values not afforded the pixelated Harlem Hellfighters in *Battlefield I*. In this way, games provide a training ground for the consumption of narratives and stereotypes as well as opportunities to become instruments of hegemony; they offer spaces of white male play and pleasures, and create a virtual and lived reality where white maleness is empowered to police and criminalize the Other. Games provide opportunities to both

learn and share the language of racism and sexism, and the grammar of empire, all while perpetuating cultures of violence and privilege.

Yet despite the ubiquitous violence within video games, gaming also offers a potential space for change—for a different kind of gaming. As noted by Helen Young, in “Racial Logics, Franchising, and Video Game Genres: The Lord of the Rings,” video games “can also be designed to address racial stereotyping and ‘get a person to understand one’s self-concept and aspects of a culture that may be different to one’s own” (Lee 2013, 147). Fantasy video games, moreover, can challenge white hegemonies. Within online game worlds, the technology, communities of gamers, and digital reality itself are important and potentially powerful tools for broader fights for social justice.

REIMAGING REALITY: VIRTUAL FREEDOM DREAMERS

We see the ample potential and possibility of gaming culture. We see the ways that people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and their allies have challenged the hegemony of whiteness and hetero-maleness within gaming culture in terms of both production and representation. Even as the mainstream industry continues to be dominated by heterosexual white men, a huge diversity of people outside the industry, on the margins, have been creating their own video games for years, beyond the focus of mainstream gaming culture.

Anna Anthropy, a transgender video game developer, took on game development and design because she was fed up with the AAA offerings of limited character development and clichéd story lines. Using Game Maker, a novice-friendly computer program, she began creating her own games. Accessible game design tools enable communities traditionally excluded from the power structures in gaming to participate and create their own innovative games. Anthropy has also employed Twine among other platforms for her games, which range in cultural and political context. They include *Keep Me Occupied*, a collaborative two-player arcade game featuring Occupy protesters in Oakland, California, who are subjected to tear gas and grenades, as well as *Dysquia*, a game based on the creator’s experiences with hormone replacement therapy. Her critically acclaimed games often repurpose traditional game mechanics and

narratives in provocative ways. In a gaming context that often privileges battle and competition, and in an era where the term *social justice warrior* is often deployed as a slur and a rhetorical insult, it becomes imperative to shield oneself from the attacks of those threatened by diversifying content in gaming. Anthropy notes that her content has been influenced by queer scholars such as Audre Lorde and alternative comic writers like Diane DiMassa, with their focus on queer love and transidentity (Lipinski 2012). While not all her games feature queer content, Anthropy states that her queer identity is always visible and influences the narratives she constructs around her games.

These examples and others make evident some of the ways in which game makers have sought to tear down the walls of the hegemony of gaming and demand equity in each and every space. They demonstrate the potential of games as teachers of alternative narratives and histories, as challenges to the ideologies of hate, persistent inequalities, and violent injustices. They model the possibility of games giving voice to the experiences, (intersectional) identities, and histories of otherwise marginalized and erased communities. While current gaming culture systematically embraces ideologies that make clear that white males lives are the only ones that matter, it's clear that games can show that all lives matter, representationally and materially.

Games can also foster critical dialogue, as shown in the ways that discourse surrounding games and gameplay have opened up key conversations about the histories of minstrelsy and cultural appropriation, and around misogyny and rape culture. Calls to challenge gaming for its reliance on representations and narratives of Blackness as criminal, female as sexual object, Asian as exotic, Muslim as terrorist, and so much more, not only demand shifts in representations but also speaks to larger political, social, and lived contexts. To change gaming in an effort to change culture—to use gaming as an instrument and technology within larger social movements—is to bolster the toolbox for justice.

MISOGYNY, RAPE CULTURE, AND GAMERGATE

Games are a significant cultural force, as is evident in the connective tissue between the gaming pedagogies of violence and the 2016 election. Rape

culture, toxic masculinity, and homophobia are ubiquitous to gaming, not only reflecting these ideologies but also existing as teachers, pedagogies, and platforms for the dissemination of dehumanizing representations and ideologies of injustice and violence. The injustices that predominate gaming culture also sit at the core of the political, social, and communal arrangements of mainstream US culture.

We see the importance of games in examining the relationship between rape culture and the objectification of women as sources of male pleasure and domination (Malikowski and Russworm 2017; Benstein 2013; Fox, Bailenson, and Tricase 2013; Salter and Blodgett 2012; Dill, Brown, and Collins 2008). Gaming culture is rife with the realities of #MeToo. As noted by the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault in “Gaming Culture and Rape Culture: How #GamerGate’s Misogyny Prevents a Safer Space,”

In current gaming culture, the connection between sexuality and violence in games supports a misogynistic version of reality, in which the majority of heroes are males displaying their masculinity through violence, and women are serving as background characters to be objectified. As a result, gaming culture is mirroring, and perpetuating, rape culture. The problems that exist in gaming culture not only relate to the visual representation of women, but also through the language used by gamers in their interactions with their counterparts. Technology now provides ample opportunity to interact with others in the game, which has led to a normalization of violent language to match the game’s level of violence. Name-calling is a standard practice, and studies show female gamers receive higher levels of taunts and sexually aggressive remarks while playing than men. As a bonding method, teams assert their dominance by using sexually violent language, often referring to winning or beating a player as “raping” them. Perhaps without knowing, their consistent use of this language minimizes the seriousness of sexual assault. With 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men experiencing sexual assault in their lifetimes, these violent interactions impact survivors in what should be a safe space.

These effects and the presence of rape culture and misogyny (Shaw 2015) within video games and gaming culture was fully realized during the 2014 controversy known as Gamergate (Quinn 2017).

During Gamergate, the divisions and fissures, inequalities and unspoken violences that were longstanding within video game culture bubbled to surface. Despite the civil war (Jilani 2014) trope that came to define Gamergate, the moment was not a battle between two equally powerful constituencies. In the face of criticism from feminists, people of color, and other critical voices, “gamer culture and traditional conservatives” (Jilani 2014) sought to not only demonize but also silence those who sought to change gaming culture.

Lamenting political correctness, multiculturalism, and the betrayal of gaming tradition, Gamergate also empowered this narrative of white male victimhood. Gamergate was defined by such belief: It was not that women in the video game industry were unfairly treated; it was not that people of color were rendered invisible through stereotypes within game spaces; it was not that gamers of color and women endured mistreatment online. The injustices within gaming could be found in oppression and unfair treatment of white males. As such, the self-appointed heroes of Gamergate were white men who dared to challenge political correctness. They wanted to make sure games stayed great. Seeing change as a threat, they fought to preserve the hegemony of white male hetero gaming and gamers. Not surprisingly, the contested ground that lay at the foundation of the racial and gendered culture wars that became visible during Gamergate would become fully visible during the 2016 election. The white grievance politics that coalesced around the candidacy of Donald Trump propelled Gamergate as well.

In so many ways, Gamergate predicted and sowed the seeds that sprouted the Trump presidency. Two months before the 2016 election, Amanda Marcotte wrote:

For those who survived Gamergate, a 2014 dustup over the place of women in the video-gaming world, the 2016 election is instilling a deep and unpleasant sense of *déjà vu*. It's not just that Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and his acolytes are playing to the same grievance about “social justice warriors”

who dare to think that white men should share power with women and people of color. It's that Trump and his men are using the same tools as the Gamergaters: gaslighting, projection, working the refs and leaning heavily on often subconscious double standards that allow white men to have more benefit of the doubt than others.

What's really terrifying is that for a surprisingly long time Gamergate worked: For months, anti-feminists in the tech world were extremely effective at undermining feminists and creating the illusion that a bunch of bullies might have legitimate grievances. Eventually, most witnesses to Gamergate woke up and saw it for what it was. I have no doubt the same will happen with the Trump campaign. Even if many people don't get it right now, history will remember the campaign as a black mark on our democracy, forged in bigotry.

Similarly, in "What Gamergate Should Have Taught Us about the 'Alt-right,'" Matt Lees highlights the parallels between Gamergate, the rise of the alt-right, and the Trump presidency. The shared opposition to truth, the propensity to see themselves as victims of feminists, people of color, and the Other, and the embrace of bullying, can be seen within each "movement." Each has embraced online technology to not only articulate their grievance politics but to silence, demean, and terrorize opposition.

From this perspective and history, we can understand Gamergate as a movement that focuses on white men's anxieties over losing ground in a universe assumed to be homogenous. The rallying point that emerged was retaliation for the recent increase in feminist critiques of video games and gaming culture (Chess and Shaw 2014). This toxic technoculture and geek masculinity positioned itself as a victim in the social justice warrior era (Massanari 2017; Gray, Buyokozturk, and Hill 2017). As scholars have noted, the culture and subculture within gaming focuses on white men, targets white men, and is dominated by male perspectives (Gray 2012). Before Gamergate, when women and people of color breached this assumed norm, they were targeted using symbolic violence, which was generally relegated and contained as isolated incidents between a few individuals. The events of Gamergate, however, revealed that women, especially

those who publicly oppose marginalization and symbolic violence, were met with real violence outside of these games. The public harassment of Zoe Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian, and Brianna Wu, among others, who endured highly publicized doxxing, rape threats, and death threats, serves as an example of this shift.

When Gamergate began, Zoe Quinn was the first woman who was targeted and experienced violence in both physical and digital settings. She was accused of trading sexual favors with journalists for positive reviews of her game *Depression Quest*. Initially the target of symbolic violence, Quinn was shamed for crafting a non-traditional game and for suffering from depression. Subsequently, her former partner, Eron Gjoni, created *The Zoe Post*—a website on which he published his experiences with Quinn and claimed that she had sexual relationships with multiple individuals during their relationship, potentially including gaming journalists (<https://thezoepost.wordpress.com>). Quickly thereafter, Quinn became the target of anonymous threats through Twitter and other social media outlets, and in August 2014 she was doxxed—meaning her personal information (including address, phone number, and bank information) was published online (Parkin 2014). These acts of violence jeopardized Quinn's safety, forcing her to flee her home.

Brianna Wu, also a video game designer, became another public, high-profile target of Gamergate when she shared a meme poking fun at Gamergate on Twitter. This meme was reworded to mock her instead, and came with a slew of death and rape threats. When asked about harassment from Gamergate, Wu stated “[t]he truth is, I’m a pretty visible woman in a very small field. I think they see the changes I’m advocating, and it scares them” (TransEthics 2016). As she was so public with her criticisms, the men of Gamergate embarked on a significant campaign to silence her. However, Wu has continued as an active participant in the game industry, reminding us of the potential and power of changing the gaming industry and how technology can be an instrument of justice and equality.

Similarly, feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian, another target of Gamergate, has refused to be silent in the face of gaming injustices. Known for her “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games” video series, Sarkeesian has been accused repeatedly of promoting feminist gaming at the expense of white male gamers. In the aftermath of Gamergate, Sarkeesian

faced greater threats for her work. In October 2014, Sarkeesian was scheduled to speak at Utah State University. Following anonymous emails and letters threatening harm to both Sarkeesian and those who attended her campus presentation, the event was cancelled. One threat promised that the lecture would become “the deadliest school shooting in American history” while another stated, “one way or another, I’m going to make sure they die” (McDonald 2014). Though no one was harmed, the threat of real violence was significant.

These attacks have come to define gaming culture. Challenges to the lack of diversity or the gross stereotypes promoted by mainstream games are often met with demonization and rhetorical violence directed at those who merely seek to help gaming reach its fullest potential (Everett 2017). While responding to attacks on specific individuals and acts of prejudice, discrimination, and microaggressions, we must also examine the structural and institutional factors that allow them to exist. The daily practices of gaming continue to sustain what Mark Anthony Neal calls *micro-nooses* and a violent lived reality for many on and offline. The stakes are too high to ignore the harm of games and turn our backs on the technological possibility of interventionist games.

JUSTICE IN THE ASHES OF GAMERGATE

This collection grew from the ashes of Gamergate. We seek to follow in the footsteps of those who have challenged how games have furthered the military industrial complex, justifying our state of perpetual warfare (Payne 2016; Huntemann and Payne 2009; Leonard 2004). It moves forward in memory of #TrayvonMartin and #SandraBland, in this moment where Black Death is a source of white pleasure, where Black bodies have been a part of the entertainment structure for white audiences (Glenn and Cunningham 2009). This trend continues within video games and gaming culture. To be immune from violence, to be insulated from injustice, to be able to cash in on the privilege encoded by/in white supremacy, misogyny, and heteronormativity is a source of pleasure. The collective efforts of the authors of this text seek to move the conversation beyond the critical examination of the virtual pedagogies of racism, sexism, and homophobia to rightly examine the role of digital games as purveyors of violence,

as spaces for the normalization of violence and domination, as sites for the consumption of worlds that privilege the American empire, militarism, and white male heroes. We seek to highlight and celebrate games and gamers that demand change from within games and beyond.

We find inspiration not simply in fighting these injustices and in identifying the connective tissue between gaming and lived violence, but in sites of resistance. We find hope in the growing number of “diversity-minded developers constructing game worlds around ‘sheroes’” (Everett 2016, xii). And we see alternatives with Dean Chan’s (2009) discussion of Joseph DeLappe “pacifist act of civil disobedience” while playing *America’s Army*. According to Kathleen Greg (2006):

Joseph DeLappe is careful about typos. In the multiplayer war game *America’s Army* DeLappe can see the soldiers around him advancing, but he doesn’t care to join them. Logged in as “Dead_in_Iraq,” DeLappe types the names of soldiers killed in Iraq, and the date of their death, into the game’s text messaging system, such that the information scrolls across the screen for all users to see. DeLappe’s goal is simple: He plans to memorialize the name of every service member killed in Iraq.

Such interventions not only reveal the possibility of games and gaming technology, of “video games of the oppressed” (Frasca quoted in Dyer-Withford and de Peuter 2009, 197), but also hold the potential to redefine the gaming community. These sources of opposition are as much reflective of gaming as those individuals and games that perpetuate inequality and violence. People such as Joseph DeLappe, Anna Anthropy, and Anita Sarkeesian, or games like *Depression Quest*, *Never Alone*, and *We are Chicago* define games as much as *Grand Theft Auto* and Gamergate.

As such, this collection seeks to document the voices, games, and dreams that persist in the face of blockades, gatekeepers, and a culture of violence. These contributors and the world they illuminate give us hope, all while reminding us that we must not cede power or control to those who use tiki torches, virtual spaces, and hashtags for the sake of power and continued domination.

AWAKE AND HOPEFUL

From these chapters, we see possibilities in the endless examples of “playing against the grain” (Chien 2009), whether as game modifications, cultural interventions, or the embracing of collective resistance. Despite the hegemony of gaming practices that “require algorithm-like behaviour from players” (Chien 2009, 250), change exists because of the agency and creativity of gamers (Everett 2016; de Peuter 2015; Meads 2015, Frasca 2004). From gamers to games themselves, we agree with Tanner Higgin (2009) who writes, “Video games do have the capability to generate emotional affect while tackling complex and controversial narrative material” (254). The chapters and the contributors reveal this truth not only in the gamers, games, artefacts, and discourses that they spotlight here but also in their own work and presence within the gaming community.

We find hope in games like *Sunset*, *Mafia III*, and *Watch Dogs 2* that create worlds where Black humanity is fully realized and even celebrated. We appreciate the destruction of the slave economy on the shores of Haiti by Adewale in *Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag Freedom Cry*. We praise the fierceness of Aveline de Grandpre from the same game, who becomes an assassin to destroy the slave trafficking enterprise in New Orleans and successfully liberates a slave community. We see possibility in characters like Marcus Halloway in *Watch Dogs 2*, whose existence gives voice and power in Black nerdom and hacking culture. We acknowledge Larae Barrett, who used her voice and platform to advocate for oppression in the police state in *The Division*. These interventions are reflective of the efforts put forth by individuals such as Tanya DePass and the #INeedDiverseGames initiative, which urged more diverse content and more inclusion of diverse voices within these development spaces. We shout out to podcasters and live streamers who make themselves vulnerable to harassment in spaces created by and for white men. Their digital practices illuminate innovative cultural practices of creating and delivering content. We find hope and possibility in the work of Safiya Noble and others who are challenging the ways that technology not only reflects racial injustice but also perpetuates it. Our dreams and reserved optimism emanates from the scholars, gamers, and games discussed in this volume, which collectively demonstrate how games can be

change agents at multiple levels. It is our hope that this collection builds from these works and advances the work being done by so many gamers.

WOKE CHAPTERS: THE WORK OF THE WAKENING

This volume gathers established and emerging scholars in the fields of games, media, and cultural studies to interrogate individual and collective experiences inside video games, gaming communities, and the industry as well as address the structural factors impacting the reality and outcomes of the same. Each of the authors considers the ways gaming holistically operates as a medium with the potential for positive impact as well as the replication and recreating of inequalities. Together, the essays in this collection look for hope; for the possibility in gaming, gamers, and in the industry to change not only the gaming world but the broader social inequalities that we experience both virtually and in everyday realities.

Part 1 of this volume highlights the nature of gaming violence and how alternative readings, counter play, and oppositional gaming not only alters game spaces but disrupts our collective relationship to destruction, mayhem, and pain. The section begins with Rob Cover's powerful focus on the precarity of the body within gaming communities, situating ethics at the core of the discussion of gaming and gamers. This essay rightfully acknowledges the trend to continue discussing disembodied digital experiences. By centering the body, this chapter makes the case for "the *obligation* of gamers to act ethically and non-violently towards other gamers, non-gamers, in care-of-the-self and care-of-all-others." Alternative narratives are essential to disrupt the power that the hegemonic structure has created, especially its violent overtones. Any broader transformation in gaming depends on highlighting alternate ways to envision traditionally violent games and narratives.

In chapter 2, "Power, Violence, and the Mask: Representations of Criminal Subjectivities in *Grand Theft Auto Online*," Rowlands, Ratnabala-suriar, Hobart, Noel, Allen, Reed, and Gonzales explore the opportunities of subverting typical violent play offered by the creator aspects of the game. While *Grand Theft Auto* is typically associated with violence against women and stereotypical representations of people of color, the authors focus on its mod culture, which showcases creator and maker spaces. The

powerful narratives unveiled in the chapter demonstrate the potential to transform traditionally hostile spaces by identifying alternate content and integrating digital storytelling.

In part 2, we bring together two authors who focus on the economics of gaming and the business dimensions of the global enterprise of games. While recognizing profits, transnational capitalism, and the logics of neoliberalism, these authors reflect on how access shapes the intervention possibilities of games. Directly challenging the structure of the gaming industry is one necessary step in transforming it. One key myth, rooted in unacknowledged privilege, is the notion that anybody can make games. In chapter 3, Stephanie Orme powerfully questions this idea, along with the question that has dominated critiques of equality and inclusivity: "If people don't like games the way they are, why don't they just make their own?" Orme explores the structural barriers that affect incorporation and a hegemonic culture that influences outcomes. In chapter 4 Zixue Tai and Fengbin Hu offer an important economic perspective within online gaming by highlighting the precarious existence of gold farmers in online gaming in China. While their work isn't specific to gaming alone, they reveal how economics effect how gamers produce, consume, and engage with gaming culture. While gaming concerns representation, including race, gender, and nation, capitalist inequities also shape the economics of gaming. This chapter demonstrates how gold farmers negotiate a volatile existence in the micro economy of gaming.

When we started this collection on the heels of Gamergate, we had no idea what was in store for this nation politically, culturally, and socially, including the rise of President Trump and the reinvigoration of feminist struggles. Part 3, on feminist gaming and counter representations, speaks to this moment. In chapter 5, Vysotsky and Allaway provide us with a glimpse of this ongoing struggle, especially for women within the gaming industry. The culture of video games is both a microcosm of our moment and the staging ground for a larger movement. While spotlighting these shared histories, this section also provides a roadmap toward gender justice inside and outside the world of video games.

In chapter 6, "The Perpetual Crusade: *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, Religious Extremism, and the Problem of Empire" Kristen Bezio continues the focus on addressing structural inequalities by reflecting on how players

themselves can complicate narratives of colonialism and taking over space. Discussions surrounding *Tomb Raider* heroine Lara Croft usually highlight narratives that disrupt traditional gender norms and misogyny in games. Demonstrating an intersectional approach to gendered analysis, Kristin Beizio rightfully interrogates the continuation of Western imperial perspectives, Islamophobia, and colonial paradigms in video games.

Andrea Braithwaite examines the 1990s girls' games movement in chapter 7, "Nancy Drew and the Case of Girl Games." She simultaneously demonstrates the historic nature of the gendered culture war in gaming while elucidating the ways that resistance has produced alternative representations within gaming culture. Similarly, Stephanie Jennings provides a discussion on critical epistemologies in video game narratives by focusing on her own auto ethnographic approach in chapter 8. This approach to creating content and narratives in games disrupts traditional masculine narratives and essentialist gender binaries.

Amid a culture of sexism and misogynistic violence, the gaming industry has embraced the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion. In response to protests, game developers have incorporated statements asserting their commitment to producing diverse games and building an industry no longer dominated by white men. The push to diversify is not simply about demographics or public relations but building a culture of voices that imagine more just and empowering realities. Diversity for diversity's sake is insufficient and is instead a starting point in the struggle for justice inside and outside gaming.

Part 4, "Gaming Against the Grain," examines these counter narratives and alternative realities, highlighting how games can do more than simply contribute to brochure diversity. Specifically, this section focuses on whether gaming culture can foster critical consciousness, aid in participatory democracy, and effect social change. It centers the silenced and marginalized, offering counter narratives to those post-racial and post-gendered fantasies that so often obscure the violent context of production and consumption.

Despite the endless possibilities of gaming as spaces of disruption, interruption, and transformation, games and the gaming world—whether the industry itself or those inhabited by gamers—generally remains a space of violence, bigotry, and harassment. In chapter 9, Karen Skardzus looks at the supportive relationships for LGBTQ gamers in *World of*

Warcraft and explores norms established around sexuality and how those who identify as LGBTQ are not extended full citizenship in the WoW community. Further, in chapter 10, “Managing Online Game Communities: Lesson from Past Attempts, Players’ Experiences, and Workplace Strategies” Amanda Cote moves on to a discussion of player experiences in gaming communities. This chapter examines women’s responses to and strategies in coping with online harassment. The alternative games and alternative spaces that are created in gaming provide an engaging analysis highlighting not only the structural and institutional factors perpetuating inequalities that permeate gaming culture but also alternate versions of what reality can be within these spaces.

Chapter 11 continues to examine the power to disrupt traditional narratives with an examination of *The Legend of Zelda*. Here, Kathryn Hemmann explores fan fiction and fan generated content to reflect on what different content players would like to see. What kinds of stories might they tell? The fans who propel these industries have perspectives that are not valued by the gaming industry. Hemmann suggests that change will come through harnessing the creativity and voices of fans. In offering the above framework, this chapter adheres to the volume’s purpose by being grounded in the concrete situations of marginalized members within gaming culture. It reveals that despite the violence and bigotry directed in the real world at commentators, academics, content producers, and gamers who have spoken out about the persistent sexism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and other injustices in the gaming space, counter narratives and alternative voices, games, and spaces for the articulation of “freedom dreams” (Kelley 2002) abound.

Given the post-racial rhetorical turn of the last eight years, it is important to push conversations about gaming and gamers beyond diversity to expose the disconnect between rhetorics of multiculturalism and the struggle for justice and equity. Persistent contradictions exist between ideals of inclusion espoused within the video game industry and society as a whole and continued injustices within structural and institutional contexts. This final section highlights work that intervenes in the culture of violence and inequity by focusing on how games have the potential to foster change through empathy and compassion. While recognizing the ways that racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia and power shape the

potential for empathy, where certain bodies bestowed with the privileges of humanity are afforded compassion and the politics of understanding, these chapters reflect on the power, possibilities, and potential of humanizing games of social change.

Chapter 12 examines this potential through the game *Everyday Racism*, which attempts to generate empathy and pushes for more anti-racist content in games. As Fordyce, Neale, and Apperley outline, online spaces have proven to be effective venues in building and supporting old racist practices. To combat this, scholars, activists, and everyday people have been using these same technologies to thwart the effectiveness of racist organizing online. The *Everyday Racism* game explores how people of color experience discrimination, particularly conveyed through mobile devices, in order to elicit anti-racist responses. Fordyce, Neale, and Apperley offer an important bridge to Barkley and Foglesong, who, in chapter 13, “Activism, Awareness, and Sympathy in Video Games,” examine the potential for persuasive and serious games to increase empathy and effect social change. This chapter also assesses the ability of these games to reach large audiences and have widespread appeal, concluding that negative opinions about games with social commentary limits their overall success. Anderson-Barkley and Foglesong note that simplistic narratives, aesthetics, and gaming playability can limit audiences for these social transformative games, at the same time that they suffer from unfair perceptions that conscious games are just not fun to play.

The collection concludes with a powerful demonstration of how inclusive design can improve outcomes for marginalized users and generate empathy as well. Illustrating that change and transformative possibilities can come from fans, diversity in games, aesthetics, and design, Bertolo, Mariani and Conti show how in *DiscrimiNation*, a persuasive board game that showcases a viable means to improve social inclusion and communitarian comprehension, games can inspire, inform, and enrich in the name of justice and equality.

In a moment of increased fear and the prospect of even more inequality in every aspect of American life, where the already vulnerable face a dangerous tomorrow, video games provide the language and tools to imagine the world anew. The games, gamers, technologies, and movements discussed here point to endless possibilities. They imagine worlds based in

justice; they offer technology and other tools that can facilitate transformation. The public outcry associated with Gamergate has put *why* at the forefront of game studies. Gamergaters, who gained media attention through their misogynist and racist attacks on women gamers and developers, even tried to justify their campaign as an attempt to restore the ethics needed in video game journalism. This attack directed at gamers and fighters of social justice, those believers in a better tomorrow, brought the hidden reality of harassment, cyberbullying, sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other injustices to light. While the work continues to be met with resistance, we see the power in community, in the persistent demand to break down the virtual walls of segregation, in the challenges to the sources of inequality and injustice. Yet, being woke isn't enough. We must, as Angela Rye reminds us, always be awake and at work in our disruption of the injustice of gaming or the worlds we each inhabit.

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From #Gamergate to the daily experiences of marginalization among gamers, gaming is entangled with mainstream cultures of systematic exploitation and oppression. Whether visible in the persistent color line that shapes the production, dissemination, and legitimization of dominant stereotypes within the industry itself, or in the dehumanizing representations often found within game spaces, many video games perpetuate injustice and mirror the inequities and violence that permeate society as a whole.

Drawing from the latest research and from popular games such as *World of Warcraft* and *Tomb Raider*, *Woke Gaming* examines resistance to spaces of violence, discrimination, and microaggressions in gaming culture. The contributors of these essays identify strategies to detox gaming culture and orient players toward progressive ends, illustrating the power and potential of video games to become catalysts for social justice.

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