chapter three

"AW FUCK, I GOT A BITCH ON MY TEAM!"

Women and the Exclusionary Cultures of the Computer Game Complex

JENNIFER DEWINTER AND CARLY A. KOCUREK

AS THE QUOTATION USED IN OUR TITLE MAKES CLEAR, WOMEN IN GAMING culture face more than a little hostility from outspoken male gamers.[1] The video game industry currently faces scrutiny from industry professionals, players, and cultural critics who deplore the lack of women and diversity in the production of games. A popular argument around this gender disparity is that games are for boys, and if we made games for girls, more women would enter the field. The numbers, however, do not support this claim: 45 percent of US game players are women of all ages, and the number hovers around 50 percent women players in other countries, as well.[2] Yet women make up only 14 percent of the production side of the industry, with 11 percent working in art and design and the other 3 percent in programming. The problem does not stem from educational disparities, we argue; women complete academic training in computer science, art, and design, and they are going on to careers that use these skills in demanding industries. Women make up 60 percent of workers in graphic design and 20 percent in computer industries—industries that use the same technologies and programs that are common in game production.[3] This points to a problem of culture, not of education, access, or even interest. And this culture was highlighted in November 2012, when Luke Crane casually tweeted, "Why are there so few lady game creators?" In response, hundreds of people who worked in the game industry, primarily women, started the #1reasonwhy hashtag, through which they cataloged the egregious harassment heaped on women in the industry.

In this chapter, we demonstrate that the participatory cultures of gaming aggressively resist feminist critiques of games and that these forms of male-dominated resistance continue to marginalize women in gaming industries and cultures. These discursive practices can be seen in the interactions between men and women in online gaming spaces, from gaming magazine editorial content to YouTube comments. Also, we consider the ways in which women who apply feminist critiques to the industry are verbally and psychologically abused—as in the backlash to Anita Sarkeesian's Kickstarter, horrifyingly illuminated by the "Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian" mini game (2012, Ben Spurr). And finally, we look to the ways in which women game industry professionals and women gamers are harassed in an anachronistic parody of 1950s works culture as cataloged under Twitter's #1reasonwhy.

In what follows, we chronicle this significant and often violent circling of the wagons and also theorize why this type of resistance occurs in a way that is absent from the discourse surrounding most popular media, such as books, television, or film. We interrogate what is at stake for those who police the boundaries of video games, protecting the parapets from the slow incursion of female gamers into the rarified male space of hard-core gamer and game maker. We consider here a large amount of gender-relevant data from across different areas of game culture, suggesting that the discourse around gender and the game industry is Foucauldian in that it is diffused broadly and implicates numerous actors across multiple institutions and cultural practices in policing borders. Within this, we argue that the antifemale policing in video game culture is an expression of sex and violence that depends on the rhetoric of isolation and rape. Further, these actions, intentionally or unintentionally, accomplish what antiwomen gamers want: they create an aggressively exclusionary culture of gaming with no space for women, their participation, or their voices, as players or as makers.

"Someone Explain to Me Why 50% of the World Population Is a 'Niche' Market": Hard-Core Gamers, Technological Play, and Male Spaces

Demographic numbers consistently prove that men and women tend to play games approximately equally, yet the foundational definition of gamer remains masculine.[4] Indeed, the very use of the term "hard core" not only brings to mind a dedicated male gamer but also the pornography industry. Pornography scholar Linda Williams develops the idea of pornotopia, which juxtaposes abundance and energy against scarcity and opposition to provide audiences with arousal within the dominant power structures of capitalism and patriarchy.[5] Pornography, then, provides abundance and energy and then spends itself in its play. So, too, is the promise made to the hard-core gamer: more games, more gameplay, more energy put into the game in a (porno-) utopia of play—and just to be clear here, more masculine. Both pornography and game culture—including the game industry as producer and workplace—offer the lure of a cultural form that caters to and seeks to satisfy male desires, promising an abundance of masculinist delights for those eager to indulge in such.

A number of scholars have examined this concept of hard-core gamer in an attempt to account for the many types of players who play games.[6] According to Aphra Kerr, the very designation of hard-core gamer is a construction of the game industry in an attempt to define a dedicated market.[7] And this definition, according to Mia Consalvo, does not account for other types of players who take their games equally seriously and spend significant time playing those games.[8] Yet this expanding of the demographic market does little to disrupt what Janine Fron and her collaborators define as the core market of hard-core gamers: "It is characterized by an adolescent male sensibility that transcends physical age and embraces highly stylized graphical violence, male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualized, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination."[9] However, as these authors point out, gamers are not necessarily a demographic defined by the industry, or at least not only defined by the industry. Rather, people self-select into this (often exclusionary) identity.

Even within the community, the definition and very existence of the hard-core gamer identity is problematized and questioned. According to Adrienne Shaw, even the apparently apolitical designation of "gamer" is fraught, as people who play video games do not necessarily identify nor want to identify themselves as gamers. She found in her ethnographic study that male participants were more willing to identify as "gamers," suggesting that the category as a whole is gendered.[10] This disparity has a very real precedent both in the history of video gaming and in the history of the underlying technologies. Computing in particular has been historically associated with men in cultural narratives, an association that effaces the real contributions of women computer researchers and programmers and serves to masculinize the field.

Critiques of gaming's gender trouble are nothing new; however, as the critiques mount, voices from the gamer community have come out strongly in defense of the hard-core gamer and the gamer in general, which exclude casual and female gamers. On the *Men Going Their Own Way* forum, which is a men's separatist space for men's rights activists, one discussion, posted under the title "WTF is with empowered women in video games now," demonstrates how even men who do not self-identify as hard-core gamers feel entitled to police women's participation and representation in video games:

> I am starting this thread because I see a new trend in the video/computer game world and that is the increase in strong playable female characters. . . . I call bullshit on this subject. *Video games are the last place for guys to hang out and now women are taking over.* Why not just save us the trouble and instead of eliminating our fantasy world just throw us in work camp to provide for their bastard children (literally speaking) while they shit all over us . . . wait they already do that.[11]

The extremists of the *Men Going Their Own Way* forum envision the reseparation of the sexes as a solution to their perceived marginalization. However, their rage

at women's trespass into gaming culture is echoed across the web, ranging from *Yahoo! Answers* to the *Steam* forums. The widely read gaming site *Kotaku* became infamous for its commenters' use of aggression to police participation not only in the site's discussion but in gaming culture more broadly.[12] The site became so unpleasant—particularly for women—that a browser extension named "Commentless Kotaku" was created to do nothing but hide *Kotaku* comments from view. While as late as January 2012, *Kotaku* was defending the discourse of its comments, the site has more recently changed its tune, expanding comment moderation to facilitate more discussion and reduce the brutality.[13]

Further, threats to women in gaming and in the game industry often deploy sex or the threat of sexual violence as a weapon. Many women, notably including *Depression Quest* (2013, Independent) designer Zoë Quinn, have been threatened with death and rape by raging male gamers, an event that is often identified as one of the flashpoints that started the #Gamergate hashtag. Quinn's ultimately successful efforts to have her game approved by the community-moderated Steam Greenlight earned her a cornucopia of on- and off-line harassment because she'd dared to make a game about depression; most harassment, however, came in the form of misogynistic insults. How, after all, dare she? At one point, she had received so many obscene and threatening phone calls that she stopped answering her phone—men would call to shout obscenities, to threaten rape, or to masturbate. Because of this, she only learned several days after the fact that her father was in the intensive care unit.[14] Following this, an ex-boyfriend decided to defame Quinn in a blog post, discrediting her work by claiming that she slept with games journalists to get positive reviews. This post started what would infamously be known as Gamergate, a movement of misogyny and harassment against feminism in general and individual women designers and scholars in particular. Likewise, Sarkeesian was treated to drawings and doctored fake photographs of her own sexual violation and explicitly threatened with rape and death and even had to cancel an invited talk at Utah State University because of a bomb threat.[15] At least one female game developer reported being sexually harassed by a games journalist during an interview; the developer went on to say that the incident was one of many that had led her to consider leaving the industry.[16]

The idea that gaming should be a rarified environment for men hearkens backward to Victorian-era ideas of separate spheres that placed women squarely outside of public culture. This ideology facilitates the treatment of women gamers as an aberration, as transgressors, as interlopers. Women belong in a different space, separate from the presumably masculine space provided by video games. While this resonates with a Victorian sensibility—the home as feminized space—we see even more in evidence a spatial segregation more akin to 1950s America. Some male gamers embrace gaming as a last bastion of homosocial male space, fighting to protect it from a slow creeping integration of gender. For these men, women's presence in games—as players, producers, or even characters—taints the form.

"Because 'Rape Is Historically Accurate,' Said the Half-Elven Wizard": Performing Sexual Aggression in Games, Performing Sexual Aggression in Life

That games are a bastion of sexual aggression is well documented.[17] Violent misogyny in game narratives is often defended as historically accurate or true to the narrative. While these claims are sometimes bizarre—as in the assertion, mocked in this section's title, that rape is a historically accurate part of a fantasy game—even cases where such a claim could be viewed as credible are frequently accompanied by real player aggression toward real women. Frank critique of sexism and misogyny in games, even when brief, often attracts outrage in two forms: attacks on the person (particularly if that person is a woman) who has highlighted the problem, or defenses of misogyny or harassment as key components of gaming culture. For example, in a review of *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013, Rockstar Games) produced for *GameSpot*, Carolyn Petit briefly described the game as "politically muddled and profoundly misogynistic" and made reference to "its serious issues with women." Overall, Petit rated the game with a 9 out of 10, a high score that indicates an excellent, if imperfect, game.[18] However, because Petit noted the game's problematic gender politics, the review attracted a cavalcade of abusive comments. An online petition calling for Petit's firing was begun and was later removed.[19] Moderation at *GameSpot* restrained some of the vitriol, but the comments elsewhere provide an archive of misogynistic and transmisogynistic abuse. Over a month after Petit's review posted to YouTube, it continued to garner comments like "Fuck this incomplet abomination freak, fuck you carolyn your a freak," and "Get this feminist fired."[20]

Petit's own gender identity—she is, in fact, a transgender woman—may mean that gaming's aggro cultural gatekeepers see her as a particularly deserving target, as they often deploy transmisogynistic jokes and remarks. But Petit is not alone among women reviewers and critics in attracting gendered attacks. Patricia Hernandez, a games journalist best known as a writer for *Kotaku*, was subject to the *IGN* thread titled "Is there a worse internet blogger than Patricia Hernandez at *Kotaku*?" This includes such gems as, "All the feminist bloggers on *Kotaku* are fucking awful," and "We should round up all the people like her in the world and exterminate them."[21] In one of a number of forum threads criticizing games journalist Leigh Alexander on *Giant Bomb*, a commenter said, "Ask me, and she sounds like one of those girls that plays video games solely to attract guys that do nothing but play video games because it's the only thing she can do to get any attention."[22] The idea that anyone might have built a career out of playing video games "to attract guys" would be laughable if it didn't echo routine efforts to expunge women from gaming.

Recently, women gamers and cultural critics have attended to sexual aggression in video games through the simple yet powerful act of archiving these interactions. In 2010, Jenny Haniver created an installation of the male and female

gamer experiences in which she collected and displayed comments that she had received while playing *Call of Duty* (2003, Activision) online. This was the first step in her archiving project, now maintained on her website Not in the Kitchen Anymore. Comments recorded here threaten rape, express sexual desire, and dismiss Haniver's abilities based on weight or age.[23] Likewise, the website Fat, Ugly or Slutty is an aggregate website in which people submit evidence of their harassment, offering a means of public shaming. The site's "About" page explains, "If having these messages posted online makes someone think twice about writing and sending a detailed description of their genitals, great!"[24]

A number of popular and academic sources attribute this type of action to anonymity; however, the atmosphere of in-person gaming communities complicates this argument.[25] Filamena tweeted on #1reasonwhy, "Because conventions, where designers are celebrated, are unsafe places for me. Really. I've been groped," which received a number of corroborating tweets about similar experiences.[26] This type of behavior at conventions marginalizes women as industry professionals.[27] Video game conventions often host what is commonly referred to as "booth babes": beautiful models who sell a pixilated story with the same tactics used to sell sports cars and speed boats.[28] This practice has recently come under scrutiny, with Penny Arcade Expo and Eurogamer Expo banning the use of booth babes. Yet publishers get around these rules by hiring "girl gamers" who just happen to be beautiful and scantily clad.[29] Worse yet, at the 2013 RTX convention, a male attendee appropriated satirical "fake geek girl" bumper stickers, sticking them onto the butts and backs of women at the conference.[30] RTX responded immediately, enforcing its no harassment policy and expelling this perpetrator. However, what this man had done was not completely out of line within the observable actions of convention communities. Any quick search for news items about sexual harassment and assault at conventions turns up a disturbing number of hits, such as Olajide Olatunji's YouTube video in which he records himself both harassing women at Eurogamer Expo and outright assaulting booth babes at the same event.[31]

The observations that Tracy Dietz makes about gender and violence within video games themselves could easily be extended to make sense of gamer culture in the material world. She argues that US culture eroticizes male dominance, which puts women in a subordinate position and increases acceptance of rape and sexual aggression.[32] This form of masculinity, especially as it plays out in video games, has real implications for people's tolerance of and even actions in support of sexual aggression toward women. For example, Karen Dill and her collaborators asked 120 females and 61 males (a mean age of 18.82) to view images from video games to determine how these images affected sexual harassment judgments and rape-supportive attitudes. They found that "the males who were exposed to the objectified female video game characters were the most tolerant of any of the groups towards sexual harassment."[33] Further, the longer that people are exposed to these types of images and attitudes the more they develop rape-supportive attitudes.[34]

A subgroup of gamers defend their alleged right to say egregious things and act in worse-than-juvenile ways under the banner of freedom of speech, which protects their "right" to be verbally and psychologically abusive. The most notable contemporary example is *Penny Arcade*'s Dickwolves debacle. In 2010, *Penny Arcade* posted a web comic that poked fun at the strange ethics and practices of games like *World of Warcraft* (2004, Blizzard Entertainment) that, during an in-game rescue scenario, would not allow players to save more slaves or hostages than the requisite number. In the comic, a remaining character asked to be saved because every night, he and his fellows "are raped to sleep by the dickwolves."[35] Following the publication of this strip, a number of readers, mostly women and some rape survivors, expressed their discomfort with the comic's use of rape as a punch line. Instead of recognizing the reception in a meaningful way, Mike Krahulik of *Penny Arcade* and forum participants mocked critics. Krahulik drew a flippant response in the following week's web comic, published a Dickwolf illustration, and began selling "Team Dickwolves" shirts and pennants. Eventually, *Penny Arcade* was pressured into removing the merchandise (to the dismay of some fans), which allowed the controversy to die down. However, at the 2013 PAX Prime convention, in a room packed with thousands of attendees, Krahulik said he regretted pulling the Dickwolves merchandise. The audience cheered. Those who spoke out against this ultimate defense and celebration of Dickwolves received a slew of rape and death threats from the site's loyal defenders.[36]

It is easy to read the Dickwolves defense as a form of hypermasculinity in the guise of free speech. That masculinity is often connected to technological mastery is well documented.[37] Further, masculinity is often defined in opposition to or as the inverse of femininity; thus, the implied syllogism suggests that women are not good at technology—technology is in the domain of the male.[38] We see here, in the performance of rape culture, not just a rearticulation of the masculine/feminine binary, but an extension of the separate spaces for male and female actions, which are guarded with threats of physical and sexual violence.

Rape and rape culture have always been ways of policing women and demarcating spaces where women are permitted. Women who are sexually assaulted are frequently chastised for their choices—clothes, location, relationships, alcoholic consumption, and the like—a phenomenon called "victim blaming." Amy Grubb and Emily Turner found that those who adhere to more traditional gender roles are more likely to blame victims because those female victims deviated from their expected roles.[39] Further research from Jesse Fox and collaborators shows that sexualized avatars in video games may even convince women and men to objectify the female body, which makes them more likely to support rape-myth attitudes.[40] More disturbing, according to these authors, is another finding: "It appears that users of sexualized avatars may be at risk for developing negative attitudes towards women and the self outside of the virtual environment."[41] Avatar representation matters. The more sexualized the avatar, the more likely women and men are to objectify women and subordinate women to the rape myth.

The rape myth in action requires both a sense of segregated space (women should not have been there to begin with) as well as cultural attitudes and practices that enable the objectification of women. In extreme examples of this, women are not seen as gamers; gamers are active participants in a broader sociocultural framework. Rather, women are for consumption as avatars and NPCs in male-centric story lines. When real women enter gaming spaces and ask for equal participatory power, the framework can be mobilized to deny them agency. In other words, if women come into gaming spaces, they are asking for it. The trajectory of the Dickwolves controversy makes a sick sense in this ideological formation: if a space is uncomfortable for women because of male behavior, that means that women should not go there, not that men should behave differently. This reasoning is not unique to online and fan spaces; it can be found in the workplace as well.

"But She Doesn't DRAW Like a GIRL": Feminized Skills, Glass Ceilings, and Locked Doors

The industry says that it wants more women working on developing games.[42] David Mullich's featured *Gamasutra* post "Wanted: More Female Game Developers" argues for this effort strongly after seeing the complete absence of women in his program.[43] Programs such as Girls Who Code, Black Girls Code, and the incubator Pixelles in Montreal attempt to target young women and provide them access to the skills needed to develop digital environments and games. And with women comprising almost half of the gaming population, one would expect that access and experience would translate into a desire to create. Yet Electronic Arts' chief talent officer, Gabrielle Toledano, argues that EA wants to hire more women but cannot find women who have the necessary skills.[44] However, even women who exhibit exceptional skill at either developing or playing games are often devalued or dismissed. It is easy to look at the #1reasonwhy tweet that makes up the title for this section to see the devaluing of skills based on gender. Thus, programs that teach advanced computer skills to girls and young women often ignore the earlier entrance points for this career trajectory, in this case, gaming.

Even when women are skilled gamers, their skills are quickly dismissed. For example, in a post to *Yahoo! Answers*, a user is frustrated that women "want credit" for beating him in-game and asks, "Why are women allowed to play video games?" He writes, "They ruin it. They know by being female people will go easier on them, team with them, give them things, etc. It's pathetic. And they'll pick 'hot' looking characters to have an advantage. It's just like real life without the battling. They use their looks to their advantage. It's annoying. Then if they beat you they try to take credit for it, as if they didn't get all these advantages first."[45] Hell hath no fury like a sore loser, perhaps, but this sentiment has been expressed elsewhere, often in spite of and over women's evidence of the harassment they face in gaming culture. Matthew Inman, who produces web comics as "The Oatmeal," posted a comic of a girl gamer who made a mistake that ruined the team's chances and was told everything was okay in condescending tones used for children. The artist wrote, "I was implying

two things: [1] When girls play, often times no one takes them seriously. [2] If they screw up, often times the room is filled with lonely dudes who say things like 'LOL that's okay! Will you marry me?' If I screw up I get eviscerated."[46] He ignored, at least initially, readers' angry responses, which pointed out both that his comic is an example of someone not taking women seriously as gamers and that women are rarely let off so easily in-game. Rather, women's in-game failure is often ascribed to gender, and their successes are ascribed to some man—a boyfriend, a brother—who played on their account or to men who have gone easy on them. These attitudes transfer to the workplace, where some men dismiss women's work, undermine their success, and isolate them from networks that would allow them to succeed.

This idea that women who succeed as gamers have either been propped up by adoring men blinded by their sexual attraction or have succeeded in spite of their inferior skills resonates between game culture and the game industry. We have conducted a series of interviews with women who work in gaming that, alongside online chronicles of similar experiences, evidence the prevalence of this myth. For example, TransformEnt tweeted on #1reasonwhy, "After being told she was hired to 'look pretty & make the guys happy', my old boss got him to repeat this in an email to HR."[47] The woman in the room becomes yet another sexualized object in the room, deskilled and vapid. And as indicated, Human Resources probably has policies against this, so this sexism is not necessarily institutionalized in the company; rather, it is institutionalized in the game complex as a whole.

Systemically, too, the industry discourages women from entering game development in a number of ways. First, according to *Game Developer Magazine*'s 2013 salary survey, the gendered disparity in salary is significant in all areas of game employment except programming and engineering (which is 96 percent male) (table 3.1).[48] The gender wage gap in the video game industry suggests that women

Table 3.1 Figures from *Game Developer Magazine's* 2013 salary survey

Occupation	Gender	Representation (%)	Average salary ($)
Artist/animator	Male	84	77,791
	Female	16	60,238
Game designer	Male	89	76,646
	Female	11	61,983
Producer	Male	77	85,591
	Female	23	78,989
Audio professional	Male	96	82,944
	Female	4	50,000
QA tester	Male	93	49,196
	Female	7	39,375
Business and legal	Male	82	108,571
	Female	18	82,292

are not provided economic incentive (or equal access) to step into a culture that actively mobilizes against them. Further, we see in these numbers a delineation of appropriate avenues for women, one that gets repeated in #1reasonwhy: "The worst sexism is the 'harmless' assumptions. I'm sick of being told art is the only appropriate career for a woman in games."[49] Some of this may be accounted for by Robin Potanin's designated "I" design methodology, which places men at the center of the design process: men make games that they want to play, which attracts more men into the game industry.[50] Looking at the male and female percentages in each of the creative domains suggests that, indeed, the "I" methodology continues to skew masculine.

When women do enter the industry, they are often in the minority, as low as 4 percent in their work pool. This leads, unsurprisingly, to feelings of isolation and anger. For example, in her blog *Dead Reckon*, Whitney Hills spins a story of her years in the video game industry: "You feel that the things that hurt you would never have happened if you weren't female, and on a certain level, you feel that you deserve it."[51] The feelings outlined in this posting are taken up in Ciara Byrne's article "The Loneliness of the Female Coder." She tells the story of a developer who was leaving her company: "At the end of our final status meeting, he launched into a description of a dream he had about me in which I was wearing Uma Thurman's *Kill Bill* catsuit and laying waste to some baddies with a sword. . . . How do you manage a team which is simultaneously picturing you in a yellow catsuit?"[52]

We see two terrible factors in place in these stories. First, the isolation: according to *The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology*, isolation leads women to drop out of technical fields because of its emotional toll and the inability to see a trajectory or career that accounts for all the stresses that women feel.[53] The second and more disturbing factor is the sense of "deserving it." The slow psychological violence—because that's what isolation is—turns the victim into the responsible agent. Here is the quieter and more conditional form of the rape myth: the woman in the male space, who is too young and too pretty, who would be included as an equal if she just weren't a woman. Indeed, acceptance of the rape myth, according to Martha Burt, correlates to an acceptance of interpersonal violence.[54] This violence can be extreme, such as the case of a Japanese woman who worked at Capcom and tried to commit suicide after prolonged bullying.[55] Further, with Gamergate organization, player communities are now aggressively harassing and bullying women in the workforce, often with terrible professional consequences.[56] The gamer culture in play is the gamer culture in work.

The feelings of loneliness and isolation lead to another significant problem in game production: silencing women's voices. Byrne speaks to this: "Although I was like them in many respects, I looked at things from a different angle, one which my colleagues often didn't recognize or adapt to. Why should they? I felt like the lone voice in the wilderness."[57] David Gaider writes about a similar phenomenon in discussing a peer review session for a plot in *Dragon Age* (2009, Bioware). After

the men provided feedback about what went well and what could be changed, one of the female writers spoke, and according to Gaider, "she brought up an issue. A big issue. It had to do with a sexual situation in the plot, which she explained could easily be interpreted as a form of rape," which the other women on the team also saw.[58] The writer was mortified, and the plot was revised. But Gaider's point has more to do with gender diversity in game development. Had no women been on the team, this scene would have gone into the game. Further, Gaider questions:

> Had that female writer been the lone woman, would her view have been disregarded as an over-reaction? A lone outlier? How often does that happen on game development teams, ones made up of otherwise intelligent and liberal guys who are then shocked to find out that they inadvertently offended a group that is quickly approaching *half of the gaming audience*?[59]

In other words, limited numbers of women are just as bad as no women if women are isolated and silenced in the workforce. Only through a critical mass can gender diversity effect positive change in a reportedly toxic environment. Yet, as Julie Prescott and Jan Bogg argue, the danger of bringing more women into the gaming industry is that they may be segregated and concentrated in female-dominated fields and subfields.[60] The salary survey points to this very phenomenon happening, with more women artists than programmers. And even then, the numbers are shockingly low.

The danger and isolation women feel doesn't have to do with whether women are good at their jobs; it has to do with whether they are in the workplace at all. Their presence is at best an anomaly, leading to isolation, or is interpreted as an invasion, requiring forceful defense. The forceful defense of game culture is publicly discussed and strategized over. ShrineNI's YouTube series "How to Gank a Girl Gamer," for example, outlines his strategies for harassing, or ganking, girl gamers. He introduces his second video thusly: "It's not just about balling in there, you know, ganking. There's actually tactics involved for this sort of thing." He outlines his tactics, and then, after literally teaching people how to drive women gamers out, he says quite explicitly, "I'm not a hero, I'm a silent guardian. A watchful protector."[61] According to gamers like ShrineNI, feminism is the blight. Women are manipulative and sadistic. Oh, and they are weaker both in-game and out of game.

"Who Decided It's Macho, Manly, and Cool to Disrespect and Hate Women?": Pushing Back and Moving Forward

When we first began writing about game culture gone rancid in 2012, we, too, were struck by isolation and depression because, as women game scholars, we subject ourselves to this culture daily.[62] But like others who stick it out, we continue to do it because we love games, the social aspects of play, the challenge of sport, the ability to design—or explore—worlds and narratives. What we see here and elsewhere is a call for a change in discourse. It's not just that we need more girl gamers; we already have them. It's not just that we need more women in the game industry;

women enter and are driven away. It's not just that we need more women writing and speaking up about this; they are, and they are attacked. It's that all these maneuvers must be reflected and protected by policies that shape the discourse of games, and those policies should be strict. Since that first draft of this chapter, we have seen the outcome of these issues at their extreme. The #Gamergate campaign, which organized itself around "ethics in games journalism," has maintained a disturbing momentum in organizing non-point-specific harassment of women and minorities in game culture writ large. If bomb, death, and rape threats were not enough, Gamergaters have also researched and posted home addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers, and credit card numbers of their victims. At their most pernicious, exclusionary cultures produce this: the violent policing of culture marked by threatened and real danger. In their landmark essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer persuasively make the case that homogenous cultural production can and does produce fascism.[63] This cycle is unfolding in games culture as we watch.

Nevertheless, we cannot and should not throw up our hands in despair. Interventions are possible and can be effective. Already, we have seen the positive impact of nondiscrimination policies. *Kotaku* acknowledged its community responsibility and now has a very clear policy concerning inclusiveness—attack comments will be blocked—changing the tone of the site significantly. This success story points to the dual components of change in institutionalized spaces: policy and enforcement. For example, Penny Arcade Expo has pro-women policies—they famously banned the use of booth babes—but those policies are inconsistently enforced. Hence, Dickwolves. Online play, too, has seen a shift in policy enforcement, thanks in part to the tireless work of Haniver and others who carefully record, report, and publicly expose harassment. For those policies to work, we need people like Haniver, recording horrific transcripts of play; like Tanya DePass, who founded I Need Diverse Games and advocates tirelessly for diversity both in on-screen representation and in the teams that produce games; like Sarkeesian, continuing her cultural criticism in the face of hostility; and like Quinn, who not only continues to make games but founded Crash Override Network to help others subjected to online harassment. And we assure our readers, producing these records and doing the work of these interventions becomes demoralizing, a job that we clock into instead of the safe magic circle of play. As Haniver has noted, even following the appropriate channels to report harassment does not always effect immediate change.[64] How many of us wouldn't just walk away? We know that in the process of writing this chapter, we often wanted to.

Underneath these positive actions is the constant threat that we cannot ignore. Gaming is gender segregated. Spaces and boundaries exist. Underlying the cultures of gaming is a darker culture of gendered segregation in the home, in the workplace, and in our play. While there are positive steps that we can and do

take to attend to the boundaries, we will likely always struggle against the conditional rhetorics of sexism. These ideological constructions are not limited to gaming; we see similar attrition in other technical and engineering fields. The problem is pervasive, and the violence and exclusion is performed over a lifetime of exposure. For example, as we read about isolation and attrition in the Harvard Business Review's *The Athena Factor*, we naturally felt sympathetic and angry about the reported cases that these professional women face. But there are untold numbers of people participating in video game culture, from young children to retired adults. And we know that exposure to this psychological violence will start far earlier for children playing games than it should, and that exposure will remain constant throughout their lives, training them to recognize the spaces and opportunities that they will and will not have access to. Should any doubt the lifetime conditioning that women are subjected to in gaming culture, we end with this quotation from one of our interviewees:

> My 8 year old loves minecraft [2011, Mojang]. . . . Occasionally we let her play in multi-player if one of us is nearby. One day she was [playing] around and she said, "someone said they want to have sex with me." I looked at the computer and sure enough, someone had written, "(her name), I want to have sex with you." I got on the keyboard and wrote, "She's 8. Say that again." They then disconnected.[65]

JENNIFER DEWINTER is Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Director of the Interactive Media and Game Development Program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She is coeditor of the books *Video Game Policy* and *Computer Games and Technical Communication* and author of *Shigeru Miyamoto: Super Mario Bros., Donkey Kong, The Legend of Zelda*.

CARLY A. KOCUREK is Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities and Media Studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology. She is author of *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade* and *Brenda Laurel: Pioneering Games for Girls*, and she develops games for serious and educational purposes.

Notes

1. Jenny Haniver, "Aw Fuck, I Got an Idiot on My Team," *Not in the Kitchen Anymore* (blog), May 6, 2013, http://www.notinthekitchenanymore.com/aw-fuck-i-got-an-idiot-on-my-team.

2. Entertainment Software Association, *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry* (Washington, DC: Entertainment Software Association, 2013), 3.

3. Jennifer deWinter and Carly Kocurek, "#1reasonwhy Women in the Gaming Industry Matters," *Flow* 17, no. 7 (2012), http://flowtv.org/2013/02/1-reason-why-women-in-the-gaming-industry-matters/.

4. The quotation in this section's title comes from Ian Schreiber, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, November 27, 2012, 8:20 p.m., https://twitter.com/IanSchreiber.

5. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1989), 155.

6. For more on hard-core gaming, see chapter 2.

7. Aphra Kerr, *The Business and Culture of Digital Games: Gamework and Gameplay* (London: Sage, 2006), 97.

8. Mia Consalvo, "Hardcore Casual: Game Culture *Return(s) to Ravenhearst*," paper presented at 4th International Conference on Foundations of Digital Games, Port Canaveral, FL, April 26–30, 2009.

9. Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce, "The Hegemony of Play," in *Situated Play: Proceedings of Digital Games Research Association 2007 Conference* (Tokyo, Japan: DIGRA, 2007), 7.

10. Adrienne Shaw, "Do You Identify as a Gamer? Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Gamer Identity," *New Media and Society* 14, no. 1 (2012): 35.

11. Quoth the OP, "WTF Is with Empowered Women in Video Games Now," *Men Going Their Own Way Forums*, 2013 (emphasis added). The original forum is now blocked, but it was captured on Jess's *STFU, Conservatives* blog in 2013, at http://stfuconservatives.tumblr.com/post/15737396521.

12. Stephen Totilo, "A Note about 'Brutal' Comments and a *Kotaku* for Everyone," *Kotaku*, June 26, 2013, http://kotaku.com/a-note-about-brutal-comments-and-a-kotaku-for-everyon-589637991.

13. Kirk Hamilton, "*Kotaku* Commenters Do Not Suck," *Kotaku*, January 13, 2012, http://kotaku.com/5875949/kotaku-commenters-do-not-suck.

14. Zack Kotzer, "The Sexist BS Women Who Make Video Games Have to Deal With," *Vice*, January 24, 2014, http://www.vice.com/read/female-game-designers-are-being-threatened-with-rape.

15. Ralitsa Vassileva, "Online Trolls Attack Feminist Media Critic," *CNN*, April 18, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNyxq-gqFNU.

16. Cassandra Khaw, "Game Developer Speaks about Journalist Who Sexually Harassed Her," *Daily Dot*, February 3, 2014, http://www.dailydot.com/gaming/game-developer-sexual-harassment-journalist/.

17. See, for example, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds., *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun, eds., *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). The quotation in this section's title comes from @GeekGirlsRule, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, December 6, 2012, 7:27 a.m., https://twitter.com/GeekGirlsRule.

18. Carolyn Petit, "GameSpot Reviews: *Grand Theft Auto V*," *YouTube*, September 16, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABiPHyaKgTw.

19. Willy, "Report: GameSpot Reviewer Gives *GTA V* a Generous Score, Readers Want Her Fired," *SystemWars Magazine*, September 16, 2013, https://systemwarsmonthly.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/report-gamespot-reviewer-gives-gta-v-a-generous-score-readers-want-her-fired.

20. Petit, "GameSpot Reviews."

21. "Is There a Worse Internet Blogger than Patricia Hernandez at *Kotaku*?" *IGN*, May 9, 2013, http://www.ign.com/boards/threads/is-there-a-worse-internet-blogger-than-patricia-hernandez-at-kotaku.453010535/.

22. "So Does Leigh Alexander Do Nothing but Criticize People?" *Giant Bomb*, 2012, http://www.giantbomb.com/forums/off-topic-31/so-does-leigh-alexander-do-nothing-but-criticize-p-537308/.

23. See Jenny Haniver, *Not in the Kitchen Anymore*, http://www.notinthekitchenanymore.com.

24. "About," *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*, http://fatuglyorslutty.com/about (accessed December 7, 2016).

25. See, for example, Kirk R. Williams and Nancy G. Guerra, "Prevalence and Predictors of Internet Bullying," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 41, no. 6 (2007): S14–S21; Julie Zhuo, "Where Anonymity Breeds Contempt," *New York Times*, November 30, 2010, p. A27; and *Penny Arcade*, "Green Blackboards (and Other Anomalies)," March 19, 2004, http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic/2004/03/19/.

26. @filamena, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, November 26, 2012, 3:45 p.m., https://twitter.com/filamena.

27. Marc J. Natale, "The Effect of a Male-Oriented Computer Gaming Culture on Careers in the Computer Industry," *ACM SIGCAC Computers and Society* 32, no. 2 (2002): 24–31.

28. For more on booth babe controversies, see chapter 4.

29. Kate Cox, "Eurogamer Expo Begins Booth Babe Ban Next Fall," *Kotaku*, October 3, 2012, http://kotaku.com/5948759/eurogamer-expo-begins-booth-babe-ban-next-fall; Junglist, "So Why Were There Booth Babes at PAX Aus?" *Kotaku*, July 24, 2013, http://www.kotaku.com.au/2013/07/so-why-were-there-booth-babes-at-pax-aus/; Ben Kuchera, "Penny Arcade Expo Fans Come Out against Booth Babes," *Ars Technica*, June 7, 2010, http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2010/06/penny-arcade-expo-fans-come-out-against-booth-babes/.

30. "Fake geek girls" is a new construction that presupposes that all girls and women are not invested in the fan community and the objects of that community, in this case video games. Rather, these fake geek girls are only interested in going to these events to have access to the men who are in attendance.

31. Wesley Copeland, "Sexually Assaulting Women (Verbally or Otherwise) at Gaming Conventions Is Not OK," *Gameranx*, October 5, 2012, http://www.gameranx.com/features/id/9838/article/sexually-assaulting-women-at-gaming-conventions-is-not-ok/.

32. Tracy L. Dietz, "An Examination of Violence and Gender Role Portrayals in Video Games: Implications for Gender Socialization and Aggressive Behavior," *Sex Roles* 38, no. 5 (1998): 430.

33. Karen E. Dill, Brian P. Brown, and Michael A. Collins, "Effects of Exposure to Sex-Stereotyped Video Game Characters on Tolerance of Sexual Harassment," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44, no. 5 (2008): 1406.

34. Ibid.

35. Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins, "The Sixth Slave," *Penny Arcade*, August 11, 2010, http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic/2010/08/11.

36. See, for example, Rachel Edidin, "Why I'm Never Going Back to Penny Arcade Expo," *Wired*, September 5, 2013, http://www.wired.com/underwire/2013/09/penny-arcade-expo-dickwolves/; and Elizabeth Sampat, "Quit Fucking Going to PAX Already, What Is Wrong with You," http://elizabethsampat.com/quit-fucking-going-to-pax-already-what-is-wrong-with-you/ (accessed December 7, 2016).

37. See, for example, Christina Dunbar-Hester, "Geeks, Meta-Geeks, and Gender Trouble: Activism, Identity, and Low-power FM Radio," *Social Studies of Science* 38, no. 2 (2008): 201–232.

38. Ricard A. Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).

39. Amy Grubb and Emily Turner, "Attribution of Blame in Rape Cases: A Review of the Impact of Rape Myth Acceptance, Gender Role Conformity and Substance Use on Victim Blaming," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 5 (2012): 449–450.

40. Jesse Fox, Jeremy N. Bailenson, and Liz Tricase, "The Embodiment of Sexualized Virtual Selves: The Proteus Effect and Experiences of Self-Objectification via Avatars," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29 (2013): 932.

41. Ibid., 935.

42. The quotation in this section's title comes from Fryda Wolff, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, November 28, 2012, 3:20 p.m., https://twitter.com/FrydaWolff.

43. David Mullich, "Wanted: More Female Game Developers," *Gamasutra*, August 20, 2013, http://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/DavidMullich/20130820/198618/Wanted_More_Female_Game_Developers.php.

44. Gabrielle Toledano, "Women and Video Gaming's Dirty Little Secrets," *Forbes*, January 18, 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeswomanfiles/2013/01/18/women-and-video-gamings-dirty-little-secrets/.

45. N, "Why Are Women Allowed to Play Video Games?" *Yahoo! Answers*, 2013, http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20130630232317AAWsLFs.

46. See Alice Marie, "Really, the Oatmeal? REALLY?" *Geekquality*, April 18, 2012, http://www.geekquality.com/really-the-oatmeal-really.

47. TransformEnt, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, November 27, 2012, 1:24 a.m., https://twitter.com/Transform_Ent.

48. Patrick Miller, "Industry in Flux: The 12th Annual *GD* Magazine Salary Survey," *Game Developer*, April 2013, pp. 015–021, http://twvideo01.ubm-us.net/o1/vault/GD_Mag_Archives/GDM_April_2013.pdf.

49. Anthea Smith, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, November 27, 2012, 12:23 a.m., https://twitter.com/AntheaCreative.

50. Robin Potanin, "Forces in Play: The Business and Culture of Video Game Production," in *Fun and Games '10: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Fun and Games* (New York: ACM Press, 2010), 135–143.

51. Whitney Hills, "Girls! Games! Onions!" *Dead Reckon* (blog), 2013, http://www.dead-reckon.com/post/60762312852/games-girls-onions.

52. Ciara Byrne, "The Loneliness of the Female Coder," *Fast Company*, September 11, 2013, http://www.fastcolabs.com/3008216/tracking/minding-gap-how-your-company-can-woo-female-coders.

53. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Carolyn Buck Luce, Lisa J. Servon, Laura Sherbin, Peggy Shiller, Eytan Sosnovich, and Karen Sumberg, *The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2008).

54. Martha R. Burt, "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38, no. 2 (1980): 229.

55. Brian Ashcraft, "Japanese Game Developer Apparently Harassed So Much, She Attempted Suicide," *Kotaku*, May 18, 2012, http://kotaku.com/5911353/japanese-game-developer-apparently-harassed-so-much-she-attempted-suicide.

56. In 2016, Nintendo employee Alison Rapp became a target and was bullied by Gamergaters or perhaps by a spin-off group called Revolt; members of these communities sent Nintendo messages, circulated personal defamation accusations online, and directly harassed her. She no longer works for Nintendo. See, for example, Patrick Klepek, "The Ugly New Front in the Neverending Video Game Culture War," *Kotaku*, March 4, 2016, http://kotaku.com/the-ugly-new-front-in-the-neverending-video-game-cultur-1762942381.

57. Byrne, "Loneliness of the Female Coder."

58. David Gaider, "The Female Perspective in Game Development," *Bittersweetest Thing*, 2013, http://the-gaider-archives.tumblr.com/post/108897777603/the-female-perspective-in-game-development.

59. Ibid. (emphasis in original).

60. Julie Prescott and Jan Bogg, "Segregation in a Male-Dominated Industry: Women Working in the Computer Games Industry," *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology* 3, no. 1 (2011): 220.

61. Ibid.

62. The quotation in this section's title comes from @MissMeltdown, #1reasonwhy post, *Twitter*, October 21, 2013, 12:47 a.m., https://twitter.com/MissMeltdown_.

63. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (London: Sage, 2007), 34–43.

64. Haniver has noted this on her blog several times, and *Kotaku* picked up one of her stories in Jason Schreier, "Microsoft's Slow Response to Xbox Harassment Leaves One Woman Stunned," *Kotaku*, August 15, 2013, http://kotaku.com/microsofts-slow-response-to-xbox-harassment-leaves-one-1139807887.

65. E-mail interview by the authors, September 2013.