Why #WomenAreTooHardToAnimate: Exploring gender and identity in communities of play

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ABSTRACT

Although around fifty percent of gamers are female, video games are still highly gendered as a male activity, and the industry often targets a majority male audience. The stereotype that women do not play video games, or only play certain kinds of games, makes the Gamergate event of 2014 particularly interesting. During Gamergate several women in the game industry were harassed online by gamers, including rape and death threats, to the extent that some had to leave their homes in the interest of safety. This thesis examines why gender is such a significant issue in the video game industry and communities of play, and produces the tensions that led to and were evident during Gamergate. Part of that examination involves the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Deleuze and Guattari are useful in part because their critique of philosophy encourages a shift away from the binary oppositions that typically appear to be at the root of this tension in game culture. Specifically, this thesis examines three questions, divided into three broader parts: (1) how gender is a factor in the content and production of video games; (2) the affects that video games amplify, and how they can impact identity; and (3) how these affects permeate and flow throughout communities of play. Part of what this thesis demonstrates is that so-called video game culture is constituted by a far more diverse range of people than what the industry has typically catered and produced for. Central to the production and consumption of games, and to the sorts of tensions that arose during Gamergate, is, I argue, what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘affect’. In this manner I argue that for some gamers, increased diversity of games, their producers, and their players have challenged their 'gamer' territory. Highly reliant on the gamer identity, they are resistant to new experiences and affects, and turn to destruction.
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Introduction

If I ever see you are doing a pannel [sic] at an event I am going to, I will literally kill you. You are lower than shit and deserve to be hurt, maimed, killed, and finally, graced with my piss on your rotting corpse a thousand times over

(Malone 2017)

On the 19th of August 2014, Gamergate began. Game developer Zoë Quinn was doxxed after her ex-boyfriend published a public blog post accusing her of receiving positive reviews of her game because she had sexual relations with numerous male games journalists. Strangers made abusive calls to her and her parents, ranging from heavy breathing and requests for a blowjob, to threats of maiming, rape, and death (Quinn 2014a). Harassers also mailed derogatory material – in Quinn’s words, '[n]ude photos of me were dug up, printed out, jizzed on by strangers, and mailed to colleagues, friends, and family' (Quinn 2017). Six days after the initial attack, Quinn tweeted that ‘[w]orking in games has left me temporarily homeless, my family harassed, my friends' company destroyed for defending me, & my life threatened’ (2014b). She was diagnosed with complex PTSD (Malone 2017), and documented sixteen gigabytes of harassing material (Stuart 2014). Yet Quinn was not the only target, and soon numerous other women and men connected to video games were harassed, including ‘game designers, journalists, critics, and allies’ (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 3). The vitriol was so extreme it reached mainstream news, including CBS (Duncan 2014) and The New York Times (Wingfield 2014) in the US, and ABC (Schafter 2014); and News.com.au (Craw & Tucker

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1 Doxxing refers to publicly sharing someone’s private information (Massanari 2017, p. 331). This can include the victim's 'real-life name, phone number, address, and/or workplace' (Phillips 2015, p. 78).
in Australia, bringing gender struggles in gaming culture to the attention of mainstream society.

Gamergate is interesting for a number of reasons. For one, it illustrates the contentious issue of women’s treatment in the game industry, a precursor to many debates happening today, such as the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo hashtag surged in popularity in 2017 when, following numerous allegations of sexual assault against film producer Harvey Weinstein, actor Alyssa Milano encouraged women to use the tag if they had been sexually assaulted (Slawson 2017). The #MeToo movement has since come to encompass women's experiences with sexual harassment in numerous other industries, including hospitality (Sainato 2018), medicine (Chuck 2018), and in the Silicon Valley (Benner 2017; Hepler & Levin 2018). Gamergate also heralded a surge of growth in the alt-right movement. Gamergate was largely fuelled by alt-right commentator Milo Yiannopoulos, who was hired by Steve Bannon to draw gamers to his alt-right news website Breitbart, and turn them into Trump supporters (J. Green 2017, p. 96). Social media plays a significant role in all of these movements, such as Twitter, Reddit, and 4chan, whether used as a tool to disseminate information, attack others, or engage in criticism or debate.

In the context of this thesis, Gamergate is interesting because it not only illustrates that gender is a highly contentious issue in game communities, but that there is change. There is a lack of female employees working at game companies (Weststar et al. 2016, p. 10), and they often experience discrimination (Ochsner 2017). Female game characters are often markedly absent from video games, and sexualised when they are present (Lynch et al. 2016, pp. 567–568). Female players are also often harassed in game spaces, and such harassment is frequently of a sexual nature (Fox & Tang 2016). Historically and in the popular imagination, ‘gamers’ are constructed as young, predominantly Caucasian men who enjoy ‘hardcore’ games, often shooters with militaristic themes, valuing competition and achievement, and engaging in aggressive behaviour. Yet over the past decade this identity has become increasingly
inaccurate, as players become increasingly diverse in terms of age and gender (Renevey 2014; Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, pp. 6 & 13; Borowiecki & Bakhshi 2017, p. 5; Ipsos Connect 2017, p. 2; ESA 2017, p. 7). Further, with the rise of indie gaming, more varied genres are becoming available and popular. So-called casual games, often viewed as the opposite of ‘hardcore’ games (Juul 2010, p. 8), form a significant part of the market. The foundation of the gamer identity is shifting, and for Gamergaters, the growing presence of female players is illustrative of this shift.

For many gamers, change is threatening. Games provide a space where players feel that they have a sense of control – what Huizinga (1949, p. 10) calls a magic circle outside of everyday life. It is important here to note that video games are a somewhat marginalised medium, often viewed as low-brow entertainment\(^2\) (Galloway 2006, p. 85), and are associated with numerous moral panics (Quandt & Kowert 2016, p. 176), from the perpetrators of the Columbine Shooting being fascinated by \textit{DOOM}\(^3\) (id Software 1993; King & Borland 2003, p. 175), to the World Health Organization (2018) recognising ‘gaming disorder’ as a diagnosable condition. As the gamer identity has come under attack, women have stood-in as the archetypal ‘other’ for this community and have subsequently become associated with their broader anxieties and fears. As Braithwaite states, ‘Gamergaters’ grievances take shape via the righteous rhetoric of a crusade, the objectification and exclusion of women, and the argument that gamer masculinity itself is under siege’ (2016, p. 7). This explanation begs the question of why Gamergaters have viewed women as the agents of their oppression, as opposed to games journalists, communities or social norms more broadly. As a result, this thesis focuses on the question of why gender is such a significant category in game communities.

\(^2\) For Juul (2005, ch. 1), this is because games are an aspect of ‘geek and adolescent male culture’.

\(^3\) Although game studies is a significant area of research, there is no clear convention as to how to cite video games. I wish to give the creators the respect they deserve, while adhering to academic convention, wherein video games tend to be referenced in a similar way to film. Therefore, when I have spoken about a game at length or in detail, I have provided a citation in the first instance. If the game is mentioned in passing, where the details are not relevant, I have not.
There has been much written about games and gender. Much of the literature focuses on the representation of female characters and possible effects, lamenting that there are few women in games and when they are present they are often sexualised (Miller & Summers 2007; Downs & Smith 2010; Summers & Miller 2014; Behm-Morawitz 2014; Johnson 2015; Lynch et al. 2016). Yet, a lack of diverse racial representation is also a problem in most games (Wohn 2011; Leonard 2006; Dickerman, Christensen & Kerl-Mcclain 2008; Williams et al. 2009; Downs & Smith 2010; Schröder 2008; Near 2013; Behm-Morawitz 2014; Summers & Miller 2014; Johnson 2015; Lynch et al. 2016), and there was no overt racial element in Gamergate (although race was an issue, as I will discuss). Further, media effects are contentious. Some scholars have found that the sexualised representation of women in games negatively impacts male players’ attitudes towards women (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro 2009; Yao, Mahood & Linz 2010; Gabbiadini et al. 2016). Yet others find that sexist attitudes are unrelated to playing games (Breuer et al. 2015; Ferguson & Donnellan 2017). While the representation of female characters is lamentable in many games, this does not solely account for Gamergaters’ negative perceptions of women.

Another possible explanation for Gamergate is that men are more driven to play ‘hardcore’ games than women, and that women’s absence from these game spaces causes them to become associated with masculinity and aggressiveness. There is a significant body of literature that investigates gender differences in game preferences, which position males as more inclined to play video games, or more inclined to play certain kinds of games (Brunner, Bennett & Honey 1998; Bonanno & Kommers 2005; Kinzie & Joseph 2008; Van Looy, Courtois & Vermeulen 2011; Vermeulen et al. 2011; Homer et al. 2012; Hsu 2013). However, such work engages with a polarisation of gender, which is rejected by a host of other scholars who suggest there are few differences between the play behaviour of men and women (Amory & Molomo 2012), and point out the myriad social and cultural forces that impact play preferences (Lucas & Sherry 2004; Hayes 2005; Jenson, de Castell & Fisher 2007; Jenson,
Fisher & Castell 2011), domestic settings in particular (Schott & Horrell 2000; Thornham 2008). Such work implies that when Gamergaters perceive differences in men and women’s play preferences or behaviour, they mistake the social and cultural construction of gender for biology. That is, even though there is no conclusive evidence that play preferences are inherently gendered, Gamergaters clearly still closely identify and protect a categorically masculine conception of ‘gamer’.

There is a significant amount of literature noting that women experience much more harassment, particularly gendered, than men during play⁴ (Kuznekoff & Rose 2013), which can lead to women ruminating and withdrawing from game spaces (Fox & Tang 2016). Scholars have applied psychological models to understand why players engage in this behaviour, including Social-Dominance-Orientation (Fox & Tang 2014), and evolutionary theory (Kasumovic & Kuznekoff 2015). However, such models focus on individuality, when others note the role of social identity (Hughes & Louw 2013; Tang & Fox 2016). In fact, many scholars have examined the effect that gender and gamer stereotypes have on players’ game and gender performances (Dezuanni 2006; Beavis & Charles 2007; Hutchinson 2007; Taylor, Jenson & de Castell 2009; Eklund 2011; Stabile 2014; Kaye & Pennington 2016). Shaw in particular investigates gamer culture and the gamer identity, noting that the latter has a powerful legacy even though it is no longer relevant to most players in terms of demographics and play preferences (2010, 2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). It is possible then, that harassment of women in game spaces is less about innate aggression, but the identification players feel with an aggressive, hypermasculine gamer identity.

It is clear that gender plays a significant role in game communities, more so than in others that develop around media, such as film or literature. Yet, much of the above work on gender in game communities tends to treat gender as a total and defining force, or game communities as a uniquely male-dominated space. In this thesis, I examine the importance of

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⁴ Scholars have also made connections between harassment and race (Gray 2012; Nakamura 2014).
gender by examining the issue predominantly through Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy in conjunction with others, such as Butler’s performativity, Bourdieu’s habitus and cultural capital, and Ahmed’s economies of hate and fear. Deleuze and Guattari’s work, I argue, helps me to move beyond a binary opposition of gender (Markula 2006, p. 43); understand subjectivity as part of a constantly-changing assemblage (Blackman et al. 2008, p. 15), and examine what actions or forces do, rather than what they represent (Colebrook 2002, pp. 120–121). In short, Deleuze and Guattari’s work refuses to view the world through a fixed taxonomy or hierarchy of categories, and is instead flexible and constantly in motion (Olkowski 1999, p. 15). Such an approach makes it clear that, particularly following the events of #MeToo, the attitudes and behaviour exhibited during Gamergate are not due to gender as such, but the idea that gender is governing and totalising.

In order to address the issue of why gender is such a category in game communities, this thesis is divided into three parts, which each address a research question. Part One addresses how gender is a factor in game content and production. I explore this through two chapters. In the first chapter, I provide an explanation of the Gamergate campaign, and establish that a lack of female players is unlikely to be its cause. Indeed, video games are played by an increasingly diverse range of people, and so it appears that the coding of video games as masculine, the mapping of gender onto play, is a significant source of tension. In the second chapter, I turn to the game industry, introducing what Fron et al. (2007, p. 1) call a ‘hegemony of play’, a collection of structures through which certain values and norms of games and play are reified by the male elites of the industry. Here I provide an overview of how female characters are presented in video games, and note that their lack of presence and frequent sexualisation can be linked back to women’s treatment in the game industry as a whole. In sum, social expectations of gender – broadly, that violence and technology is masculine – have significantly influenced who works in the game industry, what kinds of games are produced, and how those games are marketed to audiences.
Part Two introduces the Deleuze and Guattarian concepts that I use throughout the thesis, in order to address what kinds of affects video games amplify, and how they impact player identities. Chapter Three, acknowledging that the hegemony of play is evident in women’s depiction as game characters and their treatment in the industry, establishes that it is problematic to simply examine how female characters are designed, as there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ representation. Yet it is also problematic to simply examine games as form, as social factors can be overlooked. Therefore this chapter introduces Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the assemblage as a way of understanding a game’s contents and expressions, or what they do, rather than what they represent. The concept of the assemblage provides the framework required for other Deleuze and Guattarian concepts, and allows me to envision the complex forces that are at work in creating and interpreting gender in a game.

The second chapter of Part Two examines how norms and categories such as gender can become highly influential in game, creator, and player assemblages. The focus here is on how gender functions as a territorialising force in games and game communities. I introduce Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the refrain as a way to understand what produces structures and norms in a given assemblage. To examine the ethical dimensions of refrains, I also introduce Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between the molar and molecular, explaining how, in the context of video games, gender is often a molar, standardising force, that results in global, transcendental, and polarising assumptions about games and gender. The final chapter of Part Two draws from these concepts, exploring why gender is such a territorialising force in the gamer identity, and how it is produced and challenged by the industry and players. It introduces Deleuze and Guattari’s faciality, a process by which a certain norm or ‘face’ becomes the standard according to which others are compared. Here I provide an account of the gamer ‘face’, and draw from Butler and Bourdieu to explain how players draw from different kinds of capital to perform and challenge that identity. While this highly masculine gamer stereotype is becoming an increasingly inaccurate representation of
players, it is still a commonly-held image that players must negotiate with in social contexts, is integral to many Gamergaters’ sense of self.

In the final Part of the thesis, I explore how affects permeate and flow throughout communities of play. Part Three builds from the understanding that the construct of the gamer, while inaccurate, can significantly impact how players view themselves and others. It begins with Chapter Six, which considers what exactly video games do, and why they have a significant impact on players. I explain that video games are particularly good at generating affect, opening up players to new experiences. Affects can extend into lines of flight, which, if unobstructed, can extend into a becoming – a positive force that can foster new connections, recordings, and productions. However, a line of flight can also be blocked if one is resistant to new experiences. Indeed, for Guattari (1995, p. 4), technology operate[s] at the heart of human subjectivity', which is part of the reason, I argue, that the norms and categories associated with video games have become a vital part of some player's identities. It is precisely the significant role that video games have in the constitution of some player's identities, in combination with their affective nature, that causes certain players to close themselves off from experiences that challenge their sense of self.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I examine Gamergate as an economy of hate and fear, where, fearing losing their identities as gamers, Gamergaters lash out with hate against so-called oppressors and corruptors. While economic pressures in the industry have influenced how game companies and marketers conceive of gender – in particular, the way that companies and marketers develop games for certain reliable target demographics – the industry is under pressure to change as players become increasingly diverse, which generates tension in some players. Here I use Ahmed's notion of economies of hate and fear to explore what Deleuze and Guattari call the dangers of lines of flight. These dangers are a sense of clarity, being sure of a certain interpretation of reality, a fear of losing the structures that provide security, feelings of disgust or hate, and a desire to maintain power or control over a given territory. Gamergaters
were resistant to lines of flight – resistant to experiences that could destabilise their sense of self – and reacted with vitriol in an attempt to uphold their hypermasculine gamer territory.

This thesis argues that although video gaming has a unique economic and social history that makes it particularly prone to sexism and gender categorisation, Gamergate occurred largely because of change, of diversification in the game industry and of players. Second, it is because video games are particularly good at generating affect that they have such significant potential at mediating experiences and allowing players to make new connections. Yet for the same reason players can be highly restrictive about what experiences they want to have, particularly when they are already feeling under threat with the increase of more diverse games and players, and when video games are often portrayed by many as a lowbrow form of entertainment. Third, Gamergate can be understood as players lashing out and rejecting these opportunities for difference, these new lines of flight. Here it is vital to acknowledge that the vitriol exhibited towards women during Gamergate is not unlike that which occurs in other contexts, such as the #MeToo movement. It is clear that Gamergate, and the way that it was conducted using social media, presaged current events. This is perhaps no accident, considering the involvement of people such as Milo Yiannopoulos and Steve Bannon. Their involvement, as well as other connections to the alt-right, suggest that we would do well to note and address misogynistic attitudes and behaviour in society more widely.

As for possible responses, I suggest three avenues for action to improve women’s treatment in video game communities. First, game developers, particularly AAA developers, should include more diversity in their games, in regard to the kinds of games they create as well as the depiction of characters within them. While it is understandable that companies want to ensure financial success and avoid backlash from a vocal section of players, producing the same gamer refrains risks alienating the majority of players, and will not encourage a change in problematic player’s attitudes. Second, game companies must take action to ensure that they value diversity in their hiring and work practices. It is not just that companies
should hire diverse employees, but they should ensure that they are supported in the workplace and that diversity is understood to be a company value. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it is vital that game companies establish clear codes of conduct and follow through on punishments for vitriolic behaviour. Players should also make an effort to call out and curb harassing behaviour where possible. Accountability is significant and must be taken seriously by all stakeholders.
Part I
Chapter One: Gamergate and Players

Gender is a significant issue in video game ‘culture’ as a whole, including in representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (Hall 1997, p. 1). The significance of gender was especially exposed during Gamergate, which illustrated the extreme vitriol that women can experience in game communities, the game industry, and in games journalism. Gamergaters’ behaviour illustrates that they believe video gaming is a space where women do not belong, and where their right to be present is questioned. As Gray, Buyukozturk, and Hill state, ‘the unchecked gender imbalance and discrimination that has been ever-present in gaming has fostered a climate of inequality and complicity in oppression’ (2017, p. 4). Part One of this thesis provides an overview of Gamergate and outlines the various existing explanations in the literature for why gender is such a significant issue in video game culture. Specifically, in this chapter I address the question of why, considering that women comprise a significant number of players, female players are so often viewed as aberrant and treated poorly in game communities.

The targeting of women during Gamergate suggests that video games are a male-dominated hobby. As part of addressing this issue, and whether such male-domination is actually the case, the chapter provides a literature review to outline who plays what kinds of games. First I provide a brief overview of Gamergate. Second, I provide an account of who plays video games, noting an increase in female and older players. Third, I outline how theorists of play conceptualise why people play – notably, none mention gender, and it is games scholars who have suggested that men and women play for different reasons and have different play preferences. I then examine the suggestion that belief in gender roles has contributed to video games being viewed as a masculine technology, and can impact player’s
engagement with video games. Last, I outline how scholars have found that female players’ experiences of harassment can prevent them from being visible in game spaces, even where they may constitute a large proportion of players, and in some cases even a majority. A key argument of this chapter is that while the stereotype that video game play is largely or exclusively male can be safely and easily dispelled, gender roles and stereotypes can nonetheless impact play in significant ways.

I. Gamergate

Gamergate was a watershed moment, a campaign of harassment which (mostly) targeted women in the game industry. Gamergate is a complex event that is difficult to fully document because it occurred across numerous social media sites (Braithwaite 2016, p. 3). However, it is clear that it began with Eron Gjoni’s public defamation of his ex-girlfriend, game developer Zoe Quinn. In a public blog post, Gjoni (2014a) accused Quinn of receiving positive reviews of her game Depression Quest (Quinn, Lindsey & Schankler 2013) because she slept with games journalists. Gamergaters were outraged at the suggestion that a female developer was given fake positive reviews. Such outrage was not only because Quinn was accused of using sex to gain positive reviews of her game, but because her game challenged the typical idea of what a game is – being an interactive fiction that explores a highly subjective and personal experience of depression. Hence, Gamergaters exhibited misrecognition – the idea that a female developer could not possibly have received positive reviews of her game on her own merit. Gamergaters also demonstrated that they reject games that do not fit with convention.

Although Gamergaters view Gamergate as a pseudo-political movement due to their complaints about games journalism, in truth it was an ‘organized campaign of hate and harassment’ (Chatzakou et al. 2017, p. 1285). Gamergate was the result of toxic technoculture and geek masculinity (Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2), fuelling Gamergaters to take part
in a crusade to save their male hobby from killjoy critics (Braithwaite 2016, p. 1). Throughout Gamergate, numerous women and men were harassed, including doxxing and threats of rape and death. Major targets included Zoe Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian, and Brianna Wu, and their friends and supporters. This harassment was enacted over various platforms over a significant range of time, and the campaign did not occur in isolation, but was complicated and spurred on by other accusations and outrages.

It is also important to note the significance of race and sexuality in Gamergate. I do not wish to neglect the experiences of the many women who were harassed with anti-Semitic, racist, and transphobic attacks, many of which the above women experienced. Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality is relevant here (1989), defined by Collins and Bilge as a way of understanding how ‘the organization of power in a given society’ is ‘shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other’ (2016, Chapter 1). This is not dissimilar to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the assemblage, which I use to begin to unpack gender issues in Chapter Three. Indeed, intersectionality is not just an issue for Gamergaters, but also those against the campaign. As Gray points out, even online spaces created to criticise GamerGate and support female victims can neglect the importance of race, and fail to encourage an inclusionary space (2016, p. 65).

My focus in the bulk of this thesis is the way that the category ‘women’, including non-white, non-cis women, was constructed and treated during GamerGate and more broadly, in the game industry and game communities.

The following brief analysis of Gamergate draws significantly from the subreddit’s timeline of Gamergate (Squirrelrampage 2016), which contains over 400

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5 Bailey and Trudy’s term ‘misogynoir’ is also a relevant concept here, referring to ‘the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience’ (2019, p. 782), as well as ‘the particular brand of hatred directed at black women in American visual & popular culture’ (Bailey 2010).
6 Reddit is ‘an open-source platform on which anyone can create their own community of interest (subreddit)’ (Massanari 2017, p. 330). There are numerous subreddits dedicated to Gamergate, both in favour for and critical of the movement. GamerGhazi is anti-GamerGate, established as a place where ‘Diversity and geek culture collide’ (/r/GamerGhazi 2018).
events, as well as the Gamergate Wiki (Gamergate Wiki 2016a). On the 15th of August 2014, Gjoni posted on the *Something Awful* and *Penny Arcade* forums, describing his relationship breakdown with Quinn. Soon, Quinn began to receive tweets such as ‘[t]he experts will still be uncovering Zoë Quinn’s fuckbuddies from the primordial muck in coming eras’ (Quinn 2017). Moderators quickly removed the posts from both websites and Gjoni was banned from *Something Awful* (Gjoni 2014a; Something Awful 2014; Massanari 2017, p. 334). On August 16, Gjoni published ‘The Zoe Post’, an updated version of his forum posts that contained twenty-four grievances against Quinn. In the post, Gjoni described their relationship and displayed screenshots of private Facebook messages between them (Gjoni 2014a). Gjoni’s principal claim was that Quinn cheated on him with five other men to gain positive reviews of her game *Depression Quest*10, including Nathan Grayson, a journalist from Kotaku11 (Perreault & Vos 2016, p. 2; Mortensen 2016, p. 5; Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2). Gjoni then spread the post on 4chan12, stating that (Squirrelrampage 2016; Gjoni 2014b):

TLDR Zoe Quinn, a rabid feminist SJW13 GAMUR GIRL who made a shitty non-game called Depression Quest, just got outed for BRIBING THE MEDIA INTO LIKING HER SHITTY NON-GAME WITH HER VAGINA BY cheating on her

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1 Something Awful is a website that ‘offers daily internet news, reviews of horrible movies, games, and social networking, anime and adult parody’, and features a large and popular forum (Something Awful 2018).
2 Penny Arcade is a webcomic based on video game culture that became so popular that the creators now host gaming convention PAX (Penny Arcade Expo); podcasts; Child’s Play Charity, and other endeavours (Penny Arcade 2018).
3 The official reason from the *Something Awful* forums read: ‘Thank you for joining the Something Awful Forums in order to post a giant loving psychopathic helldump about your ex-girlfriend in the forum about video games’ (Something Awful 2014).
4 Quinn had already become the target of symbolic violence and shamed for developing a non-traditional game, and for suffering from depression herself (Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2). She had been sent rape and death threats after uploading the game to Steam Greenlight (Massanari 2017, p. 334). For details, see Malone (2017) and Quinn (2017).
5 *Kotaku* soon proved that this was untrue (Perreault & Vos 2016, p. 2). However, damage had already been done.
6 Quinn later stated that Gjoni did this ‘to ruin my life’, as once 4chan was involved, ‘they started doxxing me immediately, asking who had hacking skills’ (Stuart 2014).
7 SJW stands for ‘Social Justice Warrior’, a derogatory term for people who ‘are overly invested in identity politics and political correctness’ (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 2). The term will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.
boyfriend with 5 other guys, including Kotaku staff members who defended her online and reviewed her game and HER MARRIED BOSS. She is a manipulative liar and a sociopath.

Gjoni’s posts gained traction, and on August 16 YouTuber MundaneMatt released a video about Quinn and Gjoni using information from ‘The Zoe Post’ (Mundanematt 2014). Gjoni continued to use the stories he told on his blog to fuel anger in various forums (Mortensen 2016, p. 3), such as The Escapist, where staff allowed forum users to discuss the issue but asked them not to engage in harassment (Rebant 2014). On August 18, the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel #burgersandfries14 organised a harassment campaign against Quinn called the Quinnspiracy. Members of the IRC discussed doxxing Quinn and others15, stating ‘WE’RE CRASHING HER CAREER WITH NO SURVIVORS’ (BurgersandFries 2014). On the same day, YouTuber InternetAristocrat released the first of numerous videos about the incident, increasing its reach (Squirrelrampage 2016). Following this, gaming commentator and critic John Bain, under the handle TotalBiscuit, tweeted about Quinn to over 350,000 followers16, recruiting even more people into the campaign (Squirrelrampage 2016; Bain 2014). Gjoni’s claims spread as popular figures in game culture commented on and shared his accusations against Quinn.

On August 19, Quinn was doxxed and received ‘harassing calls, voicemails, & texts’17 (Quinn 2014a). One of these messages included ‘we have to rape Zoe Quinn and take everything from her. We have to ruin her life’ (Malone 2017). The focus of the harassment quickly changed from her supposed unethical practices to sexual violence. Quinn’s home

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14 A joke originating from ‘The Zoe Post’, where Gjoni inserted a Five Guys restaurant logo to allude to her supposed infidelity (Jason 2015).
15 Members of this IRC made connections between Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian in order to construct a broader feminist conspiracy (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 212).
16 Although Bain did not explicitly refer to ‘The Zoe Post’, other indie developers criticised him for being a ‘parasite’, arguing that he commented on Quinn to promote himself and Men’s Rights Activists (Squirrelrampage 2016; Heeley 2014).
17 Calls included ‘[h]angups, heavy breathing and a dude asking for a BJ’ (Quinn 2014a).
address and personal photos were shared online (Stuart 2014), her Wikipedia page was vandalised¹⁸, and she was sent Photoshopped images of herself covered in semen (Jason 2015). This harassment was compounded by a member of game design organisation The Fine Young Capitalists¹⁹, who claimed that Quinn sabotaged their game jam and doxxed them²⁰ (Squirrelrampage 2016; SillySladar 2014). Quinn and her family received so much online²¹ and offline aggression that she went into hiding for months 2014²² (Mortensen 2016, p. 6; Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2). Due to her ex-boyfriend’s false claims of sexual bribery, Quinn became a target of outrage in the gaming community, but the focus soon spread from collusion in games journalism to more generalised hatred of women.

While Gamergate started as a hate campaign against Quinn, supporters soon targeted ‘women game designers, journalists, critics, and allies’ (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 3), with doxxing, threats of rape and death, and SWATting²³. Gamergaters did not exclusively attack women, but also men who supported women. For example, when indie game developer Phil Fish criticised Bain and Gamergaters (Wirタンen 2014), his personal information was stolen and his website was hacked, causing him to eventually sell his popular indie game Fez (Romano 2014), and leave social media and game development permanently²⁴ (Maiberg 2014). This section only covers the major figures targeted in the campaign, to provide an account of the extent or harassment. Numerous others were targeted by Gamergaters. The

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¹⁸ Someone had edited it to ‘[d]ied: Soon’ – when it was changed back, another person edited it to ‘[d]ied: October 13, 2014’ – her next public appearance (Jason 2015).

¹⁹ The group sponsored a game design contest for female developers in 2014 (The Fine Young Capitalists 2018).

²⁰ In February Quinn had questioned The Fine Young Capitalists due to their not paying women who entered their game development contest, and for their transgender policy. The dispute occurred on Twitter and 4chan (Kidd & Turner 2016, pp. 125–126), and led to the doxxing accusation. The Fine Young Capitalists later stated that one of Quinn’s supporters had doxxed them (Squirrelrampage 2016; Thefineyoungcapitalists 2014).

²¹ Quinn compiled 16 GB of evidence of harassment (Stuart 2014).

²² In December 2014, Quinn stated ‘[h]ow could I go back to my home?...I have people online bragging about putting dead animals through my mailbox. I’ve got some asshole in California who I’ve never talked to hiring a private investigator to stalk me’ (Stuart 2014).

²³ SWATting means that victims had groups of police officers preparing to break down their door and shoot whoever is inside (Mortensen 2016, p. 8).

²⁴ Fish’s Twitter account has been deleted, but as Maiberg (2014) reports, he tweeted the following: ‘[n]o reasonable offer will be turned down. I am done. I want out. RUN AWAY. Just don’t do it. Give up your dreams. They are actually nightmares. Nothing is worth this. To every aspiring game developer out there: Don’t. give up. It’s not worth it. This is your audience. This is videogames’. 

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main targets included Zoe Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian, and Brianna Wu, and their friends and supporters. These women were harassed partly because they spoke up for other women and deal with women’s issues in video gaming to some extent, illustrating how the campaign expanded from a witch hunt of Quinn to a harassment campaign against all manner of women and their allies in gaming.

Anita Sarkeesian had already experienced harassment from the game community due to her video series *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*, where she critiques the portrayal of female game characters (Humphreys & Vered 2013, p. 3). On August 25, Sarkeesian uploaded a new video, *Women as Background Decoration Part 2* (Sarkeesian 2014; Squirrelrampage 2016). As a feminist critiquing video games, Sarkeesian was seen as another woman corrupting video games, and so outrage over Quinn’s supposed collusion spread to her. Her personal websites, social media profiles, and Wikipedia entries were attacked and she received rape and death threats (Humphreys & Vered 2013, p. 3; Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2). On August 27, Sarkeesian left her home due to these threats, including ‘I’m going to go to your apartment at [censored] and rape you to death. After I’m done, I’ll ram a tire iron up your cunt’ (Sarkeesian 2014). She also received threats of terrorism, including a bomb threat, and a shooting (Hern 2014). Gamergaters’ hate of Sarkeesian is couched within a broader hate for feminism, as evidenced in the shooting threat that ‘you will all bear witness to what feminist lies and poison have done to the men of America’ (Hern 2014).

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25 In May 2012 Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund her series *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*. Because she far exceeded her goal (Valenti 2015), her Wikipedia page was vandalised with pornographic images (Sarkeesian 2012), and she received threatening emails including images of video game characters raping her. The following month, a game named ‘beat up Anita Sarkeesian’ was released (Lewis 2012). There were also attempts to cancel her Kickstarter, report her to the FBI and IRS, and post her address and her parent’s information online (Valenti 2015).

26 On September 17, *EnGadget* revealed that the March Game Developer’s Conference received a bomb threat ‘unless Anita Sarkeesian’s Ambassador Award is revoked’ (Squirrelrampage 2016; Seppala 2014).

27 On October 15 Sarkeesian planned to give a presentation at Utah State University, but cancelled after receiving an anonymous email threatening to conduct ‘the deadliest school shooting in American history’ (Hern 2014). Part of the email read: ‘[y]ou have 24 hours to cancel Sarkeesian’s talk ... Anita Sarkeesian is everything wrong with the feminist woman, and she is going to die screaming like the craven little whore that she is if you let her come to USU. I will write my manifesto in her spilled blood, and you will all bear witness to what feminist lies and poison have done to the men of America’ (Hern 2014).
On August 28, games journalist Leigh Alexander wrote an article on *Gamasutra* entitled ‘Gamers’ don’t have to be your audience. ‘Gamers’ are over’ (2014a). This article caused a significant spike in Gamergate activity as Alexander criticised game culture, stating that it is ‘not even culture. It’s buying things, spackling over memes and in-jokes repeatedly, and it’s getting mad on the internet’. She goes on to criticise Gamergater’s behaviour, and the lack of leadership from game companies and website managers in retaliation to their harassment, ultimately pointing out that ‘angry young men’ are not longer the majority, and are lashing out as a result. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, Gamergaters were outraged at the proclamation that they were dead as an audience, and saw the article, as well as numerous others that made similar comments, as an attempt to erase them from existence. In retaliation, they emailed Intel with so many complaints that they pulled their ads from *Gamasutra* (McCormick 2014), and Alexander was stalked and sent death threats (Alexander 2014b). The article further spurned the belief that games journalists were attacking Gamergaters, and were the ‘true’ problem in the industry.

On September 19, Game developer Brianna Wu became angry with trolls attacking her friends (Whitford 2015), and shared a meme that mocked Gamergate (Squirrelrampage 2016; Wu 2014a, 2014b). As a result, she received rape and death threats (Gray, Buyukozturk & Hill 2017, p. 2; Futrelle 2014), was doxxed, and left her home28 (Wu 2014c; Futrelle 2014). Like Quinn and Sarkeesian, Wu received messages that were highly sexually violent. These included ‘your mutilated corpse will be on the front page of Jezebel29 tomorrow’ (Whitford 2015), and ‘I’ve got a K-Bar and I’m coming to your house so I can shove it up your ugly feminist cunt’ (Wu 2014c). Despite these tweets, Wu was accused by Gamergaters of lying for publicity and self-promotion (McWhertor 2014). In May 2015, since leaving her home Wu documented forty-five further death threats, noting that ‘if we don’t change the culture,

28 Many of these threatening tweets came from an account named ‘Death to Brianna’ (Futrelle 2014).
29 *Jezebel* is a feminist and liberal news blog.
somebody’s going to get killed’ (Whitford 2015). Again, Wu’s experiences illustrate not only the intensely violent nature of the threats, but that the threats were made to intimidate her – to deter her from making fun of Gamergaters.

Some victims of Gamergate were harassed even if they did not publicly discuss feminism or speak out against the campaign, which suggests that any woman related to gaming was a valid target. When geek actress and writer Felicia Day sent a supportive tweet to journalist Jenn Frank after she was harassed30, Day received so many hateful comments that she logged off for two days (2015, p. 241). She was also contacted by sympathetic hackers, who warned her that she would be a future target of doxxing by Gamergaters31 (Day 2015, p. 239). On October 22 Day made a blog post about Gamergate, pointing out that Gamergaters’ hateful behaviour ‘is ultimately not destructive to others like you want it to be. It’s destructive to yourself’ (Day 2014). Twenty minutes later, multiple people had posted her home address in the comments section (Day 2015, p. 244). As she described (2015, p. 245):

there were more than a thousand comments in the thread at that point, a lot of them vile and antagonistic and awful, exactly what you WOULDN’T expect as a reaction to an essay with the theme, *lets hold hands and get through this, guys!*

Later, Day was accused of not really being doxxed by Gamergaters, who claimed that she was lying about the harassment for attention – although in fact she had already been doxxed a year before by 4chan32. Wu was treated in a similar manner following her doxxing, and again

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30 Frank had published an article on *The Guardian* describing Quinn and Sarkeesian’s harassment as a hate campaign (2014a). Although she had disclosed her financial support of Quinn’s Patreon, the disclosure was absent from the article, and Gamergaters saw Frank as another example of corruption in games journalism (Frank 2014b). Gamergaters also confused Frank with Leigh Alexander, who wrote an article critical of the gamer identity (Alexander 2014), pointing to how information became distorted during Gamergaters’ campaign.

31 Day’s ‘name was on a request list for compromising photos, and people were supposedly offering big dollars to back it up’ (Day 2015, p. 239).

32 Where people shared her personal information, photos of her house and licence plate, and a fan made his way into her house (Day 2015, p. 247).
illustrates that Gamergate partly thrived on constant tension and debate surrounding truth – an issue that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. While Gamergate began as a targeted campaign against Quinn due to her supposed infidelity and deceptive methods of gaining positive reviews on her game, it quickly spread to all manner of women in the game industry, whether because they critiqued games or Gamergaters’ behaviour. As Paul states, ‘[t]his event and other cases of harassment often are about policing the boundaries of an imagined community, fueled by a strong desire to retain what already exists’ (2018, p. 77). Gamergate was driven by a desire to maintain the gaming territory in the face of the changes presented by increasing diversity in players, creators, and games.

II. Players

Reflecting on Gamergate, Gamasutra journalist Leigh Alexander stated that ‘[w]e still think angry young men are the primary demographic for commercial video games’ even though this is no longer the case (2014a). Her comment points out an inconsistency between the popular conception of who plays video games, and the reality. Hence in this section I provide an overview of data from Australia, the US, and the UK that illustrates exactly who plays video games. Here, I consider all games played on digital devices to be video games, including casual games played on mobile devices. While these studies present their data in differing forms, all note that the proportion of households that contain games, the number of female players, and the average age of players have risen over time. Specifically, the availability of casual games on mobile devices such as smartphones is often credited with the increase in

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33 Many players do not consider such games to be ‘real games’ because they are thought to be easier than those played on a PC or console, contain ‘less negative themes’, require ‘less dedication and time to play’, and appeal to people who tend not to identify as ‘gamers’ (Soderman 2017, p. 40). However, it is important to include casual games because they are becoming an increasingly significant part of the market (Dymek 2012, p. 46; Juul 2010, p. 7), as they are more readily accessible to many audiences (Kultima & Stenros 2010, p. 66), and the line between ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ games can become quite blurred depending on how they are played (Juul 2010, p. 129).
popularity of games and the diversity of its players. It is such increased diversity, I argue, that contributed to Gamergate.

A. Statistics

Although people often view video games as a niche hobby associated with young men (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 257; Fantone 2009, p. 215; Chess, Evans & Baines 2017, p. 53), games are becoming increasingly mainstream. 67% of Australians play video games (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 6), compared with around 50% of people in the UK (UKIE 2018, p. 42; Newzoo 2016a), and 49% of people in the US34 (ESA 2015, p. 2; United States Census Bureau 2015). Further, 93% of households in Australia contain a device used to play video games, such as a PC, mobile, console, tablet, or handheld (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 8), compared to 67% of households in the US35 (ESA 2017, p. 4). In both Australia and the US, PCs are the main device used to play games, with smart devices coming in second (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 8; ESA 2017, p. 6). Playing video games is clearly no longer an obscure hobby and in fact is quite widespread, significantly driven by the availability of smart devices. Indeed, as I will argue in Chapter Seven, video games becoming mainstream is one factor that upset Gamergaters, as they felt that the increase in players was causing video games to change.

Video games are not only becoming increasingly common, but players are becoming older. The average player is 35 in the US (ESA 2017, p. 4), 34 in Australia (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 12), and estimated to be 43 in the UK (Borowiecki & Bakhshi 2017, p. 2). The proportion of adults and elderly players has also been increasing. While each report uses

34 The ESA (2015, p. 2) states that there were 155 million players in the US in 2014. As the United States Census Bureau (2015) estimates that the population was 318,857,056 in 2014, I have calculated that players comprise around 48.6% of the population.
35 The Australian report refers to PCs, mobiles, consoles, tablets, and handhelds as devices (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 8), while the US report includes PCs, smartphones, wireless devices (such as a tablet), consoles, handhelds, and Virtual Reality devices (ESA 2017, p. 6).
different methods of categorising age, all note an increase in numbers of people playing video games. In Australia, 76% of children under 18 play games, compared to 65% of those aged 18-64, and 43% of those 65 and over (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 13). In the UK, it is estimated that half of all gamers are in their 40s or older, and a quarter of all players are 56 years or older (Borowiecki & Bakhshi 2017, p. 5). In Europe, 46% of 35-44 year-olds and 27% of 45-64’s play games (Ipsos Connect 2017, p. 2). These statistics strongly indicate that not only has video gaming become more widespread in general, but it has become more popular with adults and elderly people, challenging the stereotype that players are mostly teenagers.

Equally significant are statistics that show the gender divide is decreasing. 46% of players in Australia are female (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 6), compared to 42% in the US (ESA 2017, p. 7), and 52% in the UK (Renevey 2014). Indeed, scholars often attribute this increase to women playing casual games on mobile devices (Renevey 2014; Soderman 2017, p. 40). Casual games are a rapidly growing industry, and are the second most played genre in the US (ESA 2017, p. 8). Juul (2010, p. 5) describes two main categories of casual games: those that use mimetic interfaces (such as sport and music games), and downloadable casual games (‘purchased online, can be played in short time bursts, and generally do not require an intimate knowledge of video game history in order to play’). Taefay explains that casual games have clear rules and goals, must be easy for players to improve at, fit within a player’s life and schedule, and borrow content and themes from life (2010, p. 1). In short, casual games are relatively easy to access and play, and so have introduced many people to video games. However, Yee (2017) points out that the ESA’s statistic that 42% of players are women is contentious for two reasons. First, the statistic includes a significant number of casual players, which some players feel are not ‘real’ games. Second, it can give the impression that there is gender balance in game design.  

While the original Internet Advertising Bureau document appears to be no longer available, the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association reported on it. More formally, Juul explains that casual games are: easy to use; interruptible with autosave; challenging without being excessively punishing; contain ‘juicy’ elements - elements that communicate information, make the game easier to use, provide ‘an immediate, pleasurable experience’, and are tied to feedback, making the player feel competent or clever (2010, pp. 33–46).
games who otherwise may be daunted by the high cost of consoles and games as well as the knowledge required to engage with them.

Indeed, studies have found that casual games are particularly popular with women. For example, Yee (2017) found that Match 3 games, Family/Farm Simulators, and puzzle games, all ‘casual games’, are dominated by female players. Further, Chess notes that game designers most often discuss ‘fairy tales, supernatural, mystery, bucolic, animals, cooking, and fashion’ as themes associated with women – and that such themes often fit casual genres, such as hidden object games or time management games (2017, p. 43). Notably, however, such data is complex. Yee (2017), for example, notes that the data only provides the proportion of women who play a genre compared to men. This means that many men could play such genres – it is simply that women play them more. To add to this, Digital Australia found little gender difference between men and women for casual play except for those in their mid-40s, where women overtake men by eight percent (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 14). Further, in 2013, the Casual Games Association found that similar percentages of men and women play mobile and tablet games in the US, Europe, and in East Asia (Newzoo 2013, p. 5). Yet as Soderman explains, casual games have still become associated with female players and are often ‘explicitly feminized and simultaneously denigrated’ in comparison to ‘masculine’ hardcore games (2017, pp. 40–41). As casual games have become increasingly popular, certain players have become anxious that they will take over their preferred ‘real’ or ‘hardcore’ games, lashing out at female players as representatives of this threat – an issue which will be explored further in Chapter Seven.

While gender is understood to be a significant issue in game culture as a whole, studies have found that age is a more significant factor than gender in terms of play preferences and time spent playing. Yee (2015) found that there is an 87% overlap in what male and female

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39 Match 3 games are puzzle games where the player must line up three or more icons of the same type (Omori & Felinto 2012, p. 1).
players enjoy in games, and that younger and older gamers have different motivations than male and female gamers. In fact, age explained '3 times the observed variation in Competition compared with gender' (Yee 2015). Age also impacts play time. The average player age is increasing, along with the number of female players; but the number of female players also increases with age. For example, Digital Australia found that men aged 15-24 played nearly twice as much as women in the same age band, while women aged 45-54 play more than men in the same age band⁴⁰ (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 16). Age appears to be a more significant factor than gender in regard to play preferences and time spent playing games, which begs the question of why gender is focused upon rather than age. The following section therefore examines how gender has become an important market and research category in video games.

B. Play Theory and Preferences

While players are clearly diverse, video game culture is nonetheless highly gendered, and some players, as Gamergate demonstrated, find gender to be highly divisive. Key theorists of play Huizinga (1949) and Caillois (1959, 1962) make no mention of gender for example. For Huizinga, play is productive and not categorical, as ‘play is older than culture’ (1949, p. 1). That is, culture is a form of play, rather than play being a form of culture. As culture develops, the relationship between play and non-play changes, so, generally, things that started as forms of play became institutions over time. Hence, for Huizinga, religious ritual, folklore, or judicial or social life started as forms of play, and became institutions over time, such as organised religion, marriage, and the court (1949, p. 46). While Huizinga describes how ‘archaic’ communities are based on dualism, and discusses how sexual dualism functions in

⁴⁰ In line with these findings, Koster explains that as men age, they adopt play styles more like women, and many drop out of gaming altogether. In comparison, older women are less likely to drop out, and actually gain interest in video games after menopause (2014, p. 108).
such societies (1949, pp. 53–54), at no point does he state that men and women are inherently different in regard to play, which begs the question of why so many think of play as gendered.

It is important to note that video games are not the only medium where play is treated as gendered. In general, girls and women are expected to enjoy appropriately feminine forms of play, which are often in opposition to play that is active, competitive, or destructive (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 36). For example, sport according to Wellard ‘promotes an environment where displays of traditional masculinity’ including ‘competitiveness, aggressiveness and toughness, are seen as normal and necessary’ (2009, p. 14), and Kay notes that ‘the ideology of women as nurturers and carers’ helps support such masculinisation (2003, p. 96). Further, like the dichotomy of casual games and ‘real’ or ‘hardcore’ games, certain sports are seen as more feminine (tennis, netball, gymnastics), and others more masculine (football, rugby, cricket) (Kay 2003, p. 96), and men’s sports tend to be culturally and economically dominant to women’s sports (Vorhees 2015, p. 77). Belief in gender roles causes people to view certain forms of play as masculine and feminine.

Another highly visible example of play being mapped to gender is in children’s toys. Auster and Mansbach note that most ‘action toys, small vehicles, weapons, and building toys’ are labelled as exclusively for boys, and most ‘dolls or [toys] related to beauty, cosmetics, jewelry, and domestic work’ are labelled for girls (2012, p. 384). Similarly, Blakemore and Centers find that boys’ toys tend to be ‘rated as violent, competitive, exciting, and somewhat dangerous’, while girls’ toys tend to be ‘associated with physical attractiveness, nurturance, and domestic skill’ (2005, p. 619). Children’s ‘correct’ behaviour in toy choice and play has been found to be rewarded by parents, teachers, and peers in accordance with the models of femininity and masculinity (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 36). In fact, children as young as three have been found to have developed stereotypical definitions of boys’ and girls’ toys and predict their parents’ opinions about gendered toys and play (Freeman 2007, p. 357). In this way play has long been categorised according to gender roles and play preferences.
Categorising play and players can be useful as a method to establish what games players may enjoy, and numerous scholars have established models to examine play without reference to gender. For example, Caillois offers four categories of play that lie on a continuum (1962, pp. 12–13); LeBlanc (2005) presents eight kinds of fun\textsuperscript{41}, and Yee (2015) lists twelve motivations for play\textsuperscript{42}. Another method that scholars have employed to categorise play is examining play styles. A key model is Bartle’s (1996) taxonomy\textsuperscript{43}, which Yee (2006, pp. 773–774) and Kahn et al. (2015, p. 339) have expanded upon. More recently, Vandenberghhe (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) and Yee (2016a) have applied the Big 5 personality model to players. While these works do not explicitly map gender to play style, there is a risk of viewing gender categories as totalising and polarising when applied to player types. For example, Klug and Schell propose that players can be divided into various types, one, for example, being ‘The Performer’. They suggest that men are physical performers, while women are emotional (2009, p. 109). While categorising types of play and players does not need to resort to categorising gender, it runs the risk of doing so – which can reinforce global conceptions of gendered play.

Mapping play preferences is not a problem in itself, but the risk is that if gender is mapped to play, people will retain totalising and polarising conceptions of gender and play preferences that then go on to influence how they play. One of the most well-researched and prominent aspects of gendered gameplay is the idea that men and women prefer different games. The game industry’s historic emphasis on ‘masculine’, violent genres such as sports simulations, beat-em-ups, shooters, and adventure games are often blamed for a lack of female players (Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 37). In brief, male players are thought to prefer active and strategic play; mastery; competition; fantasy; spatial puzzles, and trial and error. In

\textsuperscript{41} These are sensation; fantasy; narrative; challenge; fellowship; discovery; expression, and submission (mindlessness) (LeBlanc 2005).

\textsuperscript{42} These are completion; power; destruction; excitement; design; discovery; fantasy; story; community; competition; challenge, and strategy (Yee 2015).

\textsuperscript{43} Bartle’s taxonomy of Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) players consists of killers, achievers, explorers, and socialisers (Bartle 1996).
contrast, female players are thought to prefer creativity; emotional and social productivity; negotiation; fantasy; verbal puzzles; exploration; and learning by example (Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 43; Hayes 2005, pp. 26–27; Kinzie & Joseph 2008, pp. 657–658; Hsu 2013, pp. 174–175). Assigning types of play to gender assumes that gender is not only totalising, but polarising as it fits on a convenient binary.

Assigning play styles to gender is pervasive, and the danger is that polarisation can reify game creators and players’ beliefs that men and women are fundamentally different. For example, Koster (2014) argues that hardcore male and female players have different play styles. Male players, he argues, focus on games about projecting power and controlling a territory, while females focus on games that allow modelling behaviour, like multiplayer games, and do not require strict hierarchies (2014, p. 108). By way of explanation, Schell (2015) suggests that early video games appealed to young males because their brains work well with formal abstract systems. He suggests that more women are playing video games now than in the past because now that digital technology has improved we can have emotional characters, rich stories, and the ability to play with friends (2015, pp. 120–124). Yet other research has found no difference between men and women’s ‘processing of objects, space, or number[s]’ (Spelke 2005, p. 950). Koster and Schell’s arguments make global assumptions about male and female players. Rather than consider social, cultural and taste factors that impact individuals’ play styles, they rely on psychological research that assume men and women are biologically different in ways that uphold the polarisation of gender. It is the assumption that men prefer ‘hardcore’ and women ‘casual’ games, and that such games and players are polar opposites, that constituted a significant point of tension during Gamergate. Rather than acknowledge that many male and female players enjoy the same kinds of games, women were constructed as invaders representing the influx of ‘lesser’ casual games in the market.
While methods of categorisation can be useful in establishing what games one might enjoy, the danger is that they can be used in marketing to eliminate difference, simplify player tastes and divide them into easily targetable demographics. The belief that the masculine and feminine are somehow ‘natural’ dichotomies has significantly impacted the development of video games (Cassell & Jenkins 1998, p. 4). For example, in the mid-1990s, feminists and software designers were concerned about a lack of female players, and conducted market research to find what games girls would enjoy (Cassell & Jenkins 1998, p. 10; Lynn, Raphael & Olefsky 2003, p. 147). This led to the highly successful release of Barbie Fashion Designer (Digital Domain 1996), and soon publishers flooded the market with low-quality clones, creating a new genre of stereotypically so-called feminine ‘pink games’\textsuperscript{44} (Ray 2008, p. 418). Here the industry treated the whole female market as a genre, rather than a potentially diverse and heterogeneous market (2008, p. 419), conceptualised as a ‘single, uniform kind of girl game’ (Heeter & Winn 2009, p. 75). By treating gender as a determining category, the game industry relied on and reproduced stereotypical concepts of gender and ignored difference amongst women, establishing the idea that men and women play differently and occupy different territories.

While ‘pink games’ ultimately failed, developers still produce games for girls as a genre rather than a market, which subscribes to a polarising conception of gender. For example, Fantone notes that in the late 00s, video games marketed towards adult women were not very different from those marketed towards 8-12 year old girls, using pastels, encouraging collaboration, and focusing on daily life such as shopping and chatting (2009, p. 216). Ubisoft’s Imagine series for Wii, Nintendo DS, and 3DS are particularly well-known for being highly stereotypical. In the Imagine series, girls must have beauty, virtue, and luck to improve their status (2009, p. 217). While some are less gendered, such as Artist (Ubisoft 2009) and

\textsuperscript{44} As Ray observes, Barbie Fashion Designer ‘hurt the concept [of girls playing games] because the industry redefined the entire broad and diverse female market into one single, small, genre of “fashion, shopping, and makeup for girls ages 6–10,” hence, pink poison’ (2008, p. 419).
*Zookeeper* (Magic Pockets 2009), the majority encourage women into gender roles, including seven fashion games and five baby or babysitting games (Nintendo 2018). In fact, the Nintendo Wii was marketed as a domestic console aimed towards mothers (Powers & Brookey 2015, p. 119), and the DS Lite was marketed as an accessory to enter the feminine games market (Chess 2011, p. 235). It is clear that some actors in the game industry see gender as a total and defining category, and construct play in such a way that male and female players are segregated.

Another problem with viewing gender as a play category is that it can reinforce ideas about what it means to be a male or female player. For example, casual games are becoming increasingly popular amongst *both* men and women (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 16). Yet, casual games are particularly popular with people who do not consider themselves gamers; young children; older players; and former players with less time (Soderman 2017, p. 41). Still, casual games are given credit for the increase of female players in particular (Renevey 2014; Yee 2017). There is nothing inherently wrong with casual games being popular with women, but the problem is that casual games are often viewed by players and creators as opposite to traditional hardcore, masculine styles of play. They are viewed this way partly because casual games require less dedication and time to play, and utilise less negative themes (Soderman 2017, p. 40). The false dichotomy between hardcore and casual games fits with gender polarisation – as Soderman describes, 'within the popular press (and in blog posts and comments from the public) the casual game market is often explicitly feminized and simultaneously denigrated' (2017, p. 41). There is nothing inherently wrong with casual games – but the problem is that when gender is seen as a totalising category, and casual games therefore seen as feminine, it supports the idea that there is a ‘feminine’ style of play.

In sum, one reason that gender is a significant issue in video gaming is that some game creators have believed that male and female players are polar opposites. Such a focus on
gender seems counterintuitive, however, as Yee (2015) explains that ‘there is an 87% overlap in what men and women enjoy’, and that age has a greater impact on motivations. The focus on gender in market research, Yee suggests, could ‘trigger a marketing feedback loop that gradually skews the demographics of acquired customers’ (2015). In fact, Armstrong has found that video games that are highly stereotypical in terms of gender can generate a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, putting off new players (2016, p. 117). In the process of polarising play, game creators have produced a dichotomy where certain kinds of play (such as casual games) are feminised, considered to be opposite to and of lesser value than masculine, hardcore games. With a proliferation of mobile and casual games, players have become increasingly diverse in terms of age and gender. Such increased diversity, led by supposedly feminised, lesser value casual games, threatened Gamergaters, who felt that their video gaming territory was being challenged.

C. Society and Technology

Another reason that scholars have put forward for why gender is such a significant issue in video games is that technology itself is labelled masculine. Similarly to how hardcore/casual games are mapped to the male/female binary, Kirk points out that science and nature have been mapped to ‘male’ and ‘female’ respectively (2009, p. 63). For example, scholars often attribute low numbers of women in STEM subjects as being partly caused by gender stereotypes (Wang & Degol 2017, p. 120). This is not to say that gender is directly mapped to technology, but, as Wajcman explains, ‘technology is both a source and a consequence of gender relations’ (2004, p. 7). Put another way, social understandings of gender impact not only how technology is used, but how it is developed in the first place. In terms of video games, for Dovey and Kennedy computer games are coded as masculine because they have been developed from masculine contexts, including science, mathematics, technology, the military,
and hacking (2007, pp. 36–38). Hence, here I will provide an outline of how the production of video games, as a form of technology, has been influenced by gendered social relations.

It is possible that video games’ origins in male-dominated, military strategy simulations has led to it becoming a hobby that is significantly marked by gender. Video games originated in tabletop simulation games used by the military. Recreational forms of these games surged in popularity with the 1954 wargame Tactics (Roberts 1954; Woods 2012, pp. 22 & 218). Military strategy games were succeeded by Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) in 1974 (Gygax & Arneson 1974). D&D players were mostly young, white, middle class men (King & Borland 2003, p. 5), and in 1980 women were estimated to account for just 10 percent of all players (Wells & Mohan 1980, p. 16). As well as a lack of female players, D&D’s game system was skewed to a hypermasculine audience in numerous ways, including sexualised depictions of female characters. Considering that video games have developed in part from military tabletop games, which were coded as masculine and dominated by men, it is perhaps unsurprising that video games as a technology are strongly associated with the male gender.

Other than tabletop strategy games, video games have roots in another technology that is coded as masculine – hacking (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 38). In fact, one of the first video games ever created was a hack (Kent 2001, p. 16), created at the Tech Model Railroad Club at MIT in 1962 (King & Borland 2003, p. 26). Hacking culture was dominated by white, young male college students, and exhibited an ethos and attitude associated with intelligence and taking control of technology (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, pp. 38 & 68). While there were female programmers at MIT, Levy explains, ‘none seemed to take hacking as a holy calling’ the way

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45 D&D contained sexualised depictions of women in art and miniatures, and female players often found that their male-dominated party would use their characters as sex objects (Wells & Mohan 1980, pp. 16–17). In the game system, female characters had a lower maximum strength score than male characters of the same character race (Gygax 1978, p. 9; Gray 1980). For interviews with some of women involved in D&D, see (D’Anastasio 2016, 2017).
that others did, and hacking 'formed an exclusively male culture' (2010, p. 76). This is not to say that women were not involved – scholars note that female game designers and developers, software producers, and hardware innovators were and are often misrecognised (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 82; Nooney 2013), and early female programmers have been similarly neglected (Gurer 1995). Considering that video gaming developed from hacking and computer science – areas that are dominated by men and coded as masculine – it is perhaps unsurprising that they have inherited the same coding.

Not only have video games partly developed from hobbies that are coded as masculine, but they tend to exhibit themes that are culturally coded as masculine, such as violence. Hence, gender roles impact how players interact with video games. Since men and women experience greater social acceptance when they stay within the expectations of sex roles (Lucas & Sherry 2004, p. 517), power relations and social dynamics have a significant influence on men and women’s perceptions of video games (Thornham 2008, p. 127). Numerous scholars have found that women’s entry into video gaming is often through a man (Yates & Littleton 1999, pp. 580–581; Beavis & Charles 2007, p. 697; Ratan et al. 2015, p. 446). This finding does not mean that men necessarily or consciously restrict women’s play. Rather, at times men can act as gatekeepers to the console and are seen as the resident experts, leading to women taking a passive role (Schott & Horrell 2000, pp. 40–41; Thornham 2008, p. 133). In fact, some studies...

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46 Yet women comprised the majority of first programmers during World War II, due to conscription (2012, pp. 22 & 1). In fact, in the 1940s and 1950s women were ‘encouraged to take up skilled computing work’, but their numbers have been declining since the mid-1980s (2012, pp. 1–2). Abbate suggests numerous reasons for this decline, including assumptions about technical skill; differences between men and women's tendency to seek and define themselves by employment; stereotypes about computers; and organisation issues such as work-family balance (2012, p. 2). It is vital to note that gender stereotypes are highly mutable in this context: a 1967 book on computer programming suggests that '[p]rogramming requires lots of patience, persistence and a capacity for detail and those are traits that many girls have' (Seligsohn 1967, cited in Gurer 1995). Such a statement is in direct contrast with the way that women have been stereotyped as players, as discussed in the previous section.

47 Writing in 1995, Gurer explains that although many early programmers were women, their contributions to computer science are not well documented. She describes Ada Lovelace, for example, as the 'first conceptual programmer', having worked with Charles Babbage to create the Analytical Engine, the first computer (Gurer 1995). According to Misa (2015, pp. 11 & 13), while 'history has treated Babbage as a brilliant but temperamental pioneer in a half dozen scientific fields', 'existing scholarly consensus on [Lovelace] is a dour one, often highly critical'.
have found that women are more comfortable with video games and perform better when playing with other women (Jenson, Fisher & Castell 2011, p. 165; Amory & Molomo 2012, p. 193). Video games being located in a masculine-coded territory impacts how female players interact with them and are treated in game communities.

Another impact that gender roles could have on video game play is entitlement to or use of leisure time. Accounts of the male-domination of tabletop games and hacking culture often refer to participant’s dedication\(^4\), and it is possible that women’s lack of time investment compared to men could account for a lack of visibility in game spaces. Studies have found that women play games less than men (Lucas & Sherry 2004, p. 513; Bonanno & Kommers 2005, p. 23; Hoffman & Nadelson 2010, p. 257; Erfani et al. 2010, p. 294; Homer et al. 2012, p. 1788). One suggestion for why is that due to gender roles, women can feel more compelled than men to be productive in their time off work. Schott and Horrell, for example, found that for adult gamers, men’s play habits compete with other activities, while women’s play is often second to household chores (2000, p. 49). This is a particularly interesting finding in relation to Nintendo’s marketing of the Wii, which targeted women by suggesting that play is productive in relation to household chores and self-improvement (Chess 2011, p. 247). In fact, Soderman suggests that casual games are popular amongst women partly because they are designed to fulfil the demands of fragmentary leisure (2017, p. 40). While women play games, then, expectations about gender roles can impact their views towards and engagement with video games. Specifically, women’s relatively reduced feelings of entitlement to ‘play time’ when compared to men can uphold the belief that video games are masculine.

Less time spent in play does not necessarily mean that women feel they must engage in gender-divided work, but could signify that play and desire are marked by gender. For

\(^4\) For example, Jean Wells, who worked on D&D, hoped that children would ‘not take the game so seriously that every breath they took, every word they said was about D&D’ (Maliszewski 2010). In comparison, hacker Dan Silver explained that at the Tech Model Railroad club, hacking was ‘the most important thing in the world’, a ‘mission’ (Levy 2010, p. 75).
instance, Thornham argues that ‘gaming is deeply gendered...because the wider utilizable discourses to which each individual can turn to in order to outline pleasure, desire, or investment is deeply gendered’ (2011, pp. 48–49). It is possible that, with video gaming still being viewed as a lowbrow form of entertainment, women in particular feel a need to validate their engagement. For example, Royse et al. found that female non-gamers believed that gaming is a waste of time, and that unlike ‘gamers’, they were socially adept and were capable of organising their priorities (2007, p. 569). Prioritisation was also a theme for Taylor, Jenson, and de Castell, who found that a female competitive Halo 3 player was permitted by her parents to participate in tournaments as long as she maintained good grades, and that they had met her close male friends. The male participants did not mention any such restrictions (2009, p. 244). Such examples suggest that gender roles place pressure on women to use their time effectively. That is, they do not just suggest that women should engage with gender-divided work, but that women’s engagement with play and desire is conditional. Women may be particularly susceptible to constraints in the context of video games because they are often viewed as an antisocial and unproductive form of entertainment.

In sum, gender is a significant issue in video gaming partly due to perceived gender roles, which label certain activities as masculine or feminine. One area where gender roles impact video games is how games have developed from tabletop strategy games and hacker culture. Both of these areas are coded as masculine, dominated by men and associated with ‘male’ traits such as competition, strategy, and domination over technology. Another area where gender roles can impact women’s engagement with video games is entitlement to leisure time, as studies show that women often feel they must be more productive than men with their leisure time and undertake domestic work. It is worth noting here that, many of these assessments about play time and predilections towards technology and play styles make the mistake of understanding gender to be a determining category. For Huizinga, socialising and shopping would be viewed as forms of play and clearly forms of play are not determined by
gender. So it is not that women are less prone to play, but that certain kinds of play are understood in society to be more appropriate for men or women. Coding video gaming as a masculine form of play has established it as a masculine territory – one that Gamergaters feel needs defending from the recent increase in player diversity.

D. Harassment

Another factor that impacts women’s engagement with video games and visibility is harassment. Although, as noted above, there are more women than ever playing video games, they are often not visible in game spaces. Indeed, harassment of women online is not only restricted to gameplay, but is also common in gaming forums, as well as in any public spaces on the internet. Considering that ‘73% of women have already been exposed to or have experienced some form of online violence’ (Tandon & Pritchard 2015, p. 2), it is clear that game spaces are not necessarily unique. For example, research on the comment threads on The Guardian found that ‘articles written by women attract more abuse and dismissive trolling than those written by men, regardless of what the article is about’ (Gardiner et al. 2016). Jane explains that e-bile, whether in game or non-game spaces, tends to accuse women of ‘unintelligence, hysteria, and ugliness’, and includes threats or fantasies of violent sex acts, often framed as a corrective (2014, pp. 533–534). It is clear then that gendered harassment in game spaces is not unlike other public spaces. However, it is useful to illustrate in what forms harassment occurs in game spaces, including in so-called gamer culture more broadly.

Both general and sexual harassment negatively impact women’s participation in games, as both make women more likely to withdraw from the game (Fox & Tang 2016, p. 14). Competitive play often involves trash talking, banter, or friendly teasing (Chatterjee et al. 2015, p. 78), ‘a playful way to insult your competition’ (McGonigal 2011, p. 83). Such behaviour is often considered to be a normal part of play (Fox & Tang 2016, p. 3). However,
trash talking can include ‘objectionable language, and offensive comments’, constituting harassment (Fox & Tang 2014, p. 315). As one of Nakamura’s interviewees explained, ‘there is a difference between trash talking and calling other players disrespectful names’ (2014, p. 6). Such hostility is so common in online game environments that it is expected (Lukianov 2014, p. 33), and is associated with the stereotypical hardcore gamer personality (Skalski & Tamborini 2009, p. 108). The pervasiveness of harassment in multiplayer spaces suggests that game spaces can be toxic for any player.

Game spaces can certainly be toxic for any player, but female players in particular are often targeted by other players. While trash talking is often driven by a game’s inherent competitiveness rather than gender (Hughes & Louw 2013, p. 255), women are frequently specifically targeted as a nuisance, given sexualised insults, and threatened with assault (Cote 2017, p. 138). For example, Kuznekoff and Rose found that female voices in Halo 3 multiplayer received three times more direct negative comments than male voices, even after controlling for win percentage, amount of verbal communication, skill level, and total games played (2013, p. 551). This suggests that abuse in many cases is due to gender rather than simple trash talk, as evidenced in one example when a female player’s greeting ‘hi everybody’ was met by ‘shut up you whore’ (2013, p. 551). Since harassment disproportionately effects women, it can be read as a method of upholding a certain kind masculine gamer territory – one that attempts to reject people who do not belong.

It is also important to note that racist trash talk is also a significant issue in game spaces. Ortiz, for instance, focusing on the experiences of men of colour, notes that ‘[r]acist trash talk is a regular feature of Xbox Live, heard from the moment respondents began playing’ (2019, p. 6). Race impacts women player’s gaming experiences in particular, such as in Gray’s documentation of harassment – ‘you’re not just any girl. You’re black. Get this black bitch off my team’ (2012, p. 412). Such incidences, Gray suggests, is the result of linguistic profiling, and she notes that Latina and black women often experience harassment on the platform.
from both black and white men (not women, although they were seen as passive bystanders) (2012, p. 416, 421, & 424-425). As Nakamura puts it, ‘[w]omen of color gamers who publicly identify with the culture of gaming find themselves shunned, mocked, and generally treated in ways that are far worse than one could find in almost any other social context’ (2012). Intersectionality, then, is a compounding factor in harassment.

Not only are female players disproportionately targeted with harassment, but such vitriol often takes the form of highly gendered language. For example, Nardi explains how sexualised and homophobic language is normalised in World of Warcraft (WoW) (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) with talk of blow jobs and buttsex; using words like rape, douche bag, pussy, cunt, and pimp, fag, homo, and gay in a derisive manner; and male players taunting others by calling them 'little girls' (2010, p. 153). In particular, the word ‘rape’ is often used to refer to victory against an obstacle or another player (Salter & Blodgett 2012, p. 406), and is often framed as a corrective in online harassment (Jane 2014, p. 533). Considering that normative ‘assumptions, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours’ are embedded in our language and style of communication (Kirk 2009, p. 119), use of the word ‘rape’ can be understood within the context of ‘rape culture’, which ‘implicitly and explicitly condones, excuses, tolerates, normalises and fetishises sexual violence against women’ (Powell 2017, p. 102). Since men are not socialised to fear assault to the same extent, Cote explains, trash talk can be more threatening to women than men (2017, p. 140). The use of sexual harassment and gendered language in multiplayer spaces marks video gaming as an aggressive and hypermasculine territory.

Since women are often disproportionately harassed in online and multiplayer spaces, and such harassment is often highly sexualised and violent, female players often withdraw from visible play. For example, Fox and Tang found that general harassment such as curse words and skill-based insults can lead to women quitting games (2016, p. 9). They also found that sexual harassment often leads to rumination (2016, p. 12), which they explain is problematic,
as it is linked to depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco & Lyubomirsky 2008, p. 418). To avoid harassment in online games, women have been found to stop playing them; avoid strangers; mask their gender; use skill and experience to beat aggressors; and respond aggressively (Cote 2017, p. 137). Some also avoid chat (Lukianov 2014, p. 51). It is the withdrawal from the game (Fox & Tang 2016, p. 14) that contributes to the spiral of silence reinforcing the notion that women are only a small minority of players and that gaming is a masculine space. Here it is not that female players are not present, but that they often take measures to protect themselves from harassing behaviour.

Conclusion

The events of Gamergate suggest that women comprise a minority of players, and that video games are highly marked by gender. Yet, players are increasingly diverse, with more adult and female players now than ever. Further, theorists of play largely ignore gender. One possible explanation for why gender is still such a significant issue is that game scholars and creators have often assumed that men and women have different play preferences. Another explanation is that video games have inherited tabletop strategy games and hacker culture’s coding as masculine spaces. Scholars have found that gender roles impact women’s engagement with play. A third explanation is that, possibly because of the previous two points, game spaces can be highly aggressive towards women. Female players often remove themselves from play, or do not play with others, to avoid such harassment. Not only have game creators viewed gender as totalising, but gender roles have impacted women’s engagement with video games, contributing to an environment that is particularly hostile towards women – the environment that produced Gamergate.

Although there are more male than female players in certain categories of games, many women do play video games. Since women are present in game communities, it is therefore
unlikely that a lack of female players is to blame for Gamergate and the hypermasculine territory it occurred within. This chapter has established that gender roles have significantly impacted women’s engagement with video games. Game creators have historically believed that men and women enjoy different games, and conceived female players as a genre, rather than a demographic. This conception that women must enjoy certain stereotypical kinds of games, as well as the social coding of video games as masculine, has ‘othered’ women from game spaces, evident in and furthered by their harassment in game communities. One suggestion for why gender roles are still so pervasive in video games is the way that female characters are represented. Hence, Chapter Two will investigate how female characters are represented in video games, and what connections this has with the game industry.
Chapter Two: Gender Representation in Games and the Industry

As Chapter One showed, while there is a stereotype of video games being a masculine activity, and most players being male, this view is not actually maintained by the figures. In fact, a very substantial number, and in some segments a majority of videogame players, are female. Yet when we examine both the industry, as well as the broader cultural aspects around play, and especially how female characters are represented in-game, there is at work what Fron et al. (2007) term a hegemony of play. The hegemony of play is an explanation of how ‘technological, commercial and cultural power structures’ in the industry have established certain play styles and games as the status quo (2007, p. 1). This chapter aims to examine this notion of there being a hegemony of play, not only in terms of the representation of women in games, but also in how that is manifested in the industry that makes the games.

Using the terms of the ‘circuit of culture’ (Hall 1997, p. 1; du Gay et al. 1997, p. 3), identification refers to lived cultures and social relations (Leve 2012, p. 4), the idea that certain games are ‘masculine’ and more valuable than ‘feminine’ games. It is related to representation of female characters, and to the production atmosphere, including women’s treatment in the industry.

This chapter is divided into three sections: the hegemony of play, female characters in games, and the industry. First, I introduce the hegemony of play and explain how it has come about over the game industry’s lifetime. Second, I examine how female characters are represented in video games, divided under three broad categories: AAA games, indie games,
and casual/mobile games. While female characters have historically been relatively absent or highly sexualised in games, the literature suggests that female characters are increasing in frequency, while at the same time sexualisation is decreasing. In general, it is in indie games that gender seems to be approached in a far less sexualised manner, and where there is greater exploration of gender. Of course, as a 'medium's culture of production affects what kind of content is created, who creates it, and who consumes it or does not' (Johnson 2013, p. 137), it is vital to not just examine representation but also the environment that produced it. Therefore, the third and final part of the chapter investigates female employees' work experiences, which typically involve strenuous work practices and often harassment and misrecognition. Interestingly, as with female characters' representation, there are are signs of change, but as a whole it is clear that the video game industry produces what can be termed a hegemony of play.

I. The Hegemony of Play

As discussed in the previous chapter, men and women have been, and often still are, thought to approach video games differently and prefer different kinds of games – somewhat predictably, male players apparently prefer privileged hardcore games that involve violence and competition, while female players prefer what are seen to be devalued casual games that are cooperative or involve puzzles. Despite evidence that such preferences and attitudes are not straightforward (Jenson, de Castell & Fisher 2007; Thornham 2008, 2011; Yee 2015), and the significant rise in female players (Renevey 2014; Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, p. 6; ESA 2017, p. 7) the core demographic for video games has been described as 'young men under 30' (Crowe & Watts 2014, p. 221), and ‘18-to-35-year-old-men' (Hiwiller 2016, p. 43). The privileging of hardcore games and focus on such an audience reflects, according to authors such as Fron et al. (2007, p. 1) a 'hegemony of play', which is:
a complex layering of technological, commercial and cultural power structures [that] have dominated the development of the digital game industry over the past 35 years, creating an entrenched status quo which ignores the needs and desires of ‘minority’ players such as women and ‘non-gamers,’ Who in fact represent the majority of the population.

Fron et al. (2007, p. 1) argue that the elite creators in the industry are dominated by Caucasian men, and that these people choose what technologies will be utilised, what games will be created and by who, which players should be designed for, and what styles of play should be catered for. This is particularly important in the game industry, as video games are quite autobiographical – designers create games that they enjoy. For instance, Chess reflects on an interview with a female game designer who stated that they have needed to teach young male developers ‘how to create game narratives for primarily older female audiences, and that has often been different from what they would like to play themselves’ (2017, p. 44). This hegemony has reified specific values and norms of games and play, which ‘reinforce that industry’s technological, commercial and cultural investments in a particular definition of games and play, creating a cyclical system of supply and demand in which alternate products of play are marginalized and devalued’ (2007, p. 1). As this chapter will explore, the hegemony of play is visible in how female characters’ representation in games has generally been lacking or sexualised. Rather unsurprisingly, the game industry is also dominated by men and there is a tendency to treat female employees poorly, making it clear they do not belong.

The reasons for this hegemony of play according to Fron et al. (2007) are several, and have partly come about through the game industry’s history and economic practices. To understand the economics of video game production, it is vital to understand the circuit of capital: production, commodity, and consumption (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p.
Within this circuit video games are produced at the centre of three subcircuits, which feed into each other: technology (programmers, consoles and computers, users), culture (designers, games, players), and marketing (marketers, commodities, consumers) (2003, p. 52). The ability of game production companies to respond to the interests of audiences is constrained by the needs of marketing as well as certain research practices. This usually leads to only certain kinds of gaming experiences being generated—those that 'maximise profitable growth' (2003, p. 57). There are two main factors that influence the shaping of markets and products in the AAA video game industry: player demographic data, which has privileged male markets over others, and the expensive nature of game production, which discourages developers and publishers from taking risks. The rest of this section explores how this has come about.

In the late 70s and early 80s, the home video game industry was booming, and game designers focused on making games they enjoyed rather than money (King & Borland 2003, p. 67). These games were largely developed without consideration for gender. The home video game industry, for example, began in 1972 with the Magnavox Odyssey, which ran simple games using white dots and lines based on sports – representation was not a major concern (Wolf 2008a, p. 14). This was followed by the Atari 2600 in 1977, which ran colour versions of arcade favourites such as Space Invaders. Arcade games were frequently marketed towards men and women (Kocurek 2015, p. xiv), and both systems were advertised for boys and girls of all ages (Video Game Console Library 2016a, 2016b). However, the industry crashed in 1977 due to the 1976 release of General Instrument's AY-3-8500 chip, which was revolutionary as it contained all of the circuitry needed for a video game in a single integrated circuit. By January 1977, 7,000,000 chips had already shipped, and there were too many games on the market (Wolf 2008b, p. 104). While both men and women enjoyed games and the industry was successful, this first crash led game creators to homogenise the various kinds of play as part of an effort to keep games commercially viable.
By the end of 1981 the industry had recovered and was once again thriving, with an estimated income of $5 billion USD (Wolf 2008b, p. 103). Atari was the largest game company of all time\(^{49}\), and its success prompted dozens of companies to sell video games, although most produced substandard, cheaply made copies of already well-known games (Herman 2008a, p. 58; Wolf 2008b, p. 103). Due to an influx of poor quality titles flooding the market, the video game industry crashed again in 1983 (Wesley & Barczak 2010, p. 14). The industry reported a 35% loss compared to the previous year- a loss of $1.5 billion USD (2008b, p. 105). By 1984 most third party software vendors had disappeared, and many companies abandoned video games and moved into other markets (Wolf 2008b, p. 105), marking the end of the era of early home game systems (Herman 2008a, p. 58). This second crash drove game companies to become ever more conservative and risk-avoidant in deciding what kinds of games to develop, which, I argue, is part of the reason for the development of a hegemony of play as it exists today.

To help recover from the 1983 crash, Nintendo released the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985, which was hugely successful\(^{50}\) (Wolf 2008c, p. 29), and heralded the third generation (8-bit) of video game consoles (Herman 2008a, p. 161). The NES was economically successful because its improved technology provided Nintendo with significant power, which they used to control the quantity and quality of games developed for the system, and promote their own Intellectual Property (IP) (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, pp. 111–114). Further, the NES marked the first major shift in target audiences in the video game industry, as it was marketed as a toy, rather than a game system (Bogost 2016). As mentioned in the previous chapter, children’s toys are highly gendered (Auster & Mansbach 2012, p. 384), and video games were no exception. In fact, in the late 80s and early 90s, Nintendo conducted research into ‘the tastes, preferences, and buying power of core

\(^{49}\) With a $415 million USD profit in 1980 (Wolf 2008b, p. 103).
\(^{50}\) This console was released as the Nintendo Famicom in Japan in 1983 (Wolf 2008c, p. 29).
customers to predict which games would be hits’, finding that ‘the principle player is a boy eight to seventeen years-old’ (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 249). In a drive to be successful after the second video game industry crash, Nintendo began to focus on gender demographics, focusing on a young male audience.

The fourth generation of game consoles in the 90s was dominated by SNK’s NeoGeo, the Sega Genesis, and the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Herman 2008b, pp. 119–120; Wolf 2008d, p. xix). Since ‘action–adventure, sports, racing, fighting, and shooting genres adapted from the arcade proved popular with this youthful male audience’, game companies continued to produce those genres, rather than create new content (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 249). With the fifth generation of consoles, the industry turned towards male teenagers, with gaming magazines addressing readers as such (Kirkpatrick 2013, p. 87). Such a shift, Kocurek suggests, has its origins in ‘celebration, and even fetishization’ of young male arcade game players in the 70s (2015, p. xix). Sega competed with Nintendo, marketing Nintendo as ‘infantile and boring’ (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 130). In contrast, Sega’s ads referred to a ‘rebellious attitude and male sexuality’, and incorporated violence into their games to appeal to teenage males and young men (2003, pp. 131–132). In 1995, the Sony PlayStation was released, targeting hardcore 12-24 year olds alongside Sega (2003, p. 153). These games were violent not simply because violence sells, but because it was ‘a way to precision-target strategically important market segments’ (2003, p. 249). Hence, pressure to succeed and the reliability of the hardcore young male audience encouraged game creators to focus on the latter as a demographic. While some in the industry addressed female audiences by producing the ‘pink games’ discussed in the previous chapter, this simply reinforced the gender binary, contributing further to the generation of a hegemony of play.

51 For more on how the popularity of arcades amongst boys impacted the future video game industry, see Kocurek (2015).
52 The fifth generation includes the Sega Saturn, Nintendo 64, and PlayStation (Herman 2008a; Therrien 2008; Wolf 2008e).
Kline, Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter explain that since men enjoyed the kinds of violent games produced in the 90s, many ended up working in the game industry and continued to produce the same kinds of games (2003, p. 257), further cementing the hegemony of play. Since the 00s, the industry has been dominated by Sony’s PlayStation, Microsoft’s Xbox, and Nintendo’s DS, Wii, and Switch consoles\(^\text{53}\), and promotional discourses have focused on the differences between these three companies (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 57). As in the 90s, Sony and Microsoft have prioritised so-called hardcore players, as they are the most visible and profitable (Dymek 2012, p. 39). For Fron et al., these hardcore games typically involve graphic violence, ‘male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualised, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination’ (2007, p. 7). Nintendo aims to differentiate itself from Microsoft and PlayStation by catering to a more casual market and broad demographic with games that are easy to learn, play, and work (Lee, Lin & Yu 2017, p. 682). Although, as mentioned in Chapter One, Nintendo marketed the Wii and DS towards women in highly gendered ways (Chess 2011). In any case, there is evidently a trend where economic pressures have encouraged developers to segment the market into gendered target audiences, prioritising the more profitable ‘hardcore’ audience.

This is not to say that there have not been attempts to diversify the market. Microsoft entertained an initiative to make the ‘casual’ market – families, women and housewives – interested in the Xbox 360, which was considered high-risk and was ultimately cancelled (Schaumberg, cited in Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 193). Notably, PlayStation, Xbox, and Wii advertisements from 2013 contained men and women as well as non-white ethnicities (Chess, Evans & Baines 2017, p. 48). In any case, diversity has varied across platforms as each

\(^{53}\) Sony dominates the AAA industry with 57% of the console market share, followed by Microsoft and then Nintendo (Harding-Rolls 2017).
company aimed for different audiences\textsuperscript{54}, although they still illustrated the perception that a gamer is white and male. For example, the advertisements suggested that female players almost always needed permission to play through surrounding communities, and masculine play was often shown through violent speech and action (2017, p. 53). Despite shifts in players, the game industry appears to uphold the hegemony of play, partly through reliance on the hardcore male segment of players.

Today game companies often reproduce the hegemony of play, as they are still reliant on market segmentations that prioritise male audiences and their supposed preferences. For example, one industry worker noted that the metrics team for \textit{Marvel Super Hero Squad Online} was ‘shocked to discover that girls liked our game at all. Weren’t even trying for that “demographic”’ (Grisom 2012). There is also evidence that companies can be averse to female employees’ opinions on development, as another industry worker has ‘been told “we don’t need women in order to know what female players want from this industry”’ (Rossi 2012). Finally, female characters are still seen as something unusual, a risk – ‘every female character I want to include ”has to make sense” but making everybody a dude needs no explanation’ (Natale 2012). In short, what pervades the industry, and what is a significant component in the constitution of a hegemony of play, is the notion that the use of female characters is something unusual and risky, while the inclusion of male characters is simply taken for granted.

It is important to recognise here that video games have become highly expensive to develop due to the cost of technology (Cremin 2015, p. 45), particularly with improvements in graphics capabilities and the popularity of open-world games\textsuperscript{55}. Most AAA games are

\textsuperscript{54} The Wii had the highest proportion of female and male players. In descending order, the most women were present in Wii, Xbox, PlayStation, and PC advertisements. The most men were present in Wii, DS, PlayStation, and PC (Chess, Evans & Baines 2017, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{55} For example, \textit{Metal Gear Solid V} cost $80 million USD to develop (James 2015), \textit{Battlefield 4} cost $100 million (BF4Central 2014), and \textit{Star Wars: The Old Republic} the most expensive game of all time at $200 million (Fritz 2012).
produced by the North American industry\textsuperscript{56}, which ‘lends itself to high-stakes dramas: long hours, looming deadlines, hardcore workers, big money pay-outs and tremendous losses’ (O’Donnell 2012a, p. 99). The industry is characterised by vertical integration\textsuperscript{57}, but even the largest companies struggle with the costs of production (Wesley & Barczak 2010, p. 3). Investment must be sustained for years or decades before turning a profit, although games tend to have a short life cycle, and it is difficult to predict what will be well-accepted (Cremin 2015, p. 49; Tschang 2007, p. 990). In fact, ‘it is frequently touted that only 10 per cent of games’ become commercially successful\textsuperscript{58} (O’Donnell 2012a, p. 106). As a result, publishers reject games with little best-seller potential, and invest marketing and promotion resources into those that do (Cremin 2015, p. 48). The pressure to be successful often leads to vertical consolidation and conservative production practices that uphold the hegemony of play.

Often, major game companies rely on popular franchises, turning a successful game into IP and releasing iterations each year that are quite similar to the last (Cremin 2015, p. 48). Franchises are desirable because they are reliable, having ‘a calculable revenue stream’ (Hill-Whittall 2015, p. 246), and numerous publishers rely on franchises to offset the loss of other products (O’Donnell 2012a, p. 107). At the same time reliance on franchises has resulted in some large game companies producing a relatively homogeneous selection of games. For example, ‘a significant portion’ of EA’s revenue is ‘based on a few popular franchises’, to the

\textsuperscript{56} This is because many major publishers are in the US (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012b, p. 10). The game industry in the US has its roots in the software industry, with Steve Jobs and Steve Wizniak working for game companies like Atari (O’Donnell 2012b, p. 19). Americans had a significant role in the early industry, including Steve Russell, Martin Graetz, and Wayne Witaenem’s 1963 game Spacewar; Ralph Baer’s 1972 Magnavox Odyssey; Nolan Bushnell’s founding of Atari in 1972; and the first independent game studio, Activision, formed in 1980 by ex-Atari employees David Crane, Alan Miller, and Bob Whitehead (O’Donnell 2012a, p. 100).

\textsuperscript{57} Vertical integration is a process where two or more stages of production that are typically fulfilled by separate firms are combined in one firm (Black, Hashimzade & Myles 2017). Vertical integration can improve the quality and reliability of goods, but can also ‘inhibit entry to and competition in an industry’ (2017), and console manufacturers in particular gain significant power as they provide licences and contractual agreements for a game to be produced for their platform (O’Donnell 2012b, p. 24). The top game companies today include Tencent\textsuperscript{57}, Sony, Activision Blizzard, Microsoft, Apple, and EA (Newzoo 2016b).

\textsuperscript{58} Writing in 2004, New York Times writer Nussenbaum (2004) claimed that video games are similar to the film industry, where two out of ten films make a profit, predominantly due to the cost of production. More recently in 2015, former president of Epic Games Mike Capps stated that game developers ‘just can’t make enough money now’, and that he ‘couldn’t even guarantee you a 10 percent chance of a hit anymore’ (cited in Brightman 2015).
extent that ‘the underperformance of a single major title could have a material adverse impact on [their] financial results’ (EA 2017a, p. 9). Further, ‘distributors and retailers are drawn towards recognizable franchises’ (Jenkins & Squire 2008, p. 34), and retailers tend to stock major releases according to publishers’ advice (Broekhuizen, Lampel & Rietveld 2013, p. 962). This results in increasing the power of the main producers of content, while pushing away new entrants (2013, p. 962). In this manner franchises have to an extent contributed to the hegemony of play. For example, certain genres such as highly masculine military FPS’s are often upheld as ‘hardcore’ games by members of the game community, and are popularised through franchises such as Call of Duty and Battlefield, as well as others. Such franchises are not problematic in and of themselves, but their dominance over the market can reinforce the idea that certain games have more value than others.

Nonetheless there have been huge changes in the game industry over the past decade due to shifts in distribution and the availability of development tools (O’Donnell 2017, pp. 3–4). As a result, there has been a rise in independent (indie) developers and games on the mobile market, which challenge the major (AAA) game companies (Sarkissian, cited in Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 90), and make it clear that previous ideas of who the ‘average’ gamer is are changing (Hart 2017, p. xi). Self-publishing allows indie studios to retain freedom over the games they make and what platforms they want to release on (Hill-Whittall 2015, p. 66). While indie developers are of course still under pressure to succeed financially and often struggle to receive funding (Hiwiller 2016, p. 441; Alvaro, cited in Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 41; Perry 2017; Johnson 2017), this method of game production has been described as ‘much safer for experimental design and for innovators’ (VanEseltine, cited in Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 220). The challenge of indie gaming and more diverse audiences might—in theory—encourage AAA developers to diversify, challenging the hegemony of play. With this in mind, the rest of this chapter explores how the hegemony is present and challenged both in games’ representation of women, as well as their treatment in the industry as employees.
II. Female Characters in Games

One area where the hegemony of play is particularly evident, and where a specific segment of male players are prioritised over others, is in character design. One popular explanation in the literature for why women are so poorly treated in game communities is that female characters are often represented in highly sexualised ways. For example, Behm-Morawitz and Mastro found that men and women who played a sexualised female character ‘resulted in less favourable attitudes toward women’s cognitive capabilities’⁵⁹ (2009, p. 820). Other studies find more overt links to sexualisation. Yao, Mahood and Linz found that men who played a sexually oriented video game that contained themes of female objectification reacted quickly to sexually-objectifying descriptions of women (2010, p. 82). They also found that these male players were more likely to self-report a tendency to sexually harass than men who played other games (2010, p. 85). Further, Gabbidini et al. found that ‘playing violent-sexist video games increases masculine beliefs and decreases empathy for female violence victims, especially for boys and young men who highly identified with the male game character’ (2016, p. 10). It is not necessarily that games that contain such depictions are a cause of the sexist and harassing behaviour that occurred during Gamergate, but that these kinds of representations of women reinforce or condone such behaviour. The following section examines how female characters have historically been represented in video games, using the categories AAA, indie, and casual games.

⁵⁹ Further, women who played a sexualised female character ‘were more likely to agree with statements suggesting that women were less physically capable in comparison to men’ (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro 2009, p. 820).
A. AAA Games

AAA typically refers to games that are produced by large teams throughout numerous companies, with budgets in the millions (Lipkin 2012, p. 9). The AAA industry is characterised by vertical integration and consolidation, where ‘big, cash-rich publishers have been in a strong position to acquire developers and shape the industry’ (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 49). The AAA industry is influenced by, and relies on, the so-called hardcore demographic – players who are willing to spend money on games and consoles, and play often for significant amounts of time (Dymek 2012, p. 38). Since this demographic is dominated by young men, AAA games have tended to prioritise male over female characters and depicted female characters in sexist ways. Such depictions contribute to the idea that video games are a masculine territory – one that, I argue, Gamergaters were anxious to maintain.

Scholars have consistently pointed out that female characters are poorly represented in video games, but they have examined representation in varying ways. Many utilise advertising data rather than the games themselves, as analysing games is a complicated task. Thousands of games could be examined, and the process would take a significant amount of time if each game was played. Hence, as well as playing the game to analyse gender representation (Williams et al. 2009; Downs & Smith 2010; Lynch et al. 2016), researchers also examine magazine advertisements (Behm-Morawitz 2014; Summers & Miller 2014); trailers (Johnson 2015); and box art (Near 2013). Each method can have varying results. As Dickerman notes, the representation of women in video game advertisements can be more sexualised than what is actually in the game (2008, p. 23). Further, some of the studies I discuss in this section could include games that others would call ‘indie’. However, most of the studies examined the most popular games in a given period, which are generally AAA games.

Female characters are often represented in highly sexualised ways in game advertisements, if present at all. Notably, there has been a shift from female characters being depicted as helpless, such as Pauline, originally simply known as ‘the lady’, the damsel in
distress in the original *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo Research & Development 1 1981), to being sexualised, such as the earlier titles of *Tomb Raider* (Core Design 1996), where Lara’s supersized breasts became a hallmark of the series. Such a change aligns with the average player age increasing over time. Examining game magazine articles published between 1988 and 2007, Miller and Summers note a trend of decreasing benevolent sexism, and increasing hostile sexism over time (2014, p. 1037). Specifically, Behm-Morawitz’ 2014 study of race and gender in video game magazine advertisements found that 78% of the characters depicted were male, compared to 20% female (2014, p. 8). Upholding traditional gender roles, the male characters were much more likely to be depicted in an assertive or violent role than the female characters (2014, p. 11). Further, female characters were thirteen times more likely to be dressed provocatively than male characters, and almost four times as likely to be sexualised in appearance (2014, p. 13). Generally there is an overabundance of male characters, and when female characters are depicted, they are likely to be sexualised, and unlikely to have agency. Game designers’ sexualised depictions of female characters could influence how players treat women in game communities, particularly considering the highly sexual nature of the vitriol exhibited during Gamergate.

With regard to female character’s representation in games and trailers, in general there are more female characters in ’10s games than there have been in the past. Downs and

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60 There is some debate as to how this came about. Some sources suggest that Lara Croft's artist, Toby Gard, accidentally increased her breast size by 150% instead of 50%, and that the development team prevented him from fixing the mistake (GameSpot Staff 2000; Davis 2004; McLachlin 2008). The more recent reboot of *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) depicts Croft in a much less sexualised manner, with more realistic body proportions, a smaller bust size, and appropriate clothing.

61 Summers and Miller explain that benevolent sexism refers to traditional attitudes towards women, particularly paternalistic and protective attitudes towards women. This encourages a sense of male power through subscription to traditional gender roles (2014, p. 1032). Hostile sexism, on the other hand, refers to attitudes towards women which see them as sexual objects. This is often expressed through claims of women’s derogatory characteristics such as seeking power and utilising sexuality to their advantage (2014, p. 1032).

62 She examined 383 US advertisements of console, mobile, and PC games from 12 issues of *Game Informer* and *PC Gamer* (Behm-Morawitz 2014, pp. 6 & 1). Notably, there were not enough female non-white characters to have a meaningful analysis or comparison (2014, p. 8).

63 53% of male characters were depicted in a violent act, compared to 20% of females, and 44% of males held weapons, compared to 20% of females (Behm-Morawitz 2014, pp. 10–11).

64 9% of females had a flat chest, 37% average, and 23% voluptuous (Behm-Morawitz 2014, p. 13).
Smith examined characters from the top 20 selling games of 2003, finding that 86% of characters were male, and 14% female (2010, p. 721). Examining the top 133 games from 2005 to 2006, Williams et al. had similar results, finding that 85% of characters were male, compared to 15% female (2009, p. 834). In 2015 Johnson replicated Downs and Smith’s analysis, examining the launch trailers of the top 23 games from 2014 that depict playable characters with a clear gender and have reviews on GameSpot (2015, p. 10). The results show that female characters are much more likely to be present in a game today than in the past, but still at a much lesser rate than male characters. Further, the increased *number of* female characters is not paired with decreased sexualisation. The results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003 (Games)</th>
<th>2015 (Trailers)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of characters</td>
<td>Female: 14%</td>
<td>Female: 36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 86%</td>
<td>Male: 64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of primary characters</td>
<td>Female: 12%</td>
<td>Female: 38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 88%</td>
<td>Male: 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of characters sexualised</td>
<td>Female: 41%</td>
<td>Female: 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 11%</td>
<td>Male: 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of characters fully or partially nude</td>
<td>Female: 43%</td>
<td>Female: 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 4%</td>
<td>Male: 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of characters wearing inappropriate attire</td>
<td>Female: 16%</td>
<td>Female: 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 2%</td>
<td>Male: 4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Downs & Smith (2010) and Johnson’s (2015) findings on the depiction of male and female characters*

These findings on representation do have complications. Like Johnson (2015), Lynch et al.’s study on the representation of female characters found that there has been an increase in the numbers of female characters (2016, p. 564). However, unlike Johnson, Lynch et al.

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65 While the study is limited in that launch trailers do not necessarily represent the game content, this has implications for how games are advertised.

66 Lynch et al. examined 20 titles per year from 1983 to 2014. The authors only examined games that contained female characters (2016, p. 564).
found that sexualisation of female characters was at its peak in the 1990s, and has actually been decreasing since 2006 (2016, pp. 564 & 576). This disconnect could be explained in that while Downs & Smith (2010) examined the games themselves, Johnson examined the trailers, which could be more highly sexualised than the games. Still, Downs & Smith and Johnson’s findings indicate that at the very least, there are more female characters now than in the past.

The increase in female characters is to some extent in line with an increase in female players, while their continued sexualisation in advertisements indicates that increased presence may not line up with a change in gender stereotypes or target demographics.

In sum, it appears that there has been a shift from depicting female characters in a helpless manner, to depicting them in a sexualised manner (Summers & Miller 2014, p. 1037), possibly partly due to improvements in graphics capabilities. There has also been a shift in that there are more female characters now than in the past, although they are still most often in secondary roles, and secondary female characters tend to be more sexualised than primary female characters (Downs & Smith 2010, pp. 726–728; Johnson 2015, pp. 13–15; Lynch et al. 2016, p. 564). Examining game trailers, Johnson suggests that the sexualisation of female characters has not necessarily improved (2015, pp. 17–18), while Lynch et al. observe an improvement in games with playable female characters67 (2016, p. 576). In short, female characters are more present than in the past, but they still tend to be sexualised, which suggests that game marketers are still holding onto the conception that video games are a masculine territory.

The lack of female characters in video games and their sexualisation when they are present suggests that game marketers are trying to appeal to a specific young male demographic. It suggests that the argument that ‘sex sells’ has been found to be true in some

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67 Johnson suggests that the sexualisation of female characters is not improving, as Downs and Smith found that in 2003 41% of female characters in games were sexualised, and 43% were partially nude (2010, p. 727). In comparison, Johnson’s study of trailers found 39% of female characters to be wearing sexually revealing clothing, and, 42% partially nude (2015, p. 18). Using an adapted version of Downs and Smith’s coding structure, Lynch et al. found that sexualisation of female characters in games peaked in the 90s and has been decreasing since (2016, pp. 564 & 572).
cases. Near’s 2013 study examined representations of female characters on US box art of console games, and its relationship to sales\textsuperscript{68}. He found that the best-selling Teen and Mature games are those with female characters who are non-central and sexualised (2013, p. 264). That is, sexualised female characters were associated with higher sales, but only when they were \textit{not central} on the box art. In fact, female characters were only ever positively related to game sales when they were marginal (2013, p. 262). Although box art is not the only medium through which games are advertised, and may not accurately depict the game\textsuperscript{69} (2013, p. 264), his study illustrates the target audience for video games as teen and adult males. Clearly, AAA video games are marketed through a simplistic and reductive conception of gender, which contributes to the construction of video gaming as a masculine territory – one where women do not belong.

It is also worth noting that representation of female characters varies largely by genre, and that in the game industry certain genres are associated with certain demographics. Considering that female players have been found to prefer games that depict women in less sexualised ways (Hartmann & Klimmt 2006, p. 910), depicting characters in sexualised or non-sexualised ways according to genre can create a self-fulfilling prophecy that encourages or discourages players from engaging with different kinds of games. For example, Lynch et al. (2016, p. 573) found that fighting games depicted female characters in the most sexualised ways, and Yee (2017) found that a low proportion of women play them compared to men. Further, Lynch et al. found that shooters\textsuperscript{70}, platformers\textsuperscript{71}, and RPGs depicted female characters in the least sexualised ways (2016, p. 573), and the latter have been found to be

\textsuperscript{68} Near examined 399 box art cases of games with Teen or Mature ratings, released between 2005 and 2010 in the US (2013, p. 252).

\textsuperscript{69} For example, advertisements for \textit{Skyrim} depict a male human character alone, even though during game play one can create a character from a range of species who can be male or female.

\textsuperscript{70} Lynch et al. suggest that shooters were low for sexualisation predominantly because of the first-person view these games utilise (2016, p. 577). However it is also worth noting that shooters tend to use military themes, depicting more male than female characters, and allowing for less sexualised encounters.

\textsuperscript{71} Platformers tend to be cartoonish and aimed at children, popularised by \textit{Super Mario Bros} (Nintendo Research & Development 4 1985; O’Donnell 2012b).
especially popular with women\textsuperscript{72} (Yee 2017). The coding of certain genres as masculine or feminine by game producers is reinforced by how female characters are depicted in these games, and in turn repeated by other players. Rather than assume that less women play fighting games because they dislike violence, for example, it is possible that female players are perturbed by the sexualised depiction of female characters and the kinds of behaviour associated with the genre\textsuperscript{73}. Repeatedly depicting female characters in a stereotypical manner in specific genres can further mark those genres as masculine, and can shape the overall demographics of who wants to play those games.

### B. Indie Games

The second major category of game production is indie (independent) development. While there is no clear definition of the term ‘indie’, Lipkin explains that indie games are broadly defined by three elements: ideology, economics, and a subculture that seeks out and supports developers (2012, p. 13). The main difference between AAA and indie developers is that the latter are financially independent from the investor and publisher (Garda & Grabarczyk 2016), and they rely on alternative production and distribution structures (Lipkin 2012, p. 11). For example, crowdfunding facilities like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, Patreon, and Steam Early Access allow developers to source funding before and during development. They also help developers to be more visible and develop a relationship with players (Lipkin 2012, p. 20; Garda & Grabarczyk 2016; O’Donnell 2017, p. 7). While indie game developers must consider their audience for their game to be successful, or indeed, be created at all, they are under less

\textsuperscript{72} It is also interesting that RPGs depict women in unsexualised ways, considering that the game they draw much inspiration from \textit{D&D}, which used to contain highly sexualised depictions of women and has improved (D’Anastasio 2016).

\textsuperscript{73} The fighting game community is known for exhibiting highly sexist behaviour at times. For example, \textit{Tekken} coach Aris Bakhtanians once argued against making the community more welcoming, stating that ‘sexual harassment is part of the culture. If you remove that from the fighting game community, it’s not the fighting game community’ (Kuchera 2012). See Harper (2014) for more information on fighting game communities.
pressure to appeal to traditional demographics and broad markets that the AAA industry has relied upon, such as hardcore gamers.

In terms of ideology, indie games have the potential to disrupt AAA developer’s domination over what kinds of games are available (Hart 2017, p. vii). Indie developers often posit themselves as opposed to mainstream games producers (Lipkin 2012, pp. 10 & 19), due to their association with creative and professional freedom (Ruffino 2013, p. 111; Hill-Whittall 2015, p. 66; Garda & Grabarczyk 2016). In fact, Fisher and Harvey explain that ‘indie’ often refers to a political position against that which ‘mainstream games culture represents, sanctions, promotes, and protects’ (2013, p. 27). As El Sabaawi points out, indie gaming provides an avenue for stories that are not addressed in blockbuster games (2017). AAA video games designers of course can resist social norms, but publishers often request changes to make the game more commercially successful – which often involves embracing ‘hegemonic ideologies, gendered and racial stereotypes, while also [being] silent on class divisions, state violence, inequality and exploitation’ (Cremin 2015, p. 122). While indie games certainly can and do reproduce stereotypical and narrow conceptions of gender, their lack of dependence on a specific audience can allow for more varied representations of gender.

One way that indie video games have potential to be subversive is by developing varied primary female characters. While there is no content analysis of female characters in indie games at the moment, the majority of games with the tag ‘female protagonist’ on Steam are indie games74. There are a range of successful indie games with female leads. Supergiant Game’s sci-fi action RPG Transistor (2014) has won over a hundred industry accolades (Steam 2018a). The female protagonist of this game, Red, fights her way through a city that has been invaded by a robot army. Another example is Upper One Games’ atmospheric puzzle platformer Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna) (2014), which has won four awards and been

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74 Steam is the largest digital distribution platform for PC games. The user-generated ‘female protagonist’ tag on Steam for Indie games brings 861 results, compared to 1231 results under all games (Steam 2017a, 2017b).
nominated for numerous others (Steam 2018b). In *Never Alone* the player can control Nuna and her companion Fox, ‘as they search for the source of an eternal blizzard that threatens the survival of everything they have ever known’ (Steam 2018b). The game was ‘developed in collaboration with the Iñupiat, an Alaska Native people, drawn from a traditional story that has been shared across the generations’ (Steam 2018b). These games received positive reviews and have female lead characters – they are examples of the emergence of a minor culture which has the potential to challenge narrow and stereotypical conceptions of female characters.75

Yet, indie development is still high-risk, and like AAA developers they must try to ensure that their game sells. Many developers supplement their income with other work (Hiwiller 2016, p. 441), and half make less than $500 USD from game sales (Game Developer 2013). A key factor in this is that Crowdfunding is difficult because backers, that is, people who have paid for the game, now have higher expectations of production quality (O’Donnell 2017, p. 8), and developers sometimes alter the game design so that it will stream well on Twitch or YouTube (Perry 2017). Further, some indie developers have their game published by a third party, which places pressure on the game content. In other words, while crowdfunding and early access provides indie developers with some degree of freedom from economic pressures, indie developers are nonetheless still under pressure to succeed financially and produce games that will appeal to a reasonably sized audience. The difference, then, between Indie games and AAA games is not financial pressure per se, but, rather, what they understand to be the best solution to financial pressure. AAA games tend to look to the pre-existing market whereas Indie developers tend to focus on the need to innovate valuable play experiences.

An example of such pressure on indie developers is the game *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment 2015), an episodic graphic adventure game ‘about friendship, fate, choices,

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75 While indie games have the potential to be subversive, not all developers have diversity as a goal. In fact, racial diversity in indie games has been found to be just as poor as in AAA games (Passmore et al. 2017, p. 143).
responsibilities and grief’ (Barbet & Koch 2016). The developers wanted ‘to do things that we love and these things just happen to be different from, let’s say, mainstream games’ (Life is Strange 2015). A key point of interest is that during the game Max falls in love with her friend Chloe. The developers sent the game to numerous publishers but, most wanted to change Max to a male – the publisher that was chosen, Square, was the only one not to suggest such a change (Life is Strange 2015). As the success of Life is Strange demonstrates76, while publishers’ desires reflect a conservative culture, games that do not fulfil their expectations of gender are not necessarily doomed to fail. In sort, while indie games do not always present diverse characters or depict women in an unsexualised manner, they are known for their tendency to do so, and their popularity challenges AAA creators’ or marketers’ narrow understanding of gender and demographics.

C. Casual Games

A final category of games that should be examined in relation to their representation of female characters is casual games. As mentioned in the previous chapter, casual games have become popular amongst a diverse range of players, and women in particular (Renevey 2014; Söderman 2017, p. 40). Casual game developers cater for larger and more diverse audiences than so-called mainstream gaming, and their players tend to have varying motives, skill levels, literacies, access to games and resources, as well as world views and beliefs (Kultima & Stenros 2010, p. 66). Still, it is worth pointing out that players often play casual games in a hardcore manner (Juul 2010, p. 129), and typically play them alongside numerous other genres (Yee 2017). Since casual games tend to be different genres to typical AAA games, they tend to be aimed towards different demographics, and, consequently, depict female characters in less sexualised ways.

76 Life is Strange has gained over 75 awards, particularly for character and story writing (Square Enix 2017), and as of 2017 has sold over three million copies (Life is Strange 2017).
Since casual games are quite popular amongst women it is interesting to note that the manner in which women are represented in these games differs significantly from traditional genres. Of 200 casual games, Wohn found that females (77%) were much more likely than males (23%) to be the solo primary character (2011, p. 198). The female characters’ attire was largely unsexualised compared to AAA games, and had some variation in body type (2011, p. 203). Also, while female characters were more likely than male characters to have a stereotypical feminine personality, they were just as likely as male characters to have a stereotypical masculine personality (2011, p. 203). In short, Wohn (2011, p. 203) found that, unlike AAA PC and console games, in casual games women are over-represented as primary characters, and are not shown in a sexualised way. In regard to market segmentation, clearly casual games are designed with female players, or at least a more general and diverse audience, in mind.

Considering the significant difference in female character’s representation in AAA, indie, and casual games, I make two conclusions. First, it is clear that both men and women play games, and that games that depict women in unsexualised ways can be financially successful. Second, the differences in representation among these types of game production also suggest that there is something within the industry that encourages developers to depict gender in stereotypical ways. It is not enough to assume that poor representations of women alone are the reason for harassing behaviour during Gamergate. The argument that gameplay can cause strong behavioural effects has always been tenuous (Jenkins 1999), and scholars who found links between sexualised female characters and negative attitudes towards women all note areas of doubt or complexity. For example, Behm-Morawitz and Mastro suggest that a

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77 Wohn defined casual games ‘as games that are distributed by companies that label themselves as casual game distributors’ (2011, p. 199).
78 However, 92% of the human characters were white, so, like indie games, representation of race is still an issue (Wohn 2011, p. 203).
79 No females wore extremely revealing attire, while 24.1% wore somewhat revealing, and 72.4% unrevealing. No males wore revealing attire (Wohn 2011, p. 203).
80 44% of females were thin, 48% normal, and 8% heavy, compared to 33% of males being thin and 67% being normal (Wohn 2011, p. 203).
sexualised female character may not foster men’s negative attitudes towards women, due to other positive or counter-stereotypical character traits (2009, p. 820). Yao, Mahood, and Linz point out that their work only examined short-term effects after playing a single game for a short amount of time, and that each player could experience the game differently (2010, pp. 86–87). Last, Ferguson and Donnellan re-examined Gabbiadini et al.’s data (2016), finding ‘little evidence for an overall effect of game condition on empathy toward girls or women’ (2017, p. 2446). These scholars’ doubts, as well as the general improvement in the numbers and depiction of female characters in video games, suggest that representation is not the main or sole factor that contributed to Gamergate.

III. The Industry

Obviously video games do not exist in a vacuum, and it is important to consider the context they are produced in by considering the production community that generates the representation of female characters in games. As Hall (1997) and du Gay et al. (1997) suggest, the circuit of culture indicates that producers of culture not only consider the consumer in creating products, but are also affected by their own norms and beliefs. As Johnson articulates, ‘a medium’s culture of production affects what kind of content is created, who creates it, and who consumes it or does not’ (2013, p. 137). Indeed, the game industry’s high-pressure working environment and low levels of diversity impact the games they produce and who plays them. Although the video game industry has become more diverse in terms of company sizes, organisational structures, commercial and artistic visions, and geographical locations, gender diversity is still an issue (Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, p. 33). In 2015 the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) found that 75% of people working in the international
video game industry were male, and 76% 'White/Caucasian/European'\textsuperscript{81} (Weststar et al. 2016, pp. 10 & 8), which is an improvement from 2005\textsuperscript{82}, but still severely below parity. The following section examines women’s experiences in the game industry, to try to illustrate some of the ways the industry’s culture impacts on players.

As per the circuit of culture (Hall 1997, p. 1; du Gay et al. 1997, p. 3), there is a link between representation – the highly sexualised depiction of female characters – and production – the way that women are treated in the game industry. Not only are there few women in the game industry, but female employees within the industry often experience discriminative or harassing behaviour (Gourdin 2005, pp. 10–12; Game Developer 2012; CBC News 2015; Takahashi 2015; Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, pp. 32–34; Ochsner 2017). Such behaviour illustrates a narrow conception of gender and a tendency to delegitimise female employees’ presence and expertise. As noted by an industry insider in Game Developer Magazine (2012):

\begin{quote}
I’m still surprised by how much sexism/racism the industry exhibits, and by how difficult it is to change perspectives on it. While the industry as a whole is slowly improving, I frequently find myself trying to explain to coworkers why certain content--however hilarious they find it--might offend certain groups of people. There still seems to be a "boys' club" atmosphere in the office sometimes and many women are put in the unenviable and unfair position of political correctness enforcer.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{81} It is also worth noting that women are also severely underrepresented in video games journalism, with 75% of articles on major games journalism websites written by men (MacDonald 2018b).

\textsuperscript{82} In 2005, IGDA found that 88.5% of industry workers were male, and 83.3% were ‘White’ (Gourdin 2005, pp. 10–12).
The boy’s club atmosphere that this employee describes illustrates a culture where hypersexualisation of female characters is normal. In fact, another industry worker describes that she ‘got blank stares when asked why a female soldier in a game I worked on looked like a porn star’ (Vainio 2012). Indeed, women’s negative experiences in the industry go further than simply acting as gatekeepers to problematic content. In November 2012, many female employees used the #1ReasonWhy hashtag on Twitter to voice their experiences of sexism. This hashtag became popular when game designer Brenda Romero responded to the question ‘why are there so few lady game creators?’ with ‘When announcing MY new game, an industry publication referred to me in the headline not by my name but as John Romero’s wife’ (Romero 2012). These types of experiences illustrate a production culture that routinely dismisses and sexualises women, suggesting that female characters’ poor representation in games originates partly from industry attitudes towards gender. A study by Ochsner (2017), for example, by way of an analysis of thousands of tweets using the hashtag #1ReasonWhy, found three key ways in which women in the industry are treated.

First, Ochsner found that ‘women are often evaluated on a different set of standards than their male counterparts and by criteria other than their professional contributions and accomplishments’ (2017, p. 7). Specifically, women describe being evaluated according to their clothing and appearance (2017, p. 8). Nielsen (2015), for instance, describes how at industry events she was ‘acutely aware of standing out’ wearing feminine clothing, and that she avoided wearing ‘anything that could be considered “sexy”’. Women are also often evaluated according to their relationships with men (Ochsner 2017, p. 8). Hill (2012), for example, describes that he has ‘had prominent designers compliment my games, while complimenting my wife’s appearance, when we develop together’. Women also report being tokenised (Ochsner 2017, p. 9), such as being considered exceptional if they succeed, but proof that women should not be in the industry if they fail (Sweetpavement 2012). Finally, women also experience double standards (Ochsner 2017, p. 10). For example, co-founder of
Pixelles, a women-in-games initiative, Rebecca Cohen Palcios explains that women in the game industry often need to work harder than men to prove themselves\(^\text{83}\) (CBC News 2015). Women were also held to different standards than men during Gamergate. In particular, Quinn was evaluated according to her relationship with Gjoni, and attacks on numerous women frequently referred to personal appearance and sex.

Second, Ochsner found that ‘[w]omen are often denied the recognition of status and expertise that their male colleagues enjoy’ (2017, p. 11). Women often report negative experiences in games education (2017, p. 11). As MacArn (2012) explains, she had a teacher ask her ‘if I was a manhater out to cause trouble’. Women are also often mistaken for partners or booth babes (Ochsner 2017, p. 11), and in general are not assumed to be game industry employees. For example, Johnson describes how unlike the male employees, a female associate producer was asked if she was a gamer, quizzed on what games she played, and was tested on her general knowledge about games (2013, p. 152). Gender roles in relation to work are also evident – on this point Swift (2012) explains she is ‘mistaken for the receptionist or day-hire marketing at trade shows’. Indeed, some women have been hired or not hired due to their gender (Ochsner 2017, p. 12). As Kent (2012) points out, she ‘once heard a male manager say “We don’t need any more women, they’re more trouble than they’re worth” as he viewed applications’. These experiences are evident throughout Gamergate, where female industry workers were constructed as troublemakers and their contributions to video gaming were largely ignored or treated with derision.

Last, Oschner found that ‘[w]omen’s voices are often silenced, dismissed, and made invisible’ (2017, p. 12). This includes harassment in online play, at school, industry events and conferences, online communities and comments, and at work (2017, pp. 12–14). In particular,\(^\text{83}\) Female players are often tasked to prove themselves as competent gamers, a feature that Paul believes is part of video gaming’s toxic meritocracy (2018, pp. 46–47).
women often report being groped at conventions (Young 2012). Women can often also be silenced through not wanting to be seen as a problem. One female employee explains, for example, that ‘[if you] veer far from the line you’re expected to walk…you can find yourself ostracized or labelled as “difficult”’ (CBC News 2015). Another describes being afraid to speak up about harassment in case they become unhireable (Cohen-Moore 2012). In the interest of keeping their jobs or ensuring their future in the game industry, women can be bullied into staying silent about harassment or speaking up about their concerns. During Gamergate, Gamergaters silenced women by ostracising them when they did speak out against harassment. This culture of discouraging women from speaking out against discrimination helps to maintain the conception that video games are for men.

Another way that female industry workers can be silenced, just as occurs in game play itself as noted earlier, is by avoiding harassment. Communities are particularly important for indie developers, who need to build relationships with their audiences (Perry 2017). Communities and fans spread messages and provide feedback (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012a, p. 66), and engaging with game communities helps to increase a game’s ‘longevity, quality, and profile; and hence profit’ (Apperley 2010, p. 104). Yet, indie developers risk abuse in doing so, and the same communities that can provide support can also generate backlash. As Jaffa (2016) points out, indie developers were actually at the heart of Gamergate – it was Quinn’s Depression Quest that first drew attention for being different to typical games. Yet Depression Quest was not an isolated incident. For example, following the vitriol that Baldur’s Gate: Siege of Dragonspear received on Steam for having a transgender character, indie developer Amy Dentata stated that her game Trigger would not be released on the platform.

84 Physical sexual harassment is not exclusive to video games, but a prevalent issue in broader geek culture, including literary (Cuinn 2013), comic (Asselin 2014), and tabletop game communities (Romano 2016). In response to this trend, movements such as ‘Cosplay is NOT Consent’ have been established to raise awareness and help women at conventions (Cosplay Deviants 2018), and organisers at both large and small conventions have needed to implement anti-harassment policies (PAX Aus 2017; Gen Con 2018).

85 Cohen-Moore does not elaborate on why specifically speaking up will harm her chances of being rehired, but there is an implication that she may be seen as a troublemaker.
as ‘Every single indie developer on Steam is one offended little brat away from being the next target’ (2016). Hence in game communities and the industry, there is a trend where women make themselves invisible to avoid sexist bullying. This similarity, in short, suggests that there is something broader at work that results in women’s poor treatment – and not simply representation of women in games.

It is also important to note that female employees can be unintentionally silenced or discouraged in the game industry. For example, Johnson (2013) describes how a single female programmer at a game studio found it difficult to fit in or make friends. Her isolation was complicated in that some male co-workers complained that her Flash programming was moving the studio in the wrong direction86 (2013, p. 151). Although programmers tended to be a tight-knit group, she was excluded by her male co-workers in leisure environments, and although she considered herself a gamer, she did not play with co-workers because they usually played FPS games—the only genre she did not play (2013, p. 151). The studio also routinely held Beer Fridays, where ‘about 30–40 male employees drink beer, talk in small groups, play card games like Magic the Gathering or play video games on 52-inch plasma screen televisions’ (2013, p. 148). No female employees participated, and the female Flash programmer stated that she had never been encouraged or invited to attend. While the male employees do not specifically aim to exclude female employees, the focus on beer and work-as-play atmosphere, Johnson explains, codes the space as masculine (2013, p. 149). Such unintentional coding illustrates how pervasive gender roles and coding video games as a masculine territory can be, in a way that excludes or ‘others’ women from gaming spaces. In other words, cultural understandings of gender have come to dominate the workplace, which raises the question of whether simply having more women in the industry is a way to change this behaviour.

86 Flash in Actionscript was seen as feminine, and not as technically advanced as C++ (Johnson 2013, p. 151).
The idea that the ‘masculinity’ of gaming communities is a symptom, and not a cause, of previously existing gender categories is borne out by the impact of game production practices on gender parity in the industry. For example, crunch time (significant overtime) places significant pressure on employees, making the industry inaccessible for many people. While recently much comment has been made on crunch time in relation to *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Studios 2018), with workers working 100-hour weeks (Goldberg 2018; Webster 2018; MacDonald 2018a), this is a much longer running issue in the industry, and both indie and AAA companies struggle with crunch time and low pay scales (Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 346). AAA studios, for instance, often engage in crunch time due to pressure from the publisher to change something in the game, while in indie studios crunch time often occurs because of a risk of running out of money (Schreier 2015). 52% of crunch times involve 40-60 hours per week, and 32% involve 61-80+ hours, lasting anywhere from less than a month to four months, but in extreme cases can occur over three years (Bulkley & Miller 2013). Indeed, crunch time is often considered to be normal, and studios often include crunch time in their schedules (Cremin 2015, p. 8; Schreier 2015). As a consequence working hours severely impact employees, and are a force that can drive people out of the industry – 39% of those who leave do so due to poor quality of life, and 15% due to burnout (Edwards et al. 2014). These factors impact both male and female employees’ quality of life and willingness to work in the industry, though they tend to impact women more negatively than men due to pre-established gender roles and norms.

Long hours and crunch time have been identified as a particularly restricting force for women (Bulkley & Miller 2013), and the cultural assumption that a woman is the primary

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87 Crunch time can happen anytime a milestone is behind schedule; a project is due for review; an issue occurs that prevents people from working; when there is a need to create a demo, trailer, or set of screenshots; or when pre-release content is seen by the public and the developers are criticised (Schreier 2015). Patches and downloadable content has also increased crunch time (2015).

88 In fact, O’Donnell (2012a, p. 111) describes one particular incident that occurred at EA. Employees were working 85 hours per week, and as an employee’s spouse stated, EA’s attitude towards crunch time was ‘If they don’t like it, they can work someplace else’ (ea_spouse 2004).
caregiver for children while a man is the primary wage earner for a family impacts women’s ability to work in the industry. For example, scholars found that female industry workers have tended to be single without children, while male employees were married with children (Prescott & Bogg 2011). Women suffer particularly in working overtime, Kate Edwards, Executive Director of IGDA explains that because they are historically and socially more aware that unpaid overtime is time they are not with their family (Weinberger 2016). This is supported from voices in the industry, with one respondent to #1ReasonWhy stating that most women in the industry ‘still have a second shift job waiting for them at home’ (Night Sky Games 2012). Since employees who speak up about overtime are more likely to be replaced, Edwards describes, the industry is ‘more conducive to, I don't want to say a “bro culture,” though we know it exists’ (Weinberger 2016). Hence long hours and crunch time can deter women from engaging with the industry and reinforce the hegemony of play.

The low numbers of women working in the video game industry can also be partly attributed to a production culture that holds women to different standards than men and sexualises them, engages in misrecognition, and silences or dismisses their concerns. In fact, IGDA redesigned their curriculum in 2015, noting that sexism is a significant challenge to the game industry, and that it affects whether or not women choose to enter it (Freyjadis & Becker 2015). This is not to say that all women have negative experiences—senior creative director of Visceral Games Amy Hennig has stated that ‘the industry is a haven...the internet is a toxic place. Gamer culture can be noxious’ (Takahashi 2015). However, there is clearly a trend of ostracisation. Considering that female employees are often treated in such a discriminatory manner, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are fewer female characters in games, and that they are often depicted in a sexualised way. Such treatment further supports the view that the game industry is a hypermasculine space that views women as outsiders. In

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89 She also suggests that people from outside the US are more reluctant to engage in overtime, which prevents them from staying in the industry (Weinberger 2016).
short, Women are clearly poorly treated in the game industry just as they were during Gamergate – both by other industry members, as well as other players. Women’s treatment in the game industry, in other words, illustrates that vitriol towards female players is part of a broader issue, rather than simply a function of representation, even if representation is certainly a symptom of the vitriol.

A. Change

While women’s experiences of discrimination and crunch time paints a highly negative picture of the game industry, it is important to note that change is happening. 79% of game developers believe that diversity is important for the industry (Edwards et al. 2014), and there are efforts to encourage more women into gaming. For example, Harvey and Fisher (2013, p. 365) explain that there are now ‘several initiatives to attract, support, and retain women interested in the game industry’, including ‘women-in-games groups’, ‘scholarships aimed at female students enrolling in game design programmes’, and ‘low-cost or free-to-join workshops’. Game companies have also made an effort. For example, in August 2017 a leaked memo stated that Blizzard is launching a ‘global diversity and inclusion initiative’, to raise the number of women and minority group employees, and improve their working environment (Grayson 2017a). It is possible, then, to correlate an improvement in the representations of female characters and increased awareness of a lack of women and the frequency of sexism in the game industry.

Indeed, initiatives to help female developers can have a positive impact. However, these initiatives are also at risk of being dominated by post-feminist discourses that silence women, as Harvey and Fisher (2013) found. They describe, for example, how the organisers of an initiative were reluctant to identify a project as feminist, and avoided discussing the issues

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90 74% believe that it is important in the workplace, and 67% believe that sexism in video games is a significant factor that influences society’s perception of the industry (Edwards et al. 2014).
that women developers mentioned as preventing their success. Rather than note the specific challenges that female developers experience in the industry, the organisers viewed diversity as a matter of simply increasing how many women produce games (2013, pp. 371–372). Further, the organisers did not permit the participants to introduce their own games at the showcase because they believed that the audience would not care about the game creators (2013, p. 373). However, it later became apparent that participants of another initiative, who were mostly male, were able to present their games. The organisers admitted that the decision was made because they had already received backlash from certain male indie gamers—who claimed that the program was encouraging preferential treatment of women (Fisher & Harvey 2013, p. 34). As the authors note, post-feminist attitudes in the game industry can seemingly support the idea that anyone can succeed, ignoring the role that gender relations play (Harvey & Fisher 2015, p. 577). Further, this example illustrates that even initiatives to encourage women into game development can engage in practices that actually harm the cause.

Many initiatives to increase the number of women in the game industry focus on young girls, as game developer Kim Allon states, ‘we need to get them while they’re young’ (in Knowles et al. 2017). While the number of girls taking computing classes are ‘skyrocketing’, few are entering STEM careers (King, in Knowles et al. 2017), so women in the industry often support initiatives that engage girls and young women with STEM subjects. For example, Robin Hunicke\(^{91}\) volunteers for Computer Science for All, an American funding program devised in response to the lack of African-American, Latino, and female students taking Advanced Placement computer science (Office of the Press Secretary 2016). Another example is Lisy Kane’s\(^{92}\) Girl Geek Academy, a company that aims to increase the number of women

\(^{91}\) Hunicke is a producer at indie development company Thatgamecompany, and worked on the critically acclaimed 2012 experiential adventure game *Journey* (Thatgamecompany 2012).

\(^{92}\) Lisy Kane is an Australian games producer who found international success with her 2015 game *Armello* (LisyKane.com 2017).
with STEM careers, including technology, games, design, and 3D printing (Girl Geek Academy 2018). They encourage ‘women to learn technology, create startups and build more of the internet’ through numerous women-only programmes (2018). These initiatives note that the low number of female employees in the game industry is a broader issue in technology industries93.

Having stated this, Dewinter and Kocurek (2017, pp. 67–68) argue that ‘It’s not just that we need more women in the game industry; women enter and are driven away’. Indeed, as noted earlier in this section, many women experience discrimination and harassment once they enter the game industry. To combat this there has been an effort to support women already in gaming. One example is the Working Lunch Mentorship Programme (Knowles et al. 2017). Noting that only 19% of people in the Australian game industry are women, the programme allows industry workers to sign up as mentees and mentors. They aim to go ‘beyond networking to provide a concrete and ongoing support network for entry level women with a passion for games’ (The Working Lunch 2018, emphasis original). Hence there are initiatives that aim to disrupt the hegemony of play by not only encouraging women to enter the industry, but to support them while they are there.

As well as supporting women in the industry, there is a push to address the broader cultural tensions in gaming. El Sabaawi, manager of diversity and inclusion programs at Riot Games, points out that in gaming especially, online spaces direct and frame the conversations that happen in the industry (2017). In this sense it is not simply a matter of education, or of supporting women while they are in the game industry. Rather, game communities and the industry impact each other, and there is a need to change attitudes in players and employees. Here it is evident that the hegemony of play functions at numerous points within the circuit of culture. The industry’s production atmosphere influences the representation of women in

93 Yet, STEM is not the only method of breaking into the game industry – business, marketing, law, art, and composition are also required skills (Clinnick, cited in Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 283). An exclusive focus on STEM, then, could be misguided.
games, which influences and is influenced by identity, groups of consumers. Further, players’ consumption practices, the ways they engage with games, feed back into the industry.

Conclusion

While the game industry has tended to produce games for a hardcore male audience, it is clear from Chapter One that, according to more recent research, men and women often prefer the same kinds of games, and that age is more of a divisive factor than gender (Yee 2015). To address how the game industry has reproduced a hegemony of play, this chapter first examined how female characters are represented in video games. Female characters have historically been rare and depicted in a way that exhibits sexism. More recently there has been an increase in female characters, but they are often depicted in a sexualised manner. Yet, many indie and casual games challenge these representations. Considering that production culture impacts what kinds of products are produced, the second half of this chapter examined the role that gender plays in the game industry. There are few women in the industry, and they often experience discrimination and harassment, as well as being impeded by extreme working hours. There is a drive to raise awareness and improve women’s experiences in the industry, but it is still characterised by a ‘boy’s club’ atmosphere. To understand how this hypermasculine atmosphere is reproduced, I examined how the production process has enabled what Fron et al. (2007) call a hegemony of play. This hegemony has produced a territory that privileges an exclusive, hypermasculine conception of play – one that fostered negative attitudes towards women in Gamergate.

It is evident that the gender ratio of people who play games is at odds with gender representation in games, as well as that of industry workers. The vitriol against women that occurred during Gamergate cannot be blamed simply on a lack of female players, as it is clear that there are many. Yet it also cannot be blamed on poor representation of female characters,
as media effects is a complex area of research that points out the importance of one’s personal experiences, and family and peer influences, in mediating the effects of game play (Breuer et al. 2015, p. 200). Examining women’s experiences in the game industry gets us closer to an answer—video games are associated with a hegemony of play that privileges hardcore games and the young male demographic. This hegemony is highly masculine, and is being challenged with increased diversity of players and types of games being produced. Hence, I argue in this thesis that it is the perceived challenge to this hegemony that resulted in Gamergate. Of course, while the possibilities discussed in Chapter One and Two are complex, in that it is difficult to extract a clear process of cause-and-effect, there is still a tendency to reduce explanations of different forms of engagement with play to a binary conception of gender. Also, while there is some degree of explanatory power to the notion of a hegemony of play, such as the connections between identity (segmentation of markets), production, and representation, I suggest that we adopt a more nuanced approach, which forms the focus of the next part of the thesis.
Part II
Chapter Three: Games as Assemblages

Gamergate illustrated that for a small subset of male players, women do not belong in gaming spaces and represent an unwelcome change in game culture. Specifically, women signify increased diversification in video games, including players, game creators, and the types of games being produced. Chapter One, focusing on players, noted that video games as a form are coded as masculine, even though the stereotype of a teen male gamer is not sustainable. Chapter Two, focusing on representation of women as characters and in the industry, first demonstrated that female characters are less common than male characters and often depicted in a sexualised way. I then explained that the game industry exhibits tension around gender, to the extent that female employees’ experiences are similar to that of female players. These chapters argued that gender is not necessarily a problem in game communities because there is a lack of female players – which Chapter One demonstrated is patently not the case – or because there is a lack of diverse female characters in games. Rather, there are a range of social and economic forces that have contributed to a culture of production and consumption that routinely excludes or ‘others’ women, that is, considers that women do not ‘belong’ in video games, either as players or workers.

The possibilities discussed in Chapter One and Two are complex in that it is difficult to extract a clear process of cause-and-effect. Much of the focus on games and gender is on player preferences and experiences of harassment in game communities. While this has its uses, it fails to address the complex arrangement of forces that impact the highly gendered nature of gaming and rise in tensions that cumulated in Gamergate. To begin to address this, and as part of developing a somewhat different approach and explanation of why Gamergaters are so reluctant to embrace diversity and instead react with outbursts of hate, I
argue that we can utilise the work of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as others, especially as this work has been utilised in other literature on gender focusing on areas other than games (Markula 2006; Kaufmann 2010; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2013; Braidotti 2015). Indeed, I argue that in relation to video games in particular, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage, and their associated concept of desire, is especially useful. Section one of this chapter explains that while poor representation of female characters shows that women are to some extent marginalised in video games, there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ representation. Another way of examining representation is looking at the role that form has in generating meaning. Yet examining form can mean that social factors are overlooked. To provide an alternative method of analysis, then, in section two I introduce Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage, and in section three I examine The Witcher 3 as an example of a game assemblage. The concept of the assemblage also provides a basis from which I introduce other Deleuze and Guattarian concepts, with which I examine Gamergate as a particular amalgamation of various forces or flows.

I. Challenging Form and Content

The literature on games and representation tends to examine gender and video games in two broad ways: form and content. One method of examining form is by examining video games as a form of technology. At the extreme end this is technological determinism, ‘the claim that the nature of a particular technology determines the nature of society’ (Jordan 2013, p. 13). In Chapter One, I noted that video games as a form of technology are often coded as masculine. Another way of examining video games is through content, such as by using semiology. Semiology is the study of meaning-making and representation, and focuses on interpreting the meaning of a sign. Chapter Two touched on this method by outlining the ways that female characters are poorly represented in video games. However, as I will argue in this
chapter, both methods are problematic. The following paragraphs will discuss semiotic theory and technological determinist methods of understanding representation and their challenges, before I then consider Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage as a way to incorporate both explanations of meaning in relation to the social.

A. Semiology

In the context of this thesis, semiology refers to the representation of female characters in games. Saussure’s model of the sign is key here. His model is *dyadic*, meaning that there are two elements of any sign – a signifier and signified (Chandler 2001, p. 32). The signifier is the physical part of the sign, such as sounds, letters, and gestures. The signified is the image or concept that the signifier refers to (Sebeok 2001, p. 6). Saussure determined that there are two orders of signification, or of creating meaning. The first order, denotation, means identifying a sign. When we perceive something, any words we attach to that perception is denotation, such as ‘woman’ (Lacey 1998, p. 57). The second order, connotation, involves the associations we have with a sign, which influence our understanding of it (1998, p. 58). These associations can be social, cultural, and personal, and vary according to the viewer’s class, age, gender, ethnicity, and so on (Chandler 2001, p. 140). Our ideas about femininity influence our connotations – such as ‘cooperation’ being a connotation of ‘woman’, evident in the 90’s pink girl’s games discussed in Chapter One.

Noting that Saussure’s model of the sign focuses on denotation at the expense of connotation, Barthes used Hjelmslev’s model to develop the latter, emphasising the importance of connotation by stating that it is ‘very close to a real historical anthropolgy’ (Chandler 2001, p. 140; Barthes 1983, pp. 90–91). Barthes believed that connotation produces the *illusion* of denotation – that is, that associated meanings come to appear to be naturalised (Lacey 1998, p. 68; Barthes 1991, p. 108). Indeed, Barthes also developed a
method to apply semiology to both linguistic and nonlinguistic systems, such as clothing, food, cards, and furniture (Barthes 1983, pp. 25–28). In this way it is possible to do the same for video games. One way of understanding the illusion of denotation is via game scholars’ understanding of gender and games in Chapter One. Polarising ideas about what kinds of games men and women enjoy in games, for instance, are often assumed and believed to be biological or natural in origin. For example, in Chapter One I listed the many ways that play is polarised according to gender. One suggestion is that men focus on one task at a time, while women are better at multitasking, which is why women enjoy games such as Farmville and The Sims (Schell 2015, p. 123). In reality, however, at least following Barthes, these are social constructions and assumptions94.

Saussure and Barthes’ conceptions of connotative and denotative meanings are useful in that they can help us understand that links we make between concepts – such as ‘woman’ and ‘cooperation’, or ‘woman’ and ‘pink’ – are associated meanings and social constructions. Yet, there are issues with the approach taken by Saussure and Barthes, as pointed out by Barnouw (1981), Sučeska (2017), and Gardiner (2002, pp. 149–150), amongst others. Deleuze and Guattari, for example, are critical of Saussure and Barthes for two main reasons. First, they attempt to understand everything through language and signs – the signifier (Bogue 2001, p. 125; Genosko 1988, p. 176; Guattari 1995, p. 5). Focusing on the signifier, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is an oversimplification of language (2005, p. 66), as it assumes that a singular meaning can be devised from a sign (Guattari 1995, p. 48). Second, as structuralists, Saussure and Barthes do not attempt to find the origin of a meaning, but examine a term in comparison with others within a system to understand its meaning (Colebrook 2002, pp. 10–11). The problem here is that structuralist systems utilise a binary logic, where one term is privileged over another (Dosse 2012, p. 129), and structuralists believe that it is impossible to think outside of that system (Colebrook 2002, p. 11). Semiological systems, then, are problematic in

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94 In fact, Mäntylä (2013, p. 519) found no difference amongst men and women's ability to multitask.
that they suggest that a signifier communicates a single signified, and can therefore trap us into a form of binary thinking that privileges a transcendental understanding of signifiers.

When analysing video games, for example, the problem with semiology’s use of structuralism can be understood in two ways. First, representations that some players may find positive or negative may not be the case for others. For example, in *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009), the title character summons demons by discarding her hair, which also constitute her clothing – so during the game she becomes naked. Further, there are frequent camera angles that zoom in on her crotch. Bayonetta’s design is highly contentious. For some, Bayonetta is outright sexist due to her appearance, and is a clear example of the male gaze (Kreider 2011; Klein 2017). Yet others interpret Bayonetta as taking ownership of her sexuality, and point out that she is a powerful witch and a skilled fighter, suggesting that there is more at play (Griffin 2016; Cross 2016). In other words, it is rare that a given representation will only be interpreted in a single way by numerous people.

Second, by interpreting representation through structuralism, we confine ourselves to thinking categorically: such as human being opposed to machine or, indeed, in the context of this thesis, ‘masculine’ somehow being opposite to ‘feminine’. Importantly for this thesis, what these issues illustrate is that one problem with assuming that fixing representations of women will fix gender segregation is that there is no one ‘correct’ way to portray women – there is no ‘correct’ transcendental denotation for that particular category. For example, Jansz and Martis use Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* series to describe the ‘Lara phenomenon’, ‘the appearance of a tough, and competent female character in a dominant position’ (2007, p. 142). Numerous reviews praise Lara Croft’s character development in Crystal Dynamic’s (2013) reboot especially (Petit 2013; Thursten 2013), where the main character Lara changed from being presented as sexualised (booty shorts and a bare midriff) to rugged and appropriate for the environment (cargo pants and tank top). However, others argue that the changes made to Croft are ‘so thoroughly masculine that all aspects of womanhood [are] lost’, and point out
that she still saves a damsel in distress (Christiansen, Drescher & Graham 2014, pp. 16–17). In this sense there is tension between a female character having power and agency, but appearing to be ‘too masculinised’, depending on player interpretation.

Another recent example is the main character in the game Horizon: Zero Dawn (Guerrilla Games 2017). Aloy was excommunicated from her (matriarchal) tribe, and consistently exhibits her skill as a hunter, particularly in the face of members of the (patriarchal) Carja tribe. Lead Narrative Designer John Gonzales explains that they developed Aloy not by thinking about female protagonists, but by ‘creating the best possible character we could’ (Brotherson 2017). They refer to her ‘incredible toughness and grit’, and ‘intelligence and articulate wit’ (Brotherson 2017). Some reviewers praise Aloy’s design and the range of male and female characters in the game, as they do not adhere to gender roles (Williams 2017; Vincent 2017). However, others argue that Aloy, representing ‘inner strength and outward independence’, illustrates ‘that we think feminism is about making all women strong, instead of valuing all women, no matter how weak we may perceive them to be’ (H. Green 2017). While the introduction of more female characters in video games, particularly as main characters, has resulted in some characters that challenge traditional notions of femininity, there is clearly no ‘correct’ way to portray female characters. As noted by the examples above, developing female characters as ‘strong’ can lead to people arguing that they are adopting ‘masculine’ traits, whereas developing female characters without strength is derided as perpetrating the ‘weak feminine’ stereotype. While differences in representations clearly have value in representing difference, what is a transcendental understanding of representation can be restrictive and fail to capture the complexity of interpretation.

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95 Williams (2017) describes Aloy as ‘intelligent, curious, kicks ass, wears practical (but gorgeous) outfits and has a face that looks like it belongs to a real person. She takes initiative when other characters falter and doesn’t hesitate to tell it how it is. She’s a redhead. She is progressive herself, breaking taboos and changing tradition where she sees fit’.
B. Technology

Another way of understanding representation is through form, that is, technology. McLuhan is a key theorist here, as he argued that media technologies facilitate new ways of thinking and being in the world, rather than simply spreading already-known content. This is perhaps best expressed in his statement that ‘the medium is the message’, which means that the message is a change of scale, pace, or pattern that a new innovation or invention ‘introduces into human affairs’ (2013, p. 8). For McLuhan, new forms of technology enable, enhance, accelerate, or extend changes or affects (Federman 2004, p. 2). For example, the railway made certain ‘human functions’ larger and faster, and as a result created new kinds of cities, work, and leisure (McLuhan 2013, p. 20). Taking such an approach, video games as a form are different from other kinds of media in that they are more interactive, or rather, have a different form of interactivity. Bogost, for example, explains that video games are more persuasive than other forms of media such as film, speech, or writing because they involve ‘rule-based representations and interactions’, causing the player to interact within a system (2007, p. ix). That is, as others such as Aarseth (1997, p. 1) and Frasca (2003, pp. 221–222) argue in different ways, the player takes part in the representation in a way that they do not in other media. Stated differently, they are properly speaking simulations in which the player participates, rather than representations. In this respect, it is important not only to consider what a female character looks like, that is, how the character is represented, but also what the game as a medium enables the character, and hence the player, to perform within the context of the rule-based system that is any model or simulation. In short, how it allows or enables a player to interact with the character, and what that character does.

McLuhan, for example, addresses analogue games such as sport, ritual, and gambling, suggesting that the most important part of a game is its form, as the game’s pattern is relevant to ‘our inner lives’ (2013, p. 301). As with any medium of information, McLuhan argues, a game is an extension of an individual or group, and they translate and transform experiences
into new forms (2013, p. 301). He uses poker as an example to illustrate how games function as a model of culture, requiring ‘shrewdness, trickery, and unflattering appraisals of character’, reflecting the ‘complex attitudes and unspoken values of a competitive society’ (2013, p. 298). For McLuhan then, the problem of representation in video games is less about the game content as such. Instead, he would argue that as a medium, video games enhance or extend what already exists. In other words, using McLuhan’s approach it could be argued that we already have reductive and stereotypical views of women and their roles in society, so their poor representation in video games is simply an extension of this. Given the previous chapter’s account of female character’s representations in games and female employee’s treatment in the industry such a claim is perhaps not entirely without merit.

McLuhan, however, has been criticised for focusing almost exclusively on form to the extent that he ignores social factors. Williams, for example, believes that McLuhan fails to understand that technology is ‘selected and controlled’ by society (2005, p. 121). Similarly, Williams laments that people tend to ask what effect television has compared to other influences, such as home, school, press, or work. That is, people tend to view technology as separate from society, when really they interact with each other (2005, p. 119). This is particularly relevant in relation to video games, which have been the centre of numerous ‘moral panics revolving around violent, militaristic, or sexually explicit content, addictive qualities of games, and other aspects of games that are considered to be inappropriate or damaging to their users’ (Quandt & Kowert 2016, p. 176). Rather than view these moral panics as something unique to video games, Williams and McLuhan – albeit in different ways – would ask why our social order produces video games that, as a form, tend to contain this kind of content.
Williams also notes that the effects of technology are usually studied as something that breaches or observes certain norms\textsuperscript{96} of society, culture, or politics, even though they are effects themselves (2005, p. 119). As a result, the real primary causes are often ignored. That is, by viewing the effects of technology as causes, we mistakenly view that technology as having its own laws of cause and effect (2005, p. 119). For example, Dyer, emphasising social factors in the development of film apparatus like stocks, cameras, and lighting, notes they were developed ‘taking the white face as the touchstone’\textsuperscript{97}, meaning that certain setups became normal, or rather, came to be adapted to a particular existing social norm – and any deviation to accommodate someone else would be abnormal or a problem (1999, p. 135). Similarly, numerous game developers have explained that women were not able to be modelled in their games due to technical or engine restrictions. For example, Schröder (2008) describes how the developers of \textit{Gothic III} claimed that they could not have many women in the game because the long dresses and complex hairstyles were too difficult for the graphics engine to process. An obvious solution would be to depict women with less complex hairstyles and more simple clothing, and while some female characters in the game had short hair, there was no attempt to alter their clothing (2008). That is, rather than depict women in less stereotypically feminine ways to lessen pressure on the graphics engine, the game creators chose to largely exclude them from the game. In this case, it could be argued that technology ‘determined’ the marginalisation of the representation of women, however, as Williams would argue, the technological determination was in actuality an excuse to perpetuate social attitudes about women in games.

A more recent example relating to this is \textit{Call of Duty: Ghosts}, which in 2013 was the first game of the series to allow character customisation and the ability to play as a female

\textsuperscript{96} Williams defines norms as ‘the established institutions, relationships, and values of a given order of society’ (2005, p. 119).

\textsuperscript{97} Different darkesses of skin reflect different amounts of light, which makes it difficult to ensure that the lighter people are not bleached out, and darker people are not so dark that their facial features are not visible (Dyer 1999, p. 134).
soldier\textsuperscript{98} (Graser 2013). Infinity Ward’s executive producer, Mark Rubin, explained that it was not possible to have a female soldier in the past for technical reasons. Female characters need a new set of animations and adjustments made to their hitboxes – meaning it was only possible when character customisation was implemented (McWhertor 2013). A similar explanation was made by Ubisoft Creative Director Alex Amancio in relation to Assassin’s Creed: Unity. While female assassins were initially planned for the game, he explained, ‘the reality of production’ – ‘double the animations’, ‘voices’, and ‘visual assets’, meant that it was ultimately too much work to include them (Farokhmanesh 2014a). Further, ‘level designer Bruno St-André estimated more than 8,000 animations would have had to be recreated on a different skeleton’ (Farokhmanesh 2014a). These comments were met with a backlash on Twitter under the hashtag #womenaretoohardtoanimate, where Jonathon Cooper, the lead animation director of Assassin’s Creed III, tweeted ‘In my educated opinion, I would estimate this to be a day or two’s work. Not a replacement of 8000 animations\textsuperscript{99} (Cooper 2014). In other words, while technology can be restrictive, and production pressure can prevent developers from including all the content they would like to, social norms and influences clearly do shape the development and use of technology.

It is both problematic, then, to on the one hand view female characters in games simply as representations, because focusing on a signifier means that we become trapped in a structuralist way of thinking, where there is in effect only one way to interpret a representation of a female character, that is, as couched within a masculine/feminine binary. On the other hand, it is possible to focus on form, technology, excessively – to the point where we fail to notice that technology is shaped by society. Or as Deleuze would argue, technologies do not determine society, but rather are an expression ‘of the social forms capable of

\textsuperscript{98} According to the President and CEO of Activision Publishing, Eric Hirshberg, this was ‘something [they’ve] wanted to do for a long time’ (Graser 2013). With the knowledge that there are plenty of female fans of the series, Executive Producer Mark Rubin noted that the company wanted to ‘be more inclusive and embrace them’ (Graser 2013).

\textsuperscript{99} Cooper expanded on this comment in an interview with Polygon (Farokhmanesh 2014b).
producing them and making use of them’ (Deleuze 1995, 180). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage is especially useful in this regard because it explains how content and expression are linked and shape each other. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage, I argue that expression (the game industry, its ideologies and discourses) impacts content (a video game), and vice versa. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage is useful in developing a method, because it asks us to consider what something does, rather than what something means.

II. Assemblages

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts are useful because they encourage us to move beyond the logic of organisation and development, as they do not make claims about taxonomies or hierarchies (Markula 2006, p. 42; Patton 2000, p. 14). Deleuze and Guattari view the world as a spectrum of difference, while thinking in more structuralist ways reduces this spectrum down to set categories – good or bad, male and female, and so on. For example, Colebrook explains that a structuralist would examine difference through opposition (2002, p. 44). To examine what female characters are like, they would contrast her ‘softness, passivity, and mystery’ with ‘male characters who govern the plot and action’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 44). Here, the ‘difference was created through a system that organised difference from above in order to sustain a meaning—in this case, patriarchy or ideology’ (2002, p. 45). Deleuze and Guattari are interested in how certain qualities, like ‘softness’, become signifiers for women in general. Using their concept of the assemblage, I examine how such structures are produced in video games and why.

First, it is useful to understand that Deleuze and Guattari developed the assemblage from Hjelmslev’s reworking of Saussure’s signifier and signified. Hjelmslev’s first key deviation from Saussure is that he renamed the signifier to expression, referring to speech or sound, as
well as signified to content, referring to thought (Taverniers 2008, pp. 368–370; Hjelmslev 1963, p. 59). Further, Hjelmslev refers to content and expression as planes, and believes they are not separate. Content cannot exist without expression, and expression cannot exist without content (1963, pp. 49 & 59). This is because it is not possible to extract meaning (content) from the sign (expression) without interpretation. In contrast to Saussure’s semiology, Deleuze praises Hjelmslev’s model of signs as it does not rely on signifiers. By not relying on signifiers, it is possible to ask not what something means, but something does (Deleuze 1995, pp. 21–22).

Bogue (2001) explains that Deleuze and Guattari like Hjelmslev’s model for three main reasons. First, Hjelmslev’s model views the designation of levels as either expression or content to be arbitrary (Bogue 2001, p. 126; Hjelmslev 1963, p. 60). That is, expression and content can only be defined ‘oppositively and relatively’ (Hjelmslev 1963, p. 60), and what is expression on one level can be content on another (Bogue 2001, p. 127; DeLanda 2006, p. 12). For instance, summarising one of Deleuze and Guattari’s examples (2005, p. 59), Bryant (2007) explains that in one sense, a nucleic sequence is content as it organises or orders, choosing elements to form a DNA sequence. Yet the nucleic sequence is also expression in an ‘actualized organism’. Deleuze and Guattari like the arbitrary nature of content and expression because rather than enforce a binary structure, Hjelmslev’s model allows for relative distinctions (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 45), which, as will be discussed further on, is a key component of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage.

Second, Bogue explains that Deleuze and Guattari praise how Hjelmslev does not oppose form and content (2001, p. 127). Rather, Hjelmslev suggests that expression (speech/writing/images) and content (thought) each have form and substance. In Hjelmslev’s model, substance depends on form, and so the two are not separate (Hjelmslev 1963, p. 50). This means that each sign has four layers – content-form, expression-form, content-substance, and expression-substance (Nöth 1990, p. 66). Form contains, in both content and expression,
the paradigmatic and syntagmatic (Fischer-Jørgensen 1966, p. 7), or positioning and substitution (Chandler 2001, p. 29). Substance, in terms of content, contains ‘meanings’ or ‘things’, while for expression, substance contains ‘sounds’ or ‘letters’ (Fischer-Jørgensen 1966, p. 7). Drawing from other scholars, Chandler (2001, p. 54) explains that for content, form refers to semantic and thematic structure, while substance refers to human content, ‘textual world, subject matter, and genre’. For expression, form refers to ‘language, formal syntactic structure, technique, and style’, while substance refers to ‘physical materials of the medium’, such as ‘photographs, recorded voices, [and] printed words on paper’ (2001, p. 54). In giving expression and content form and substance, Hjelmslev avoids reducing a sign to a form and content duality (Chandler 2001; Deleuze & Guattari 2005). Again, avoiding duality allows Deleuze and Guattari to note how form and content impact each other.

Third, Bogue explains that Hjelmslev’s model suggests that there is a material substrate that exists before the planes of expression and content (2001, p. 127). To avoid dichotomising form and substance, Hjelmslev introduced purport, or matter (Godard 2000, p. 65). For Hjelmslev, purport refers to the common factor shared by all languages, but are executed in each language in different ways. Purport is ‘an amorphous mass, an unanalyzed entity’, ‘which is defined only by its external functions’ (Hjelmslev 1963, pp. 50–51). Taverniers explains that ‘Within the content plane, purport refers to unformed and unanalyzed thought’, while on the expression plane purport refers to ‘an amorphous, unanalyzed sequence of sounds’ (2008, pp. 376–378). Deleuze and Guattari like the concept of purport or matter because it illustrates immanence rather than transcendence (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 242), which means examining something from within, rather than applying an external structure (Due 2007, p.
By thinking immanently, it is possible to move past categories and structure, and by doing so, move past reductive ideas about gender\textsuperscript{100}.

To properly explain why moving past reductive and transcendental ideas about gender is important to challenging gender divisions in the game community, it is also useful to consider Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of thought. Deleuze and Guattari describe three images of thought: arborescent, fascicular, and rhizomatic thought. Arborescent, meaning tree-like, refers to images of thought that involve representational thinking, that is, forms of thought that ‘[assume] there is an ordered and differentiated world, which we then dutifully represent’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 3). This ordered world is segmented: it is hierarchical, and involves dualisms and binary logic (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 16; Markula 2006, p. 31; Riddle 2013, p. 45). These arborescent modes of thinking, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, have ‘dominated Western reality and all of Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy’ (2005, p. 16). Yet, they explain that reality is not actually structured like a tree: ‘Thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter’ (2005, p. 15). In short, arborescence dominates the way that we think about the world: in categories and dualisms, such as masculine and feminine – in Chapter One I listed many of the ways that such a dualism is common in work on gender and play. However, these categories are not really how the world works, at least not according to Deleuze and Guattari.

The second mode of thought that Deleuze and Guattari describe is fascicular, which refers to a fascicular root, where a bundle of secondary roots grow from where the tip of the primary root has been destroyed (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 5). Munday explains that in fascicular thought, arborescent thought (‘the universal or ideal narrative’) has broken down, resulting in

\textsuperscript{100}Linguistic approaches other than Hjelmslev’s are important in Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Peirce, for example, instead of Saussure’s binary of the signifier and signified, proposes a triadic model, composed of representamen, interpretant, and object (Peirce 1960, sec.2.228; Chandler 2001, p. 33). His concepts impacted Deleuze’s work on cinema in particular (Manteghi Fasayi & Akrami 2012, p. 16). Here I focus on Hjelmslev because his concepts are particularly important to understand the assemblage.
‘a multitude of ways of seeing or comprehending the world’ (2012, p. 45). While there is multiplicity here, Deleuze and Guattari explain, ‘the root’s unity subsists’, and still supports dualism (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 5–6). That is, ‘fascicular thought continues to cling to idealisation’, to ‘nostalgia’ and ‘a kind of perfectionism’ (Munday 2012, p. 45). Fascicular modes of thought, while recognising multiplicity, ultimately reduce that multiplicity to a totality, reverting to arborescence (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 32). An example of fascicular thinking in regard to gender is the way that the Wii was advertised to women. Powers and Brookey, for instance, describe how the Wii, along with Wii Sports and Wii Fit have made video games accessible to women, but in ways ‘that focus on women’s domesticity and body image’ (2015, pp. 117–118). While Nintendo’s addressing female audiences acknowledges multiplicity, in that many women are interested in games and sport, their methods of advertising these games reverted to stereotypical understandings of women's interests.

For Deleuze and Guattari, while we tend to represent thought as arborescent or fascicular, really thought is rhizomatic. Rhizomatic modes of thinking do not subscribe to a fixed order, but instead view the world as a ‘multiplicity of expanding and overlapping connections’ (Colebrook 2002, p. xix). That is, rhizomes involve a multiplicity of components that are interconnected and always changing (Fancy 2010, p. 98). Compared to arborescent, tree-like structures, which grow according to a structure, rhizomes can be compared to grass, which ‘grow[s] round the edges and between gaps’ (Munday 2012, p. 51). Yet Deleuze and Guattari are careful to point out that they are not creating a dualism, stating that ‘[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots’ (2005, p. 20). An example of rhizomatic thinking in relation to gender is to unlink ourselves from categories such as sex, which prescribe dualism: femininity vs masculinity (Markula 2006, p. 36; Riddle 2013, p. 46). Rather, thinking in a rhizomatic way would mean understanding ‘femininity’ not as a predefined ‘form or substance’ but as a collection of multiplicities that are constantly in flux
(Markula 2006, p. 36). As the rhizome is an abstract concept, next I will provide a more detailed explanation of how a rhizome works.

Deleuze and Guattari (2005, pp. 7–12) explain that the rhizome has six characteristics. The first and second are connection and heterogeneity, meaning that any point of a rhizome can and must be connected to another. The third characteristic is multiplicity, as multiplicities are rhizomatic, and do not revolve around an object or subject. The fourth is asignifying rupture, which means that while a rhizome can be broken, it will commence again from old or new lines. The fifth and sixth characteristics are cartography and decalcomania, which means that rhizomes cannot be traced to a structural model, and are a map, not a tracing. That is, as maps rhizomes construct the unconscious, foster connections, and are open to numerous dimensions, while tracings are representations. Rather than use arborescent or fascicular methods of thinking, which are ‘formalising, linear, hierarchised, [and] centralised’, Deleuze and Guattari explain (2005, pp. 327–328) that we should use rhizomatic thinking that does not use oversimplified binaries or function along dualisms.

Deleuze and Guattari provide a wasp and orchid as an example of a rhizome, referring to the way that an orchid appears like a wasp to attract it to its pollen. They note that it is possible to view this process between the wasp and orchid in a representational way – ‘[i]t could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.)’ (2005, p. 10). However, they explain that ‘[m]imicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature’ (2005, p. 11). Instead, they explain that an orchid looks like a wasp, drawing the wasp to it. In this process, the wasp becomes a part of the orchid’s reproductive apparatus, and transports the orchid’s pollen. ‘Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome’ (2005, p. 10). So, rather than a plant imitating an animal, there is something else happening – a becoming, a process that is discussed later in this chapter. The orchid is ‘becoming wasp’, the wasp is ‘becoming orchid’, and both of these becomings ‘interlink and form relays’ (2005, p. 10).
10). Hence, processes do not operate just along a line (arborescently), but jump between lines (rhizomatically). In terms of Gamergate and gender in gaming more broadly, it is not that the representation of female characters or the vitriol exuded in Gamergate is an imitation of the game industry, or an imitation of society. Rather, these forces influence each other but, notably, change within these forces is also possible.

The wasp and orchid rhizome is also an assemblage, and helps explain how Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage contains a variety of parts, which are part of a processual arrangement (Wise 2005, p. 77). In regard to parts, assemblages contain contents (‘the tangible’), and expressions (‘enunciations, statements’, and ‘transformations’) (Young 2013a, p. 137, 2013b, p. 139; Grossberg 2013, p. 11). In the wasp and orchid assemblage, Atkinson (2016) explains, the content or material aspects include the wasp, orchid, and pollen. In comparison, the expression ‘would be the orchid entering into the wasp’s symbolic system to encourage it to act in a certain way’ (2016, p. 93), that is, the orchid’s impact on the wasp, encouraging it to transform into an orchid. This latter point illustrates how the assemblage is constantly in process – as Lenco states, the wasp-orchid assemblage should be understood ‘as a system whose sexual organs are a co-development in an evolutionary process’ (2014, p. 137). This process involves the becoming mentioned in the previous paragraph, where the wasp becomes orchid and orchid becomes wasp, which bring ‘about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 10), terms which will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Importantly, for Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages are formed through processes of what they term desire. For them, desire is the machine that produces reality (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, pp. 39–43). It is the principle that underlies the world, existence, life, and the real (Roberts 2007, p. 116). For Deleuze and Guattari, desire, unlike its typical or Freudian use where it is defined by what it lacks, is productive and constantly makes connections or flows between the components of an assemblage (Deleuze 2004, p. 285; Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 92).
In making connections, desire arranges, organises, and fits components together to form an assemblage (Livesey 2010, p. 18). Importantly, this, for Deleuze and Guattari, is an ongoing process or ongoing arrangement. For example, subjectivity is just one component of a person-assemblage, which also includes material, cognitive, and affective components, that are ‘swept up and reshaped by a sort of dynamism’ (1995, pp. 34–35). Guattari and Rolnik (2007, p. 44) provide an example of driving a car to illustrate this: when someone drives a car, they are not a unified totality – rather, they enter into a ‘process of servomechanical articulation with the car’. ‘When driving flows smoothly it is practically automatic’, so ‘the consciousness of the ego...does not intervene’. But when the person must intervene, their ego desires ‘to reassert itself in continuity and power’ (2007, p. 44). Assemblages then, are ‘complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning’ (Livesey 2010, p. 18). The assemblage provides a way of viewing the world as constantly shifting combination of interrelated parts, which form larger parts and change depending on what they connect with.

Deleuze and Guattari also explain that assemblages have two axes. A horizontal axis that contains content and expression, where content refers to a machinic assemblage, and expression is the product of that machinic assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 36–38 & 88). At the same time a vertical axis contains forces of what they term territorialisation and deterritorialisation, which impact the relationship between content and expression (2005, p. 88). That is, such forces can territorialise (stabilise) and deterritorialise (destabilise) the assemblage (Fox 2015, p. 7). As noted above, it is important to emphasise that assemblages are not concrete or static, but a certain and ongoing arrangement of components. As Anderson

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101 In full, Guattari lists ‘material and energy components’, ‘semiotic, diagrammatic and algorithmic components’, ‘components of organs, influx and humours of the human body’, ‘individual and collective mental representations and information’, ‘investments of desiring machines producing a subjectivity adjacent to these components’, and ‘abstract machines installing themselves transversally to the machinic levels previously considered’ (1995, pp. 34–35).
et al. (2012, p. 177) describe, ‘an assemblage is both the provisional holding together of a group of entities across differences and a continuous process of movement and transformation as relations and terms change’. The processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation enact such movement. When Deleuze and Guattari say that something is machinic (to varying degrees), Deleuze and Guattari are referring to how it is productive. Looking at a machine or assemblage (and in their Anti-Oedipus they refer to the assemblage as the machinic assemblage) means looking at what something does or produces, what it connects with, rather than what something means (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 4; Elliott 2012, p. 54). For example, rather than ask what a female character means, we could ask what is it capable of – how do players engage with it, can it open them up to new ideas, and so on.

According to Deleuze and Guattari there are many kinds of machines, and Deleuze describes three in particular – technical, social, and desiring machines (2004, p. 219). Technical machines of course relate to material and technology, while social machines include economic, cultural, and social organisation, as well as family and education (Elliott 2012, p. 60). Desiring-machines, on the other hand, are the unconscious, producing desire and attempting to connect with other machines (Elliott 2012, pp. 56–57). There are more machines than this though – Harper and Savat describe material and psychological machines (2016, pp. 21–22), while Lazzarato adds aesthetic machines (2006). In terms of video games, there is the technical game-machine, the console that runs the game. There are game industry machines, game culture machines, many game community machines, play psychology machines, game aesthetic machines, such as 8-bit, and so on.

While there are many kinds of machines, according to Guattari each have the same three basic characteristics. First, they ‘connect to and form part of other machines’ (Elliott 2012, p. 56). As noted above, a simple example of this is provided by Guattari where he describes ‘the servomechanical articulation of the car’ (Guattari & Rolnik 2007, p. 44). At a basic level, the person driving the car is a human-machine, who connects with the car, which
is a mechanical-machine. However, while the assemblage is a collective machine, it is also a component or function of a larger assemblage (Savat 2009, pp. 1–3). For example, a person is a machinic assemblage, comprised of biological machines (such as the respiratory system and blood), social machines (such as conceptions of gender and class), and desiring-machines. A video game, in that respect, is also a machinic assemblage, comprised of other machines, including technical (game mechanics), and desiring-machines (the developer’s desire in producing the game). When the person connects with the video game, they create or constitute a new assemblage.

Second, machines disrupt, interrupt, and redirect connections or flows of desire (Deleuze 2004, p. 219; Elliott 2012, p. 56; Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 14). They can allow flows through, or rather, enable or constitute particular flows, but also cut them off or redirect them (Elliott 2012, p. 58). To return to the example of driving a car, Guattari describes how ‘when driving flows smoothly it is practically automatic’, but ‘suddenly there are signs that require...intervention’ (Guattari & Rolnik 2007, p. 44). While Guattari does not specify what signs, these are assumedly signs such as stop signs, which require the driver to alter their behaviour, to interrupt the flow. Looked at from such a perspective it is immediately clear that there are many kinds of flows. There are personal flows of desire, fears, anxiety, loves, and despairs (Seem 2000, p. xviii); commercial flows of money, commodities, private property, financing, and income (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, pp. 221, 228 & 245), as well as labour and workers (2000, pp. 33 & 223); flows of time, ‘countries, races, families’, parents, divinity, geography, and history102 (2000, p. 85). In short, while desire as flow is unstructured and disorganised (Colebrook 2002, p. 103), it is coded or structured by way of, and as, machines.

In the context of playing a videogame, for example, when a player-assemblage connects with a

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game-assemblage, they are channelling particular flows (of desire). Of course, social machines such as a gender-role machines can redirect that flow – such as a girl who wants to play a violent video game feeling that she must play a cooperative game, as that is more appropriate for her gender.

Third, machines ‘have an overriding organising principle’ (Elliott 2012, p. 56). Harper and Savat explain that the organising principle, which flows of desire are organised around, is something that Deleuze and Guattari call the Body without Organs (BwO) (2016, pp. 102 & 105). The BwO ‘is the intensive reality of the body, a milieu of intensity that is “beneath” or “adjacent to” the organism and continually in the process of constructing itself’ (Smith 2012, p. 209). It is ‘the full set of capacities or potentialities of a body prior to its being given the structure of an organism, which only limits and constrains what it can do’¹⁰³ (Smith 2018, p. 107). Although the BwO is about disorganisation, it can also be an organising principle, because it ‘cannot break away entirely from the system that it desires to escape from’¹⁰⁴ (Message 2010a, p. 37). Hence when the BwO, the organising principle, changes, the machine’s structure also changes. Harper and Savat describe, for example, the news – its organising principle can be to inform or entertain (2016, p. 103). In terms of video games, once the game is developed, the developer has diagrammed the possibilities that the player can experience (Cremin 2015, p. 68). We can ask if the organising principle in developing a game is to design something that will fit a certain audience, or to explore difference in a playful way.

Returning to the horizontal axis of content and expression, content is a machinic assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 89), ‘what constitutes a thing and how that thing is constituted’ (Kunzelman 2015). In a feudal assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari explain that

¹⁰³ The BwO’s tendency towards disorganisation drives Holland to suggest that the BwO is perhaps better described as ‘the body-without-organization’ (2013, p. 96).
¹⁰⁴ The BwO is ‘where both stratification and destratification vie for predominance’ (Holland 2013, p. 97). Message explains that the BwO must ‘maintain some reference to…systems of stratification, or else risk obliteration or reterritorialisation back into these systems’ (2010a, p. 37).
content includes numerous bodies: ‘the earth and social body’, ‘the over-lord, vassal, and serf’, the ‘knight and the horse’, the stirrup, ‘the weapons and tools’ – all of these bodies have relationships with each other, forming a machinic assemblage (2005, p. 89). In a video game assemblage, content includes bodies such as the game console and controller, game creators and players. It also includes game mechanics, plot, characters, and objects. Content here does not just refer to the representation of a female character, or the technology that makes that representation possible. As a machinic assemblage, the video game contains both of these machines, and more, which are comprised of yet more machines.

While content is a machinic assemblage of desire, for Deleuze and Guattari expression is ‘a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies’ (2005, p. 88). Content, machinic assemblages of desire, refers to the material, while expression and collective assemblages of enunciation, refer to the immaterial. However, this does not mean that content and expression are separate – since it is not possible to separate signs (expression) from their objects (content), ‘Collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within machinic assemblages’ (2005, p. 7, emphasis original). This also does not mean that expression is ‘simply representing, describing, or averring a corresponding content’ (2005, p. 86, emphasis original). Rather, expression is independent of content (2005, p. 86), and is the putting of content to work (Protevi 2012, p. 252). Expression then, is separate to content but is related to it through processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation.

Expression or collective assemblages of enunciation are ‘regimes of signs’105 (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 68), and include ‘discourses, words, "meanings"’ (Wise 2005, p. 80). For Bogue, for example, assemblages of enunciation ‘are patterns of actions, institutions and conventions’ that make linguistic statements possible (2003, p. 98). For Colebrook, expressions are ‘events, connections, creations, [and] conjunctions’ (2006, p. 106). In regard

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105 Yet, some expressions do not utilise signs, such as genetic code (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 67).
to what they do, collective assemblages of enunciation ‘express organizations of power or assemblages’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 68). This is because when regimes of signs (including discourses, such as gender) are repeated, they organise ‘reality according to a dominant social order’, and everywhere speech-acts take place a dominant social order is confirmed and reinforced’ (Bogue 2003, p. 98). Finally, collective assemblages of enunciation are ‘redundant’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 80), which means that they are repeated in the social field in such a way that they have no individual origin (Bryant 2011). For example, the discourse of gender, which involves the idea that women are emotional, while men are rational (Knights & Kerfoot 2004, pp. 431 & 436), among the many other binaries of supposed gender differences discussed in Chapter One, have been repeated in the social field to the extent that we cannot clearly identify its origin: hence then nature vs nurture debates.

One kind of assemblage of enunciation are order-words, which ‘issue commands and arrange bodies in standardized ways’ (Genosko 2002, p. 41). They designate incorporeal transformations, which account for social character (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 88 & 80). Deleuze and Guattari provide numerous examples of order-words. A judge’s sentence instantly and incorporeally transforms the accused into a convict; a declaration of war ‘expresses an instantaneous and incorporeal transformation of bodies’, and ages such as ‘majority’ and ‘retirement’ are incorporeal transformations (2005, pp. 80–81). Because assemblages of enunciation enact incorporeal transformations, expression is about how assemblages connect with each other. On this point Atkinson (2016, p. 71) explains that expression ‘is the way that the assemblage connects with other assemblages’. In enacting incorporeal transformation, ‘expression results in new affects, new capacities to form further assemblages (in the best case)’ (Protevi 2012, p. 251). Although incorporeal, assemblages of enunciation function socially and have real impact on people, expressing power in such a way that changes them.
In a feudal assemblage, for example, Deleuze and Guattari explain that expression includes ‘statements, expressions, the juridical regime of heraldry, all of the incorporeal transformations, in particular, oaths and their variables (the oath of obedience, but also the oath of love, etc.)’ (2005, p. 89). Similarly, in a video game assemblage, when someone plays a game, they become a ‘player’ or a ‘gamer’, which has significant social ramifications, and will be discussed in Chapter Five. When one takes on the role of a character in a game, they to some extent ‘become’ that character in that they become the agent of action – processes related to this will be discussed in Chapter Six. Sign regimes such as achievements – visual representations of a player’s accomplishments – are also expressions, and although incorporeal, can hold value. Order-words such as the use of the word ‘rape’ in gaming discourse to describe a player being beaten by another in a contest or competition designates a certain kind of masculine space that is hostile towards women, a space where women do not belong. Stated differently, the word is productive.

As noted above, the vertical axis of the assemblage contains movements of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, which are processes that impact the relationship between content and expression. While content and expression are separate, they are not part of a binary opposition, and at times a segment from one will slip into, conjugate, feed into, or accelerate the other106 (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 86–88). Such movements are deterritorialisation and territorialisation, forces that keep the assemblage constantly evolving. Territorialisation and deterritorialisation occur ‘according to biological, social, historical, or political circumstances’ (Genosko & Young 2013, p. 36). As Colebrook explains, ‘[t]he very

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106 Since content has its own form, the function of expression is not to represent, describe, or assert certain content (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 90). Kaufmann (2010) provides an example of the relationship between content and expression, by applying Deleuze and Guattari’s concept to transsexual representation. In a previous study, Kaufmann found that a transsexual MTF participant became distressed after reading the paper, claiming that the author had taken away her identity rather than deconstruct it (2010, p. 104). Kaufmann believes that by viewing the body as a form of content, and narrative as a form of expression, the upset may have been avoided, because this would have abolished the solid distinction between the body and the text (2010, p. 114). Since in this view content and expression overlap each other, narrative would lie in the participant’s body, and her body is in her narrative (2010, p. 113). Content and expression or body and narrative could be viewed as separate while still influencing each other.
connective forces that allow any form of life to become what it is (territorialise) can also allow it to become what it is not (deterritorialise)’ (2002, p. xxii, emphasis original). Specifically, deterritorialisation can involve ‘detaching a sign from its context of signification’, or a ‘separation from a given purpose’ (Crain 2013). For example, ‘[g]enes connect or territorialise to produce species, but these same connections also allow for mutations (deterritorialisation)’ (Colebrook 2002, p. xxiii). Another example of deterritorialisation is how the game Portal (Valve Corporation 2007) uses FPS mechanics (point-and-shoot) to do something new, create a new kind of puzzle game. In other words, conventions are broken so that new territories can be entered and new connections can be made (Buchanan 2008, p. 55). Deterritorialisation is disruptive then, because it does something new (Fox 2015, p. 7).

Yet, content and expression can also ‘become stabilised and perform a reterritorialisation’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 88). Territorialisation is a process of stabilisation, and refers to drawing boundaries within an assemblage (Brighenti 2010, p. 60). It involves homogenising the components within that territory (2010, p. 60), by simplifying, organising, or coding differences (Colebrook 2002, p. 37). In this process, differences are organised into a groups that contain similar bodies (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 18; Colebrook 2002, p. 37). These groups of similar bodies tend to be marked out in various ways (Brighenti 2010, p. 63), such as tribally, through a colour, animal, a mythic symbol, or a body part (Colebrook 2002, p. 37). Such markings are also termed refrains by Guattari.

Refrains are ‘repeated images, gestures, rituals, or sounds’ (Guattari 2010, cited in Watson 2013, p. 254), that establish a familiar territory. Deleuze provides walking into a room as an example of when someone might need a refrain: when someone walks into an unfamiliar room, a room they do not know, they ‘look for a territory, that is, the spot where [they] feel the best in the room’ (Deleuze, Parnet & Boutang 2011). To make that room, that territory, more familiar, the person may gravitate towards a certain part of the room where they usually feel more comfortable. Such behaviour would constitute a refrain, which helps build a
territory. Another example is someone listening to certain music that puts them in the mood to exercise – by listening to that music, they are repeating a musical refrain to get themselves into the right territory.

It is important to note that refrains are repetitions with difference. This is because, for Deleuze, there are two kinds of repetition: repetition of ‘the Same’, which is static, and repetition with difference, which is dynamic (Deleuze 1994, p. 24). Yet these two kinds of repetition are not binary opposites or independent from each other, as repetition of ‘the Same’ often has differences hidden within it, and repetition with difference does repeat ‘the Same’ (1994, p. 24). Rather than a repetition being a ‘re-presentation’ of something, then, Deleuze calls a repetition an ‘a-presentation’: ‘a presentation that marks and “includes difference”’ (Nealon 1998, p. 84). Williams explains that there is difference in each repetition of the refrain, each marking of a territory, because each time there is a repetition it ‘takes place against the background of a variation in intensities (2003, p. 12). Hence, according to Deleuze, each repetition ‘allows new experiences, affects and expressions to emerge’ (Parr 2010a, p. 225). For example, Stephenson describes how ‘[e]very caramel macchiato I ingest at Starbucks...is a repetition of the same drink, but it is never the exact same drink’ (2011, p. 94).

In terms of video games, each time the same game is played by the same person, the experience varies. Perhaps they are hungry, tired, or thirsty; their emotional state varies; they are interrupted; their console crashes, and so on. Each refrain has some difference.

I will discuss the refrain in more detail in the following chapter, but for now it is enough to understand that it is a process of territorialisation, of forming and maintaining a particular territory, which involves capturing individual or social forces and limiting or constraining their ability to take action (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 18). By way of this process, territorialisation, according to Deleuze and Guattari, produces what they term striated spaces, which are ‘regular, ordered, and closed’ (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, pp. 28–29). For example, Deleuze and Guattari describe Chess as a striated space, as the pieces are coded with
sophisticated rules, which determine the limited possibilities that are possible in the game, leading to certain strategies becoming standardised (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 352–253; Harper & Savat 2016, p. 89). Another example of striated space is that of a city, where the State striates space through rules such as local zoning schemes and land use classes (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 29). We create a striated space out of a world of infinite difference, and in this creating a form of existing, because, importantly, without territories we cannot exist and live a life. While territorialisation may sound quite negative as it reduces difference, we need territorialisation to function. Otherwise, there would just be chaos. These processes of striation and reducing difference are explored further in the following chapter.

As well as territorialisation, the vertical axis contains ‘movements of deterritorialization and destratification’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 3). Deterritorialisation produces change by freeing up fixed relations within a territory (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 18), and ‘is the movement by which “one” leaves the territory’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 508). As deterritorialisations allow new kinds of connections to be made, they make it possible for something new to be created (Rizzo 2012, p. 64). So if territorialisation is reducing difference to something more categorised and manageable, deterritorialisation is undoing this stratification (Due 2007, p. 132), and is associated with smooth, less structured spaces (Grossberg 2013, p. 9). For example, in comparison to the striated space of Chess, Deleuze and Guattari describe the game Go as an example of a smooth space, where the pieces do not represent anything, but are pellets or disks, and the rules are quite simple although the gameplay is quite complex and significantly differs each time it is played (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 352–253; Harper & Savat 2016, p. 89). Deterritorialising forces constantly pass through territories (Brighenti 2010, p. 64), as people are constantly in flux, freeing themselves from the striated space’s restrictions and boundaries (Tamboukou 2008, p. 360). For example, to follow on from Hillier and Abrahams’ example of the State producing a striated space in a city, examples of attempts to create smooth spaces within a city include shanty towns,
guerrilla gardening, and squatting (2013, p. 32). It is through deterritorialisation, as will be discussed in Chapter Six, that players can escape categorisation and experience something new.

Deterritorialisation occurs through the refrain, as while the refrain does ‘regularize, control and encode’ the territory, it ‘never remains purely closed and stable’ (Bogue 1997, p. 265). Because refrains are repetitions *with difference*, they can generate a line of flight, a line of escape from an assemblage\(^{107}\), along which deterritorialisations occur (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 508). To illustrate this, Savat describes a hydraulic system ‘that is constantly in danger of springing leaks and breaking apart due to the pressures created by the various flows within it’ (2013, p. 193). Along the line of flight, ‘things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take shape’ (Deleuze 1995, p. 45). Becomings do not just oppose, contradict, or resist territorialisation, but produce an alternate reality (Grossberg 2013, p. 9), a new territory. Lines of flight are not about achieving permanent freedom, but constantly liberating desire from being attached to external forces that territorialise it, whether ‘political, familial, biological, cultural’, and so on (Young 2013c, p. 183). For example, an individual line of flight could be one changing their profession or gaining a divorce, while for a group of people, a line of flight could be forming a new political party (Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 22). As will be discussed in Chapter Six, a line of flight could be creating or playing a game, or even players changing a rule within a game, that does something new, that challenges norms.

If that line of flight evades capture, it extends itself into a *becoming* (Harper 2005, p. 128). Becoming means gaining ‘an increased awareness of what it is to be something other than oneself’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 88). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Deleuze and Guattari describe the process of becoming in the wasp and orchid example. Becoming is not about transitioning from one point to another, from an orchid to a wasp, or a wasp to an

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\(^{107}\) Deleuze and Guattari use the French word *fuite*, which refers to fleeing or escaping rather than flying (Young 2013c, p. 183).
orchid. Rather, ‘[a] becoming is always in the middle’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 293). That is, ‘[r]ather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change...tending towards no particular goal or end-state’ (Stagoll 2010, p. 26). By taking on a new role in a video game, for example, as will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six, players can gain an understanding of what life could be like for someone else, which is in part the aim of some so-called serious games (Bogost 2007, p. ix). Yet, players can also be resistant to such experiences.

However, lines of flight are not always or not necessarily liberating. Lines of flight can be destructive, and Deleuze and Guattari describe how in drug addicts, the ‘line of flight immediately turns into a line of death and abolition’ (2005, p. 285). Lines of flight can also be captured, reterritorialised and recoded (Rizzo 2012, p. 63; Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 9). For example, Windsor (2015, p. 166) notes that alternative lifestyles, such as living in an environmentally sensitive manner could be a line of flight. However, he refers to Žižek (2014), who explains that when people buy biodegradable products to convey the image of a healthy lifestyle – they are still trapped by commodities. At the same time, it is important to note that territorialisation is not inherently bad and deterritorialisation not inherently good. Deleuze explains that '[w]e can't assume that lines of flight are necessarily creative, that smooth spaces are always better than segmented or striated ones’ (1995, p. 33). For example, ‘nuclear submarines establish a smooth space dedicated to war and terror’ (1995, p. 33). A game that does something new does not necessarily promote a less structured way of being, or could be recaptured in a way that reinforces particular norms.

With this in mind, games can be used to deterritorialise gender by generating a line of flight, which can result in becoming. For example, Dragon Age: Origins (BioWare 2009) and its sequels depict a wide range of characters with varying personalities, gender, race, sexuality, and age. Their diversity challenges the stereotypical male, physically strong central character. Some players may experience a becoming when playing a new character, as they experience
something new. Yet, deterritorialisations can be recaptured, reterritorialised, restructured. For example, a fan of *Dragon Age* petitioned for BioWare to make a homosexual-free game option, arguing that the ability to be queer is an insult to himself and other straight male gamers (Condis 2015, p. 208). Here, the player was resistant to deterritorialisation and attempted to reterritorialise by restricting what experiences they, and other players, could choose from. The ability of games to facilitate becoming will be discussed further in Chapter Six: for now, it is enough to understand how an assemblage works.

### III. The Witcher 3: A Game Assemblage

For Deleuze and Guattari, then, assemblages are arranged through desire and have two axes. Along the horizontal axis is content (machinic assemblages) and expression (collective assemblages of enunciation). Along the vertical axis is territorialisation (the refrain) and deterritorialisation (lines of flight and becomings). To help illustrate the above explanation of assemblages in a more concrete setting, it is useful to consider the game *The Witcher 3* as an example (CD Projekt RED 2015a). *The Witcher* is a popular AAA title – the developers claim that it has received over 800 awards (CD Projekt Red 2016), and Game of the Year Picks (2015) calculate it received 257 Game of the Year Awards in 2015 from professional outlets, making it the most awarded game of all time (Leck 2016; Game of the Year Picks 2013). Numerous AAA games released since *The Witcher* have emulated aspects of the game, such as *Assassin’s Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft Montreal 2017), another very popular and well-selling franchise, adopting a similar system of main story quests and side quests with open world exploration.
The Witcher 3 is also a useful example because it places much emphasis on sex. The game received a rating of 17+ in the US\textsuperscript{108}, partly because ‘the central character can engage in sexual activity with prostitutes and female companions. These brief sequences depict females’ breasts and buttocks—sexual moaning sounds can be heard, though the camera cuts away from explicit sexual acts\textsuperscript{109} (ESRB 2018). Yet as Rizzo (2012, p. 10) points out, there are numerous ways to use the assemblage to interpret a piece of media. That is, what is content on one level of analysis could be expression on another. In this respect examining assemblages is no easy task: there are numerous machinic assemblages that comprise a game, and numerous machinic assemblages that create a game. Game creators can be thought of as a machinic assemblage that expresses a game. A game can be thought of as a machinic assemblage that expresses a character. A character can be thought of as a machinic assemblage that expresses something about gender. A player can be thought of as a machinic assemblage that, when coming into contact with a character-assemblage, generates an expression. With this in mind, my analysis here is necessarily truncated and focuses on three frames of reference. I will first examine The Witcher 3 as a game-assemblage, focusing on gender via the game characters. Then I will examine the game creators as an assemblage, and third the game players.

A. The Game

In brief, The Witcher 3 (CD Projekt RED 2015a) is an action RPG set in ‘the Continent’, a fantasy land inspired by Scandinavia. The Continent is inhabited by numerous creatures, including humans, elves, and dwarves, as well as monsters, and the game is significantly

\textsuperscript{108} In Australia, The Witcher received an 18+ rating, for high impact violence and sex (Australian Government 2018).

\textsuperscript{109} It is worth noting that the version of The Witcher 3 released in the Middle East and Japan removed full frontal nudity and some gore (Jaki 2015). In regard to nudity, for example, rather than being fully nude Yennefer wears underwear (Lola 2015). In regard to gore, mutilated bodies are simplified so that viscera and the like are not visible (Censored Gaming 2015).
influenced by Eastern European folk tales and medieval, rural Poland (Suellentrop & Iwinski 2017). The player is Geralt, a witcher\textsuperscript{110} or professional monster hunter who has been tasked with finding his adoptive daughter Ciri, who is able to travel to alternate worlds. Ciri is on the run from the Wild Hunt, a group of elven warriors who want to capture her because she has Elder blood, which contains powerful magic. Geralt travels throughout the Continent in his journey to find Ciri, aided in particular by his lover Yennefer, and, though this is player dependent, love interest Triss.

On the horizontal axis, content is formed by the material, bodies and objects. In regard to video games it is useful to use Schell’s explanation of game elements, which are also conceived of as machines: mechanics, story, aesthetics, and technology (2015, pp. 51–52). My focus here will be on how the female characters, which are assemblages, are comprised of these machines. First, mechanics refers to space; time; objects, attributes, and states; actions; rules; skill; and chance (Schell 2015, pp. 158–200). Two aspects of mechanics that are relevant here are combat and story. In terms of combat mechanics, there is relatively little to say about gender. Geralt fights with swords and magic. At certain points in the game the player controls Ciri, who uses a sword and has the ability to magically teleport around the battlefield. At other points in the game, Yennefer and Triss, among others, fight alongside Geralt using magic, as highly powerful sorceresses. Interestingly, Yennefer and Triss are members of the Lodge of Sorceresses – a secret organisation of only female mages. The female characters in this sense have a capacity for action, that is, a clear sense of agency that does not necessarily or clearly align with that of the player.

Stories in The Witcher are told through characters and settings, and can vary according to player’s choices about achieving goals and navigating conflicts (Schell 2015, p. 300). In terms of story mechanics, throughout the game the player can make choices that will impact the

\textsuperscript{110}’Witchers are mutants, men subjected to gruelling training and flesh-altering experiments that prepare them for one purpose: to kill monsters’ (CD Projekt Red 2018). In the game it is explained that only men can be witchers because women cannot survive the necessary genetic mutations.
game’s narrative. One narrative thread concerns Geralt’s relationships with Yennefer and Triss, and at certain points the player makes dialogue choices that impact Geralt’s relationship with them, and can choose to sleep with them or not, which impacts on the narrative, even if not necessarily in an immediately obvious way. Geralt can also sleep with other female side characters, including prostitutes\footnote{See (Witcher Wiki 2018b) for details.} – notably, unlike in Dragon Age: Origins, there appear to be no male prostitutes in the Continent. Such sexual scenes are what the ESRB\footnote{The Entertainment Software Rating Board.} referred to, where women are depicted nude or that allude to sex. Yet, both women and men’s nude upper body and buttocks are depicted. The focus on women’s nudity raises questions about whether simply depicting a nude female body is sexist. This is where expression comes in, as what something means, what it expresses, depends on the assemblage that comes into contact with it – the player.

Technology refers to the medium of the game – the computer, screen, and input device, as well as the technologies used to create the game itself (Schell 2015, p. 450). Here the technologies that are used to create the game are relevant, as the game’s engine allows the creators to develop large scale open worlds, as well as ‘realistic skin, eyes, and hair’ (Krzyścin 2015). Technology in this sense relates to aesthetics, which produce the game’s atmosphere, making ‘the game world feel solid, real, and magnificent’ through ‘visuals, sounds, music, and game mechanics’ working together (Schell 2015, p. 385). The key female characters’ outfits tend to accentuate their breasts or legs. In particular, Triss’s default outfit heavily accentuates her breasts (Witcher Wiki 2018a), while her alternative outfit is a dress with a neckline that plunges to her hips (Witcher Wiki 2016a). Other sorceresses, Keira and Philippa, also have plunging necklines (Witcher Wiki 2016b, 2016c). Ciri and Yennefer both wear tight-fitted pants, and along with Triss, they wear heeled boots, even when engaging in combat (Witcher Wiki 2016d, 2016e, 2018a). Again though, whether such content’s expressions communicate
sexualisation, sexism, or aesthetic richness depends on the assemblage that comes into contact with it.

B. The Creators

As Cremin points out, games as machines include the desires of the animator, composers, designers, programmer, and tester – ‘the game is the realisation of these multiple desires’ (2012, p. 76). The game industry forms another assemblage, with a general value chain of 'developers, publishers, distributors, retailers, customers, consumers, IP-owners, platform owners and hardware owners' (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012b, p. 2). Each of these actors are machinic assemblages, content, machines that redirect the flow of desire. These all form a complex assemblage. The Witcher 3 was developed by CD Projekt Red (CDPR), published under CD Projekt – a Polish video game publisher and distributor (CD Projekt 2018). The games are based on the fantasy book series The Witcher, written by Andrzej Sapkowski, who laments that CD Projekt concealed his authorship and feels that the game has stolen his market (Bajda 2017). The Witcher games have also inspired a series of comics, produced by Dark Horse (2018). As the third iteration in the video game series, The Witcher 3 is produced in quite conscious ways in relation to all of these other assemblages.

To make the player interested in The Witcher 3, Story Director Marcin Blacha explains that CDPR showed the player ‘what we like ourselves’, including Polish customs and traditions, and pre-Slavic mythology (Culture.pl & Blacha 2016). Co-founder of Projekt Red Marcin Iwinski notes this includes a ‘rich’, ‘nonlinear, deep’ world, ‘with very strong personalities and characters’ (Suellentrop & Iwinski 2017). Iwinski has also explained that they provided the ability to make choices, which is complicated by the lack of ‘clear distinction between good and evil’, making it ‘like real life’ (Suellentrop & Iwinski 2017). He points to the Bloody Baron
quest as an example – ‘It’s fantasy, there’s this unborn child that turns into a monster, but still it’s a real, tragic situation’. Such a combination taps into his aim to have ‘the story to play with my intelligence, with my knowledge about the world, and maybe deliver something new’ (Suellentrop & Iwinski 2017). CDPR reflected on their own desires for the game, investing their desire for a rich fantasy world that has ties to real life. In that respect, CDPR wanted to break new ground in regard to player choices – by making it ambiguous what the ‘right’ choice is, which is impacted by the player’s judgements about key characters, as well as the impact a given choice may have on the narrative. All of this involved moral values – in the case of which female character Geralt will pursue, for example, he cannot end the game with multiple partners. None of these elements are necessarily new in video games, but the way that they are presented together in The Witcher 3 and its resulting success is likely to significantly impact how other developers approach their games (MacDonald 2013; Weber 2018).

At the same time, The Witcher 3’s content can facilitate territorialisation. Considering that female characters are frequently depicted in a sexualised way in video games, sexualised depictions of female characters can be read as territorialisation, an expression that upholds a power structure where women are sexualised for the enjoyment of men. For example, in 2016 British game development studio The Chinese Room (2016) accused CDPR’s upcoming Cyberpunk 2077 as looking ‘just as sexist’ as The Witcher, as CDPR shared an image of a female character wearing a corset, underwear, and stockings, with her legs slightly parted. CDPR Cinematic Director Pawel Swierczynski (2016) unofficially responded to The Chinese Room’s complaint by pointing out that CDPR has ‘many women (brilliant and talented) but also minorities: gay, transsexual’ working within the company, using this point to reject that they are ‘sexist for showing a boob or panties’. His response illustrates that for him, lingerie and

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113 The drunken, incensed Baron physically abused his pregnant wife, resulting in a miscarriage. The baby was improperly buried and transformed into a ‘botchling’ – a small, deformed foetus that preys on pregnant women (CD Projekt RED 2015a).
nudity is not an *expression*, a statement, of sexism – rather, a failure to employ diverse workers would be. For whoever at The Chinese Room who authored the tweet, the lingerie is an expression of sexism, a statement of power where women are sexually exploited, that *territorialises* by reinforcing that the image is for men – and by extension – the game.

In terms of the game characters, *The Witcher* is complex as it is inspired by a fantasy book series. That is, the depiction of characters is an assemblage that depends not only on the people involved in the game design, but by the author of the series, Andrzej Sapkowski. Lead character artist of *The Witcher 3*, Pawel Mielniczuk, explains that ‘[t]he look of the female characters, the sorceresses especially, it [sic] was kind of forced by the book’ (Purchese 2013). In the book series, ‘they have the plastic surgeries by their magic [sic]. It was said that they were a one-hundred-and-twenty-year-old [sic] with a hunch and she's [sic] really ugly, but they are using magic to make them look like twenty-year-old sex bombs’ (Purchese 2013). Indeed, the developers note that the books provided information on Yennefer’s appearance in particular, ‘including everything from her hairstyle, figure, and height to the color of her eyes and hair to such nuances as the shape of her face and nose’ (CD Projekt RED 2015b, p. 115). In terms of personality, Sapkowski states (Cutali 2015):

> Being an avid fantasy reader I was sometimes really bored and disgusted with the stories in which the hero could easily have sex with any woman he wished because every woman was willing and eager to have sex with him. I created a woman character who simply refuses to be a fantasy cliché.

Throughout the game, in fact, Yennefer is at times quite cold towards Geralt and others. The content of Yennefer, then, is her appearance – being tall and thin, wearing black, tight-fitting clothing, heeled boots, black hair, violet eyes – a typical object of the male gaze. But content also includes her personality – cold and powerful. Expression depends on the assemblage she
comes into contact with. For Sapkowski, Yennefer’s design rejects the sexist cliché that any woman will be eager to have sex with the male main character. The assemblage then helps us see that a character’s design, and what it means, is more complex than semiology would suggest.

C. The Players

Cremin explains that when a game is played, it takes flight away from the game creator, and becomes open ended, part of an assemblage with the players (2012, p. 76). It is when the game-assemblage connects with player-assemblages that yet more expressions emerge. Being based on signs, expressions – statements of power – vary according to who and how one interacts with content, and their own machinic assemblages. As mentioned earlier, people are comprised of numerous social assemblages, including economic, cultural, and social organisation, as well as family and education (Elliott 2012, p. 60). These assemblages impact their engagement with the game-assemblage. Understanding that expression, whether something deterritorialises or reterritorialises, depends on the assemblages that it comes into contact with is vital. It illustrates that, in the same way that Lara Croft can be interpreted as a strong female character or a sexist one, there is no ‘correct’ interpretation of a representation.

The machines that comprise people all regulate their drive to play or desire. One may play The Witcher 3 to experience a sense of achievement, enjoying the process of making Geralt stronger, gaining valuable weapons and armour, defeating enemies, human and monstrous, or gaining trophies/achievements. They could also play for immersion, travelling across the Continent, exploring villages, caves, cities, ruins, islands, and the wilderness. They may enjoy the role-playing aspects of the game, making moral decisions as they believe Geralt or themselves would, touching on issues such as alcoholism and abuse (Purchese 2016). They may enjoy customising Geralt to fit their fighting style, or play to escape from their own lives.
for a time. Assemblages are productive, and games harness the player’s desire to produce *something* – the reason for that desire to produce differs for each person, and often changes. A player may play *The Witcher 3* for a sense of accomplishment one day, but to slowly explore the fantasy world the next.

One’s interpretation of *The Witcher 3* also varies according to these social machines. Some players may feel that the games’ content territorialises, reproduces sexist power structures, because women are frequently depicted nude, more so than men. Others may feel that the contexts of these scenes negate this. For example, in one scene the player can choose whether or not Ciri will cover her upper body in a sauna (although her breasts are hidden regardless, as she is wearing a bandage). Whichever choice is made, the two other women present do not cover their upper bodies. Notably, one is elderly, and if Ciri does wear a towel, she points out it will ‘just get wet’. In the same scene, the player has an opportunity to decide if Ciri prefers women over men. This choice could be a reterritorialisation for some, if the *expression* for them furthers the male gaze. For others, it could be a deterritorialisation, an acknowledgement that nudity does not always need to be sexual. In this sense, cultural context significantly impacts upon expression.

Another issue up for interpretation is monsters or creatures depicted with naked breasts, such as succubi, nymphs, and sirens. Some players could feel that such depictions are expressive of a certain power structure where women are repeatedly sexualised. Others could feel that such nakedness is acceptable within the context of the game, as the monsters are based on medieval mythology, which frequently depicted the monstrous feminine in such a way. Another example is succubi – which are only female, and include the only non-white characters in the game (Witcher Wiki 2016f). For Anita Sarkeesian, since succubi are the only people of colour in *The Witcher*, and are ‘[h]ypersexual animal hybrids with tails, horns and “tribal” body paint’, such depictions are racist (Feminist Frequency 2015). For others,
however, the lack of people of colour makes sense in the Witcher universe because it is a fantasy version of Scandinavia.

Some may take offense at how female characters are often presented as sex interests to Geralt. Geralt has the opportunity to have sex with numerous characters: as well as Triss and Yennefer, he can sleep with Keira; Jutta An Dimun; Madame Sasha; Syrana and Shani (in the Blood and Wine and Hearts of Stone DLC respectively); and visit two brothels (IGN 2017). Some players may view such possibilities and interactions as a reterritorialisation – an expression of the male gaze, a statement that repeats a gender structure where women, particularly those in fantasy hero stories, are present largely for the enjoyment of men. Other players may not interpret the content in such a way, perhaps – all of these female characters are assertive in that they take control of their sexuality, and simply exhibit a relaxed attitude towards sex. Some players may even view the sexual options in in a satirical manner, as Geralt is quite hypermasculine, and in some scenes this is made fun of. In this sense, one’s interpretation of a text depends on the machines that channel their modes of thought.

Indeed, while The Witcher 3 depicts characters in certain ways, players create and download mods that alter the game, content and expression. Some expressions produced by mods repeat stereotypical or sexist refrains in relation to gender, particularly for women. For example, some increase female characters’ breast size and facial features (MKM9999 2015a). Others are more explicit, providing numerous alternative female body shapes (slim, curvy, and extra curvy), and outfits to display them (including a sling swimsuit) (MKM9999 2015b). There are also mods ‘to rip off the clothes from female NPCs’ (ElQuiote 2015), and depict female NPCs nude with ‘new nipples and vagina [sic]’ (HdG 2015); depict all female characters in a given cutscene as nude (M4sterDeath 2016); depict a host of core female characters as permanently nude and with larger breasts (jochan449 2018). While there are many more mods that sexualise female characters than male, others change Geralt’s appearance, such as Geralt on steroids giving him a ‘shredded steel body’ (miessi 2016), while others remove
Geralt’s underwear, both with and without genitalia (Ninivekha 2017; Beckman 2015). The highly sexual and at times sexually violent nature of some mods has caused much controversy in the game community.

Yet other mods that alter character appearance can constitute a line of flight, a line of escape from the assemblage. One way that mods do this is by challenging the female characters’ somewhat unrealistic beauty ideals – *Armor for Ciri*, for example, removes her heeled boots, covers her stomach, and buttons her shirt (Briarbird 2016), and another mod removes her heavy eye makeup (fenutus 2016). Other mods simply provide cosmetic changes that are not overtly sexual, but introduce new clothing or hair styles, such as *Stylish Yennefer* (Roksa 2018) or *Stylish Hairstyles for Geralt* (Roksa 2017). Some mods aim for physical realism, such as by giving Geralt body hair (Cordobahillokpassa 2016), or lore realism, altering character appearance to better match the descriptions provided in the book series (Hertores 2016). Others simply make ‘silly’ changes, such as making Geralt look like David Beckham (glowattack 2018) – clearly a deviation from what the developers intended. The way that mods function in a game-assemblage, whether as a line of flight, a line of escape from a given territory, or a reterritorialisation, will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

In sum, it is important to remember that for Deleuze and Guattari it is not the components of an assemblage that define it, but rather the way that those components are arranged, the way that they connect to each other (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 90). As Guattari points out (1995, p. 39), the machine is less the material components than it is the organisation of the components. In this way they have a topological understanding of the machine. Indeed, assemblages are constantly in motion and subvert logics of organisation. Expressions (interpretations of what something means) vary according to what assemblages (players) they come into contact with. *The Witcher 3* can be deterritorialising as the moral choices and fantasy world can cause the player to experience something new. The female characters are powerful. Yet, assemblages are always under threat of territorialisation and
coding. The frequent depictions of women at least partially naked, conventionally beautiful, tall and thin are territorialising forces but simply because of the sustained repetition of these components, not because of anything intrinsic to the components themselves. Hence, viewing video games and game production as assemblages helps us move past the assumption that there is a single expression, interpretation, or effect. By viewing a game, a creator, and a player as an assemblage, we can appreciate that a complex arrangement of machines are at work, constantly redirecting desire.

Conclusion

Chapters One and Two illustrated that video games are highly gendered, evident through processes within the game industry such as the hegemony of play and the way that female characters are represented in games. In this chapter I first explored semiological and technological methods of interpreting content and form. These methods have their uses, but are problematic as they often fail to acknowledge the role of the social in producing and consuming form and content, and often rely on binaries that reduce difference. To explore how I can think of games and representations within them in a way that does not reduce difference, markets, and production processes to gender, I introduced Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage. The assemblage undermines categorisation and examines what processes produce that categorisation. The assemblage has two axes: content and expression, and territorialisation and deterritorialisation. The assemblage is constantly in process, and as I illustrated with The Witcher 3, produces or expresses something different depending with what it comes into contact with.

This chapter has established that rather than simply examine how a video game represents gender, what it means, it is important to consider what that game or representation does, what kinds of connections it makes. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the
assemblage, I can conceptualise video games as arrangements of many elements, which are constantly in motion, always deterritorialising and reterritorialising, changing depending on what connections they make with other assemblages. Many forces can be territorialising, but as the Gamergate and the previous chapters made clear, in video game assemblages gender is particularly powerful overcoding force. That is, highly categorical and stereotypical understandings of gender significantly impact the way that players and industry workers are treated and viewed, and games are produced and consumed. The next step, therefore, is to consider why and how gender is such a dominant norm or category in video game assemblages. In order to do this, the following chapter builds from this chapter’s understanding of the assemblage, more specifically examining processes of territorialisation.
Chapter Four: The Production of Norms and Categories

Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage involves a collection of material and immaterial components that are arranged by desire, and this arrangement can at times be territorialising, reproducing structures and norms, or deterritorialising, doing something new that challenges those structures and norms. However, this does not in and of itself explain how gender is, at least for some, and especially for Gamergaters, such a territorialising force in video game assemblages. To examine this requires a consideration of how desire is channelled or coded in the context of video game assemblages, which in turn, I argue, requires a consideration of the relationship between the game industry and players, that is, requires the social, as Deleuze and Guattari might term it, to be brought back in. Particularly important in doing so are Deleuze and Guattari’s syntheses of production, as they determine how desire is channelled through machines, that is, how assemblages are arranged. I argue that what Deleuze and Guattari term the illegitimate uses of the syntheses are principally what is at work in establishing gender as what they term a molar, overcoding force that establishes norms, that is, that functions as a force of territorialisation.

The syntheses are a complex concept, and there are some steps that must be taken before investigating them. Hence this chapter is divided into two sections: the refrain and the syntheses. As noted in the previous chapter, a useful concept in understanding territorialisation and deterritorialisation is the refrain, repetitions with difference. Here I
examine the refrain in greater detail, explaining that there are three kinds: stability in chaos, a home territory, and a line of flight, and provide examples from each in relation to video games. Yet for Deleuze and Guattari some refrains are more ethical than others, and one way of thinking about this is the distinction between the molar and molecular, that is, unified, structuring elements, and elements that are multiple and unstructured. With an understanding of the molar and molecular, I then introduce the syntheses of production, which help explain the role of the social in the game industry and players, gender in particular. By understanding how gender becomes a molar force, I can in the following chapters examine how it is used as a determining category in game assemblages, and in particular Gamergate.

I. Refrains

As discussed in the previous chapter, refrains are forces of territorialisation, repetitions with difference. There are for Deleuze and Guattari three kinds of refrains, which, indeed, can occur simultaneously. The first refrain is a mobile, fragile territory (Coonfield 2009, p. 10), used to temporarily create ‘a rough sketch of a calming and stabilising…center in the heart of chaos’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 311). Deleuze and Guattari offer the example of a child ‘gripped with fear’ in the dark, who ‘takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can’ (2005, p. 311). As noted earlier, simply walking into a room establishes such a territory (Deleuze, Parnet & Boutang 2011). In the context of video games, a player can bring their personal equipment, such as a console or controller, to new spaces to provide a sense of their home territory. Another example is the cloud\textsuperscript{114}, which allows users to access their media from any computer or device. For example, one can log into Steam from any computer and download or play games. Such examples illustrate how games as refrains can be brought into many situations, producing a new territory in chaos.

\textsuperscript{114} The remote storage facilities provided by the internet (Ince 2013).
The second kind of refrain is the domestic territory (Coonfield 2009, p. 10). This refrain draws 'a circle around that uncertain and fragile center' (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 311), selecting, eliminating, and extracting from the surrounding milieu to keep the forces of chaos outside and create a home (Coonfield 2009, p. 10). Deleuze explains 'I sing to myself when I am moving about in my territory, wiping off my furniture, radio playing in the background, that is. When I am in my home' (Deleuze, Parnet & Boutang 2011). However, the boundaries of this territory fluctuate and are permeable (Coonfield 2009, p. 10). In video games, the domestic territory could be the place someone plays games – one's 'battlestation'\textsuperscript{115} for example. For players, the domestic territory could be the desire to categorise oneself as a gamer or a certain kind of gamer. In fact, King and Borland note that 'the story of computer game communities is about people searching for a place that feels like home' (2003, p. 4). This aspect of the refrain, as an element of identity, will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The third kind of refrain is a collective territory (Coonfield 2009, p. 11), a line of flight (Elliott 2012, p. 90). This is where one opens up to others – when a territory is stabilised enough, one can open their circle to allow other milieus or people to connect or communicate, or to exit themselves, launching into the world (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 311; Coonfield 2009, p. 11). Deleuze and Guattari describe this refrain as venturing 'from home on the thread of a tune', along lines that begin to drift 'with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities' (2005, pp. 311–312). This third vignette of the refrain in the context of players could be attending a game convention or otherwise opening up to meeting new people. For example, Felicia Day describes how playing *Ultima* taught her that it is 'wonderful...to connect with like-minded people' (2015, p. 54). In terms of game design, developers can be open to trying new features when a franchise is stable enough, such as the success of the *SimCity* franchise encouraging Electronic Arts to be open to Will Wright's idea.

\textsuperscript{115} Battlestations are PC player's desktop setups (/r/Battlestations 2018).
for a new game: *The Sims* (Seabrook 2006). A line of flight could also be in the form of a mod, which as discussed in the previous chapter, can significantly alter a game in terms of mechanics or appearance.

The refrain is a useful concept when examining video games, as game creators must attempt to balance familiar and novel elements for games to be understandable and enjoyable (Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000, p. 264; Schell 2015, p. 154). Familiarity is desirable in video games partly because frequent game players often have specific expectations of games (Heeter & Winn 2009, p. 96), and matching these expectations can facilitate immersion (McMahan 2003, p. 68). Yet novelty is also desirable because it ‘is a tremendous part of what motivates players to purchase games’, as well as being ‘a big part of what keeps players playing’ (Schell 2015, p. 154). Game producers therefore must attempt to strike a balance. They must utilise familiarity, employing refrains to create strong assemblage, but also include enough novelty to prevent players from moving onto other assemblages – other games.

Yet achieving a balance between innovation and creativity is not easy. While game developers want to be creative, and consumers want innovation (Tschang 2007, p. 1003), consumers’ wants are constantly changing (2007, p. 990), and are often articulated in the form of abstract ideals like originality (Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000, p. 264). Further, developers must also suit the needs of publishers, while fulfilling the expectation that games will continuously improve (Johnson 2013, p. 138). On the latter, there is some concern that the industry is repeatedly producing similar games, specifically those with detailed and cinematic-style content, rather than new forms of gameplay\textsuperscript{116} (Tschang 2007, p. 991). Tschang explains that game creators attempt to balance innovation and familiarity in two main ways: by repeatedly tuning and testing games during development, and by repositioning the game and its design exclusively due to rational marketplace concerns (2007, p. 999). The

\textsuperscript{116}Atari founder Nolan Bushnell, for example, has suggested that the emphasis on high-end graphics hinders fine-tuning gameplay and innovation (Boxer & Bushnell 2009).
former involves the refrain, as elements can be repeated but with some difference. The latter involves the over-coding force of existing markets, which reinforces territorialisation, a lack of difference. Over time, the game industry has organised itself to cater for certain genres and today there is a proliferation of franchises that dominate the market. The following subsections will examine how refrains are enacted in video games via genre and franchises.

A. Genre

One way of understanding refrains in games is through genre, which is used to differentiate different texts according to ‘composition, structure, and subject matter’ (Buchanan 2010, p. 200). Classic film genres, for example, include ‘westerns, comedies, musicals, and war films...thrillers, crime or detective films, film noir, horror, and science fiction’ (Chandler & Munday 2016). Such genres, Chandler and Munday explain, ‘have distinctive textual features including subject matter and themes, setting, narrative form, characterization, iconography, and filmic techniques’ (2016). They can also ‘involve different functions, pleasures, audiences, modes of involvement, styles of interpretation, and text–reader relationships’ (2016). Genres in this sense are kinds of territories, where certain refrains, whether subject matter, setting, narrative form, and the like, are repeated in ways that helps constrain or shape how meaning is produced and interpreted (Frow 2006, p. 10), and how 'boundaries are defined, eroded, defended, and redrawn' (Gledhill 2000, p. 222). Indeed, in video games genre is frequently used to categorise various kinds of games and gauge player's preferences.

Yet video game genres are not straightforward. While there are a set of game genres that are frequently accepted as standard, including ‘action, shooting, role-playing game, strategy, simulation, sports, racing and fighting’ games (Faisal & Peltoniemi 2015, p. 24, emphasis omitted), players, publishers, and games journalists often ascribe different genres to the same
games. This is because, as Faisal and Peltoniemi explain, games vary in terms of how neatly they fit into genre categories – some games are mostly one genre, while others belong equally to multiple genres (2015, p. 21), which are often categorised differently. For example, *Oddworld: New ‘n’ Tasty!* (Just Add Water 2014) is listed as an action game on MobyGames (2014); ‘Platformer, 2D, Action, Platformer, 2D’ on Metacritic (2014); and Action > Platformer > 2D on GameRankings (2014). Further, game genres frequently converge (Ip 2008, p. 207), such as ‘action’ and ‘RPG’ to ‘action RPG’ as seen in *NieR: Automata* (PlatinumGames 2017; Metacritic 2017). While genre has a significant impact on a game’s potential success (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau 2013, p. 103), determining what genre a given game falls under is complex and often varies.

The question that remains, then, is how to determine what constitutes genre for video games. For Costikyan, game genres differ significantly from film genres because they are ‘defined by a shared collection of core mechanics’ (2005, p. 4). That is, while film genres are based on theme, game genres are based on ‘a gameplay dynamic’ (2005, p. 4). For example, consider the aforementioned game *Oddworld: New ‘n’ Tasty (NnT)*. On MobyGames *NnT* comes under the action *genre*, which on that website is used for games that utilise accuracy, movement, quick decisions, reflexes, and/or timing as main mechanics, aside from genres such as racing/driving, RPGs, and sports (MobyGames 2014, 2019a). MobyGames also classifies *NnT* according to *gameplay*: it is a platformer, a game that features ‘jumping or climbing onto platforms on various elevations’, and contains puzzle elements, that is, it is a ‘non-puzzle game that features puzzle-solving elements’ (MobyGames 2019b, 2019c). Finally, MobyGames classifies *NnT* according to *perspective*: it is a side scrolling game, which is a tradition of platformers (MobyGames 2019d). Certain game elements or refrains, then, such as platforming and side-scrolling, are strongly associated with, and help produce, the action genre or territory, as they relate to movement, reflexes, and timing.
The next step is to consider how game mechanics function as refrains, and in doing so mark out genres as territories. The first function of the refrain, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is to create a safe space within chaos. As Yates and Littleton explain (1999, p. 570), a game system’s properties and the environment that it functions within provide **affordances**. Players provide certain abilities, which allows them to utilise the affordances that are available. Utilising established game mechanics can provide such order in an otherwise new and innovative game. Without any familiarity, the game will be difficult to pick up, as players rely on genre conventions and cues in their understanding of how to play (Cremin 2015, p. 26). Conventions can refer to controls, such as the use of the analogue stick on a controller or WASD on a keyboard to move the player-character or the game’s perspective. It could also be in the form of a character glowing, or an icon appearing next to them to indicate that the player can interact with them, as is common in Mass-Multiplayer-Online games (MMOs) and RPGs such as *WoW* and *The Witcher 3*. In FPS or action games, it is common for barrels of oil or petrol to explode when shot, and so players often view their presence as a sign that this is possible and an option when engaging enemies. Such conventions are examples of the first aspect of the refrain, as they make the game more easily understandable to the player.

The second function of the refrain is to create a home territory. Costikyan notes that nearly all genres have an original, pioneer game that contained the key mechanics for that genre (2005, p. 4). For example, Pinchbeck explains that *DOOM* set the core affordances for the FPS genre with a first-person perspective; dangerous environment; enemies to destroy in numerous ways; a linear story of conflict; and ‘[t]he ability to move, look, jump, run, crouch/sneak, and shoot’ (Pinchbeck 2013, p. 157). These elements are all refrains that establish genre, a territory. Over time players develop somatic and analytic attunements that ‘shape their expectations and understandings of how to play’ (Ash & Mukherjee 2013). As a result, players often feel a sense of affinity with certain genres (De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy 2015, p. 351), and avoid playing games that are not within their predefined area of interest.
Functioning as a ‘home territory’, genre provides players with a centre that they know well, and to which they can return to when they want to play something dependable. Hence, understood through the refrain, genre can function as a domestic territory by providing a known, reliable collection of mechanics.

Retrogaming is another example of the second refrain. ‘Retrogaming’ refers to a range of practices, including playing old games on their original consoles or via an emulator, and more broadly appreciating the style of old games (Suominen 2007, p. 15). Retrogames are highly popular, and the industry caters for retrogamers by releasing remakes and remasters of older games, while many modern indie games often utilise the 8-bit aesthetic (Fisher & Harvey 2013, p. 27), and there are numerous websites where players can download copies of old games to play on emulators. As for why retrogaming is popular, according to Deleuze, when art is new, it ‘produces a “violent effect” that forces us to seek its meaning through experiencing it again’ (Buchanan 2000, p. 188). Indeed, it is evident that people play old games or games of a similar style to repeat refrains to achieve the same effects as in the past. Heineman, for example, points out that ‘[c]onsumers re-purchase items from the past (or that look like they are from the past) so as to have a material connection to a time and place that has passed’ (2014, p. 14). That is, retrogamers are nostalgic for a return home (Heineman 2014, p. 14; Casey 2000, p. 201). For instance, nostalgia has been found to be a significant factor in why people play Pokémon GO (Zsila et al. 2018, p. 65), and the largest groups of players are aged 18-29 (46%) and 30-50 (25%) (Mac 2016) – not children, for whom the Pokémon franchise is designed, but adults who likely enjoyed the cartoon or games as children. Hence retrogames fulfil the second function of the refrain, building or returning to a home territory, often through the use of nostalgia.

117 Heineman provides a list of such games, including ‘developer compilations, such as the Sega Genesis Collection, EA Replay, Activision Hits, Intellivision Lives!, Taito Legends, and Atari Classics; series specific titles, such as the Dracula X Chronicles, The Sonic Mega Collection, The Gradius Collection, and the Metal Slug Anthology; and new titles that provide twists on original games, such as New Super Mario Brothers or the Sega Classics Collection’ (2014, p. 2).
The third role of the refrain is to open the assemblage up to something new, and in the context of games this can be understood through the converging of genres. Costikyan explains that once game designers find the peak of a genre, where core mechanics combine to bring engaging gameplay, they can produce engaging variations (2005, p. 4). Indeed, genres are ‘derived from a recombination of existing styles and plot lines’ (Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000, p. 266), and game designers are progressively utilising gameplay elements from other genres (Johnson 2013, p. 138). For example, Ip notes that games such as Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar North 2004), Shenmue (Sega AM2 1999), and Half-Life 2 (Valve Corporation 2004) combine ‘driving, puzzles, melee combat, strategy, and various other design elements from previous standalone genres’ (2008, p. 207). Further, Faisal and Peltoniemi note numerous overlapping genres such as strategy-shooting, action-platform, action-racing, and combat-sport (2015, p. 29). Combining RPG and FPS elements are also common, such as in Borderlands (Gearbox Software 2009) and Fallout 3 (Bethesda Game Studios 2008). With the third function of the refrain, game creators can combine genres to create something new – they can attempt to balance innovation and familiarity.

Yet another example of the third function of the refrain, a line of flight, is mods. As discussed in Chapter Three, player-created mods can vastly change the game creators’ intentions for a game. Aside from those discussed in relation to The Witcher 3, such as those that change characters’ appearance, many mods fundamentally alter a game. The Elder Scrolls IV: Skyrim (Bethesda Game Studios 2011) is one such heavily modded game. Some make cosmetic changes that impact gameplay, such as adding roads to the world map, aiding travel in a way that the developers did not originally allow for (IcePenguin 2016). Others are a little more involved, such as Ultimate Follower Overhaul (fLokii & Vamyan 2013), which provides a line of flight whereby the player’s followers (their computer-controlled party members) have more of an impact on play. For example, one feature of this mod is that the player can have up to fifteen followers, potentially altering the game experience from fairly independent and
isolating to feeling that one is part of a group. An example of a more extreme mod that changes the game in a more fundamental way is *Wet and Cold*, which includes weather effects that impact that player, such as a 15% reduction in movement speed during a blizzard (isoku 2016). Mods can introduce significant changes into a game, and in doing so radically change the gameplay experience from the way it was designed, generating a line of flight. The impact that such lines of flight can have on players are discussed further in the following chapter.

**B. Franchises**

Another aspect of the game industry where the refrain is particularly evident is the AAA industries’ reliance on franchises. As the discussion on retrogaming suggests, video game players are often drawn towards the familiar. Indeed, the ESA has found that 47% of players’ purchasing decisions are influenced by the familiarity of a game product, and 48% are influenced by a game being ‘a continuation of a favourite game series’ (ESA 2017, p. 14). In addition to the high-risk and expensive nature of game production as outlined in Chapter Two, the result is that franchises are valuable to game companies. Many firms focus on finding, developing, and keeping creative resources under control (Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000, p. 265), typically by transforming them into Intellectual Property (IP) (Tschang 2007, p. 993). For example, EA has reported that their ‘games and services are based on a portfolio of intellectual property that includes established brands’ (EA 2017a, p. 3). In the context of franchises, key elements of IP are repeated as refrains in order to create a given game, a territory. For instance, the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise includes refrains such as a modern setting where the main character enters the Animus, and a historical setting that this enables them to visit. Other refrains include weapons: a hidden blade, options to use a light, heavy, and ranged weapon, a focus on stealth mechanics, the ability to climb tall buildings and ‘synchronise’ to reveal the map, and so on.
Within franchises, developers try to supplement familiarity with innovation, as consumers compare the new product with the features and experience of the previous version (Chatterjee et al. 2015, p. 74). Each game, in this sense, is a refrain: repetition with some difference. In this context it is interesting to compare a series such as *Assassin’s Creed* to series such as the *FIFA* football simulators, which have been released yearly since 1993. Large franchises such as these create their own refrains and territories, reducing how much difference a game can produce. As mentioned earlier, the main games of *Assassin’s Creed* are similar in narrative and mechanics, although developers employ difference through new historical settings, and gradual introduction of new mechanics118. Still, the series has been described as ‘wearisome’ in its yearly releases, and being ‘familiar and formulaic’ (Hogarty 2015). To introduce more difference into the series, the latest iterations, starting with *Origins* (Ubisoft Montreal 2017), utilise more open-world RPG elements similar to *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt RED 2015a). In comparison, as a simulation *FIFA* must maintain its realisticness119 (Galloway 2006, p. 73), and this means constantly updating the game to stay ‘authentic’120 (EA 2015a). The past three iterations, for example, updated professional players, stadiums, commentary, and audience chants (EA 2015b, 2016, 2017b). When creating a franchise, developers are committing to a certain amount of repetition that must be supplemented with difference, but the ‘correct’ amount of difference is not easy to discern as players become accustomed to certain elements, that is, to the repetition of particular refrains.

Too little innovation, or excessive repetition of the refrain can lead to becoming trapped within a certain method of production and expression. That is, the second vignette of the

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119 Galloway (2006, pp. 73–74) uses ‘realisticness’ rather than ‘realism’ as a way to differentiate between technical realism (realisticness) and social realism.

120 The *FIFA 16* website states that ‘[c]reating authentic match day experiences has always been fundamental to the EA SPORTS FIFA series’ (EA 2015a).
refrain, creating a domestic territory, can be so desirable that game creators are discouraged from implementing significant difference. Chatterjee et al. note that it is possible that consumers become so comfortable with a franchise that they no longer want major innovations, and instead desire minor ones that are easy to adapt to (2015, p. 87). For example, *League of Legends (LoL)* players have lamented that changes to the game have forced them to ‘re-learn how to play’ (DeathPartizan 2015). Consumers could also become so comfortable with a certain product or series over time that they remain loyal, even if they only provide minor innovations (Chatterjee et al. 2015, p. 88; Tschang 2007). This is particularly evident in Nintendo’s franchises, which utilise familiarity to encourage fan investment (Cuff 2017, p. 44). In this sense, the franchise fulfils the second function of the refrain, to build a home territory, but does not enact the third: the line of flight.

Even minor innovations or changes can frustrate such dedicated players. For example, Jones (2008, p. 138) describes how the GameCube and Wii versions of *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* were horizontally flipped because although the protagonist Link is left handed, he needed to be right handed for players using the Wii controller. Some fans were upset because they saw Link’s left-handedness as a character trait, unique as Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of the series, is also left handed. Others disliked the mirroring of the game world and character designs (2008, p. 138). Again in this example, the second function of the refrain – creating a territory – has occurred, but the third does not, and the players are trapped and do not open up to change. In sum, operating as refrains, genres and franchises construct territories, which means that they have certain expectations and associations attached to them, and players can become upset if those expectations are broken and there is too much difference.
C. Gamers

Buchanan views popular music as having the potential to enact all three functions of the refrain on its fans, and I argue games can do the same on its players. Buchanan explains that capitalism predominantly functions through the second function of the refrain, creating a home in the sense that every new kind of music creates a niche market or territory for itself and its listeners (1997, p. 183). As already discussed, in games, genre has created niche markets or territories in the broader gaming assemblage, such as FPS’s, RPGs, and so on. Buchanan then explains that the music produced in that niche fulfils the first function, creating a home in our hearts. It grants its listeners freedom or authentication, often by providing a voice (1997, p. 183). I argue that games do the same – players can use their gaming territory to refer to their egos, their roles, how they view people, and how they experience a sense of belonging. Finally, Buchanan explains that in music what the listeners do with that voice is the third function– the way home or out. The music could provide a deterritorialisation, giving the listeners the ability to enunciate themselves differently to before (1997, p. 183). Or, it could result in a reterritorialisation. In games, players can be open to making new connections and change. For example, players who socialise in MMOs could become more comfortable socialising in real life. Or they may close themselves off, turning away from the rest of the world.

One reason for why players would self-select as a ‘gamer’ is because it provides a sense of community. That is, they fulfil the second aspect of the refrain – provide a safe home. In regard to D&D, King and Borland describe a computer camp that Richard Garriot\(^{121}\) attended as a teenager in 1977. Here there was emphasis on mixed-gender community- ‘Girls were as eager as the guys to play’, and one of the first rules that was broken was the rule that boys and girls stay out of each other’s halls (2003, p. 13). The camp provided the students with a sense of community where ‘computers, programming, technology, fantasy, and role-playing games

\(^{121}\) The creator of the landmark Ultima series.
were okay. They weren't nerdy, dorky, or strange' (2003, p. 14). Similarly, throughout the 70s to 90s hundreds of MUDs were created by mostly men on college campuses (King & Borland 2003, p. 5; Lowood 2009, p. 35; Pearce 2009, p. 9). Communities formed through word-of-mouth as players shared games with each other, and the general anonymity the game afforded allowed players who would not normally mix to form bonds (King & Borland 2003, pp. 29 & 54). Hence, video games were largely borne from (and still fulfil) a desire to form a safe community.

Indeed, King and Borland note that games provided players with 'a sense of shared and individual *mastery* over their environment that was often missing from their everyday lives' (2003, p. 15, emphasis added). Players' want for control is echoed by Pariser, who suggests that programmers have an impulse to build new worlds, as many have 'been socially ostracized due to quirks or brains' (2011, p. 92). Noting the link between games, science fiction, fantasy, and programming, he suggests that programmers can desire building new worlds as a form of escapism when life is miserable or oppressive. The second reason programmers can want this, he explains, is control – '[w]hen the rules of high school social life seem arbitrary and oppressive, the allure of making your own rules is pretty powerful' (2011, p. 92). It is possible that such insecurity is what prevents many players from fulfilling the deterritorialising function of the gamer refrain. The second function of the gamer refrain provides a safe territory, and for the third function, players can be reterritorialised and closed off to others.

It is in hacking culture that we can see some elements of antisocialness and gender. In fact, some seemed to view women as alien – one of the hackers who worked on the computer that was used to make *Spacewar* stated in an interview with Levy that ‘[w]omen, even today, are considered grossly unpredictable...How can a hacker tolerate such an imperfect being?’ (2010, p. 75). Similarly, while not specific to gender, Dovey and Kennedy point out that biographies of leaders in the history of computer games illustrate a certain kind of persona with similarly
obsessive, asocial, and anti-social behaviour. They describe a solitary individual genius who hacks technology and repurposes it for pleasure, who happened to enjoy analogue and digital games during childhood (2007, p. 69). For example, Kushner (2003, pp. 18–20) describes DOOM programmer John Carmack as lonely and hating authority, whether in the form of school, his parents, or religion. It would seem then, that the programming origins of video games brought with them the refrain of the anti-social, loner stereotype.

The tension between community and exclusionary or aggressive behaviour in game culture is evident in King and Borland’s description of how communities developed around Quake (id Software 1996). Playing Quake fostered deep and lasting friendships and provided a sense of comradery and leadership (King & Borland 2003, p. 124). Notably, at the first Quake tournament122 in 1996, QuakeCon, all sixty people in attendance were male (2003, p. 121). In the early 2000s gaming culture had become widespread, played by ‘teenagers, mothers and grandmothers, students and professionals, men and women’, who viewed gaming as a social activity (2003, pp. 200 & 226). Yet the 2002 QuakeCon was still mostly attended by ‘geeky men in their late teens or early 20s’ (2003, p. 205). Hence King and Borland note that while game cultures were growing online, these communities were mostly male, and there was little racial or class diversity, which they partly attribute to the digital divide123 (2003, p. 142). Trash-talking, homophobic language, and racist slurs were common, producing an unfriendly environment for women and minorities, although these people were not missing from play spaces (2003, p. 142). Here we can see some conflation over a sense of building a community, but also antisocial tendencies.

122 The development of communities and competition also heralds a kind of exclusionary culture. King and Borland describe how Frank Nuccio launched his own gaming league in 2002 when he became frustrated with racism on his Counter-Strike servers. The Winter 2002 games was business-like, and Nuccio worried that it was becoming too competitive, and was driving away casual gamers - the tournament was becoming less fun (King & Borland 2003, p. 237).

123 The digital divide refers to ‘power and access gaps in relation to users, beneficiaries, and developers of technology’ (Kirk 2009, p. xii).
In sum, a variety of refrains have contributed to the construction of the gamer identity and its continuation. Broadly, game culture has emerged from and is part of an assemblage of hackers, geeks\textsuperscript{124}, and gamers, which Taylor (2012) combines into geek masculinity. Masculinity, according to Connell (2005, p. 77), is ‘the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’. 

Geek masculinity refers to a form of masculinity whereby men have power over technology (Kendall 2000, p. 261), involving ‘highly refined skill and mastery’ in ‘technology, science, and gaming’, and requiring ‘intensive commitment and passion’ (Taylor 2012). Such masculinities can reinforce a group identity – particularly one where whiteness and heterosexuality are significant elements\textsuperscript{125} (Kendall 2000, p. 263 & 268). Hence, having developed from such a context, it is unsurprising that gaming is also associated with technical skill, masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality.

However Taylor explains that geek masculinity is not just about gender identity. It can be a way of rejecting mainstream culture such as sports and athletics (2012). Similarly, Konzack suggests that geeks are a form of counterculture, rejecting yuppie lifestyles, including ‘trendy food, music, fashion, and sports’ (2006, p. 5). Hence, gamers are borne partly from a desire to form connections with other people who dislike mainstream culture. On the one hand this can foster productive communities, but on the other, a desire for control and mastery could be a force that causes certain players to become blocked off from others outside of that community.

While video games are becoming increasingly mainstream and accepted in the popular media (consider the success of the book and film \textit{Ready Player One}, for example), they are still often perceived as a lowbrow, antisocial form of entertainment, and are susceptible to moral panics.

\textsuperscript{124} For Konzac, geeks are people who are driven to ‘learn vast quantities of knowledge about a particular field’, and are particularly associated with games including ‘classic role-playing games, LARP [Live-Action Role Play], and strategic board games to trading card games and highly developed videogames’ (2006, pp. 2 & 5).

\textsuperscript{125} For instance, see Kendall’s (2000, 2002) work on the MUD \textit{BlueSky}. 
The hallmarks of the game identity will be discussed further in the following chapter – for now it is enough to recognise that refrains can vary in effect, that is, some can be said to have more positive effects than others, which brings me to the second section of this chapter: the syntheses.

II. The Syntheses

For Deleuze and Guattari some refrains are more ethical than others, and their categories of the molar and molecular provide a useful way to understand this. To understand the molar and molecular, it is helpful to first to have an understanding of what Deleuze and Guattari term desire. As discussed in the previous chapter, for them the world is produced through desire, which makes connections to form assemblages. Desire is also the unconscious, ‘the state of the impulses and drives’ (Smith 2012, p. 178; Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 35). In this context Deleuze and Guattari also describe desire as multiplicities, which are ‘not unified with, or subjected to, a dominating signifier, power, [or] object’ (Young 2013d, p. 213), and do ‘not reference a prior unity’ (Roffe 2010, p. 181). As Smith explains, it is because our drives or desires are multiplicities that we all have different perspectives on the world (2012, p. 178). Within assemblages, Due explains, multiplicities (or desire) can be articulated on two levels: molar and molecular (2007, p. 132), although whether something is molar or molecular can change, and depends on the particular circumstances at work, that is, something can function in a molar manner in one context or from one perspective, yet can function in a molecular manner in another context or from another perspective.

Deleuze and Guattari explain that the molar refers to multiplicities that are ‘extensive, divisible...unifiable, totalizable, organizeable, conscious or preconscious’ (2005, p. 33). Molarisation is a process of ‘ordering according to kinds and categories’ (Due 2007, p. 132), by simplifying differences to fit them within binaries, such as men and women (Due 2007, p.
As such, it is a force of territorialisation. Molarisation occurs via molar machines, such as economic, political, social, technical, and organic machines (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, pp. 183 & 286), which ‘regulate, contain and code desire’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 61). For example, gender is a molar machine (Ringrose & Coleman 2013, p. 129; Jun 2009, p. 352), which takes molecular multiplicities and categorises them so that they come to represent femininity or masculinity. Colebrook provides Marilyn Monroe as an example of this, where ‘blondeness, curvaceousness, [and] vulnerability’ is placed under the category of woman or femininity (2002, p. 45). Hence, molar forces provide structure but can restrict the way that we can think about the world to fixed, rigid, and ordered ways (Elliott 2012, p. 25; Due 2007, p. 57; Hillier & Abrahams 2013, p. 30). Further, since binary oppositions favour one asset as majoritarian, or desirable (Flieger 2000), they can encourage opposition and oppression – such as ‘man’ being placed above ‘woman’.

In contrast to the molar, Deleuze and Guattari describe molecular multiplicities as ‘libidinal, unconscious...intensive’ (2005, p. 33), with no ‘goals or intentions’ (2000, p. 342). It is these molecular forces that the molar unifies or totalises ‘by accumulating statistics under the laws of large numbers’ (2000, p. 342). Put another way, ‘[s]ocial production represents, at a molar level, what is produced, by desiring production, at a molecular level’126 (Smith 2012, p. 163). While molarisation is an ordering and categorising force, a force by which territorialisation occurs, molecularity is ‘a site of ambivalence’, where molar organisation can occur, but so can a line of flight (Due 2007, p. 139), deterritorialisation, a line of escape. However, Deleuze and Guattari explain that like content and expression, we should not the view molar and molecular as a binary (2005, p. 34). This is because desiring-machines ‘never exist independently of the historical molar aggregates’, that is, they ‘function with social machines’ (2000, p. 183). Put another way, ‘[t]he molar plane is continually organizing and territorializing the molecular plane into categories and hierarchies, and the molecular plane,

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by continually disrupting the molar plane, disorganizes and deterritorializes order and enables becomings’ (Rizzo 2012, p. 66). In short, the molar unifies, totalises, and organises the molecular, but what is molar on one level can be molecular on another, and vice versa, and they are constantly in motion.

Smith (2012) provides making a decision as an example of how desire as a multiplicity functions through the molar and molecular. He explains that people are composed of ‘a multitude of unconscious drives’ (that is, multiplicities, desire), and ‘each drive is itself multiple’, constantly ‘folding…[the soul]…in all directions’ (2012, p. 184). For instance, when someone is making a decision, such as when they are ‘torn between staying at home and going out for a drink’, they are pulled into two directions, two drives (‘the taverns and the study’), and each of these options are ‘swarming with an infinity of minute perceptions and inclinations’ (2012, p. 184). Going to the tavern includes perceptions and inclinations such as ‘the effect of the alcohol’ and its taste; ‘the clinking of glasses in the bar, the smoke in the air, the conversation with friends, the temporary lifting of one’s solitude, and so on’ (2012, p. 183). Studying, in turn, ‘includes the minute perceptions of the rustling of paper, the noise of my fingers tapping at the computer, the quality of the silence of the room when I stop tapping, the comfort (or frustration) that I find in my work’ (2012, p. 183). All of these elements, these perceptions and inclinations, are multiplicities, the unconscious, desire.

How then are decisions made? It is not so simple as one drive winning out over the others, Smith explains, because at the same time that a person is pulled in these directions, they themselves are constantly changing and ‘modifying the two feelings that are agitating it’ (2012, p. 184). If someone chooses to go out for a drink, he states, it may not be because ‘the drive to go out has won out over the drive to stay home working’, as ‘other motives that remain largely unknown to us’ could have an impact (2012, p. 185). Smith explains that for Deleuze, all of these multiplicities, these ‘drives and minute inclinations’ form the conditions for making a given decision (2012, p. 185). That is, Deleuze does not see decision-making as a
transcendental, conscious judgement, but as an immanent process of desire (2012, pp. 185–186). This is where the molar comes in. The drives, Smith explains, that is, desire, ‘never exist in an unbound state’, and are never ‘merely individual’ – ‘[t]hey are always assembled by social formations’ (2012, p. 182), that is, the molar. For Deleuze, if we are able to pursue an interest, that means that ‘one’s desire—one’s drives and impulses—is itself invested in the social formation’, that is, the molar machine ‘that makes that interest possible’ (2012, p. 186).

Such an approach also means that desire and interest cannot be treated as the same thing. It is with this understanding of desire, which can be channelled through molar or molecular machines, that we can move on to the syntheses.

The syntheses, which Deleuze and Guattari call the passive syntheses of production, describe how reality produces itself (Grossberg 2013, p. 7). There are three kinds of syntheses: the connective synthesis of production; disjunctive synthesis of recording; and conjunctive synthesis of consumption (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, pp. 68, 75 & 84). Further, each of the syntheses have a legitimate and illegitimate mode or use (Colebrook 2002, p. 111; Buchanan 2008, p. 50). The legitimate uses of the syntheses are immanent and involve molecular forces, which are ‘reactive’, ‘schizophrenic’ ‘forces of desire’ that produce and express themselves creatively as much as they can (Jun 2009, p. 351). These uses do not ‘locate desire within persons or agents of intention’ and instead allow us to view the world ‘pre-personally and without meaning or intent’, viewing ‘intensities, rather than values or ideology’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 114). In comparison, the illegitimate uses of the syntheses are transcendental and involve molar forces, which are ‘active’ and ‘social’ (Jun 2009, p. 351). The transcendental uses ‘judge life from the position of one of its produced terms: man, society, or even human sexuality’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 114). What follows is an overview of each of the kinds of syntheses, and how they differ in their legitimate and illegitimate uses.

The connective synthesis of production refers to what happens when something, a machine or flow, comes into contact with or connects with something else. It produces reality
by ‘connecting a singularity or event to another’ (Grossberg 2013, p. 7), following the logical term ‘and’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 123). For instance, consider the earlier example of the wasp connecting with the orchid. When this occurs, Colebrook explains, ‘the wasp and orchid become different in their own way, and this difference is both an affirmation of their own power and a creative response to another power with which they connect’ (2002, p. 123). Further, it is through connection that territories are formed, and so it is also social and political, such as bodies that connect to become a tribe, which in turn makes a territory (2002, p. 123). In its legitimate use, the connective synthesis is ‘partial and non-specific’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 70). This means that connections are ‘easy to engage with, iterative, not predetermined and easily changeable’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93). In contrast, the illegitimate use is ‘global and specific’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 70). This means that it is exclusive, ‘pre-defined, inflexible and exactly the same for everyone’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93). For example, in its legitimate use, the connective synthesis simply takes in information in a specific instance, while its illegitimate use interprets such information as a global truth.

Second, the disjunctive synthesis of recording refers to what happens after a connection is made and the remainder or product leaves an imprint. It produces reality by producing a divisive ‘configuration of relations’ (Grossberg 2013, p. 7), following logical term ‘or’ (Colebrook 2002, p. 123). That is, the disjunctive synthesis refers to the process where the marked connecting machines are contrasted with each other (2002, p. 123). For example, Colebrook describes how in ‘barbarian regimes’ the ‘despot’s body is...elevated above the other bodies’ (2002, p. 123), that is, it is separate, different from other bodies. ‘The crucial thing to note’, Colebrook points out, ‘is the transition from immanence to transcendence: from a power that operates on bodies across a space or territory, to a power that organises that territory from some position outside or above that territory’ (2002, p. 124). The legitimate use of the disjunctive synthesis is ‘affirmative, non-restrictive, inclusive’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 76), ‘being both free and reactive’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93). In contrast, the
illegitimate use is ‘exclusive or restrictive’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 76), idealising the transcendental and immovable (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93), encouraging polarisation (Goodchild 1996, p. 86). For example, in its legitimate use, the disjunctive synthesis notes differences along a spectrum, while in its illegitimate use it reduces difference to binaries.

Third, the conjunctive synthesis of production and consumption is slightly more complex, referring to what is produced following the disjunctive synthesis. Colebrook explains that connections and disjunctions organise bodies, but we believe that something pre-existing must have organised them: this is the conjunctive synthesis (2002, p. 125). For example, capital seems to exist before our society, before our connections and disjunctions, but really it has been produced (2002, p. 125). Put another way, the conjunctive synthesis ‘continues the productive effects of connectivity, but in a way that always produces it in another dimension, producing surpluses that escape the inscription of disjunctive alternatives’ (Grossberg 2013, pp. 7–8). The legitimate use of the conjunctive synthesis is ‘nomadic and polyvocal’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 105, emphasis omitted), ‘channel[ing] energy into a local and contingent affect’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 94). In comparison, the illegitimate use is ‘segregative and biunivocal’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 105, emphasis omitted), having a ‘segregative and mobbing affect’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 94). This means seeing organisation and categories as ‘pre-existent, governing and total’ (Colebrook 2009, p. 14). For example, in its legitimate use, the conjunctive synthesis refers to seeing something as associated with numerous identities (nomadic), while the illegitimate use would be seeing something as associated with only one identity (governing and total). It is this governing and totalising interpretation of gender that has led to gender tension in gaming communities. To explore how gender has become a repressive force in game development, I will examine gender through the illegitimate forms of the syntheses.
A. The Illegitimate Conjunctive Synthesis (Girls are just different from boys)

Goodchild explains that repression first occurs through the conjunctive synthesis, where desire relates to the social field (1996, p. 86). The illegitimate form of conjunction is seeing the molar, gender, as ‘pre-existent, governing and total’ (Colebrook 2009, p. 14), which tends to have a ‘segregative and mobbing affect’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 94). That is, while deliriums begin in ‘social, economic, political, cultural, racial and racist, pedagogical, and religious’ fields, Freud ignores them and refers to molar unities – ‘the father, the penis, the vagina, Castration’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 274, 2005, p. 27). This means that we often think that gender comes before desire, and therefore determines desire. In video games, the illegitimate conjunctive synthesis can be seen in biological essentialism, treating gender differences as ‘natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men’ (Bem 1993, p. 2). These perceived gender differences inform our assumptions about male and female players.

There is some evidence for biological differences between men and women in relation to gameplay. Men have been found to be better at women at spatial cognition and visuospatial tests, such as working memory, and working with shapes and maps (Bonanno & Kommers 2005, p. 15), which has been linked to testosterone (Kimura 1999, p. 179). In contrast, women have been found to be better than men at perceptual speed, fine motor skills, and language (Bonanno & Kommers 2005, p. 15), which have been linked to estrogen (Kimura 1999, p. 180). Such hormonal differences are sometimes used to determine what games men and women will be better at or prefer. Sherry provides a table of these differences, suggesting that men have an advantage in games that involve 3D rotation, disembedding, and targeting – so they are argued to prefer shooter, fighting, action, and sports games (2004, p. 341). In contrast women are thought to have an advantage in colour and object location memory, and verbal fluency and memory, causing them to prefer puzzle, card, and board games (2004, p. 341). As
discussed in chapter one, belief in biological essentialism drove the development of ‘pink’
girl’s games in the 90s.

Yet, attributing skills to male and female hormonal differences is problematic because it
suggests that hormones create absolute masculinity and femininity, rather than a spectrum
(Crocetti 2013, p. 24). Testosterone and estrogen are found in all bodies in various levels, and
have multiple effects regardless of gender (2013, pp. 28–30). More broadly, sexual biology is
highly complex, as chromosomes are not a simple XX or XY system, and genes vary widely\textsuperscript{127}
(2013, p. 26). As a result, Jordan-Young argues that it is difficult to attribute major changes in
‘sex distribution in education, occupations, and the division of labor in families’ to hormonal
differences between men and women (2010, p. 233). Further, our brains and gender relations
are constantly changing, influenced by environmental factors (2010, pp. 291–292), which are
present at multiple levels, and multiple environments influence a person at once (Goldhaber
2012, pp. 3–4) – just like an assemblage. Gender differences then are not only related to
biological or genetic factors, but also family, peer, and social/cultural influences; cognition
and thought; emotions, feelings, and attitudes; and behaviour (Lippa 2005, p. 219). It is highly
reductive, then, to attribute preferences to biology.

In the illegitimate connective synthesis, then, \textit{biological gender} is seen to shape desires,
preferences, and skills, when \textit{social conceptions of gender} are really at work. For example,
gaming practices and preferences often significantly depend on accessibility, experience, and
knowledge of games (Hayes 2005, p. 25). Many of these barriers were discussed in Chapter
One in terms of women’s access to games and harassment. For example, middle aged women
playing puzzle games might not reflect women being biologically better than men at
perceptual speed, but rather that short games are easier to fit into their lives (Hayes 2005, p.
24). Similarly, Embaugh (2016) suggests that findings that women enjoy competitive

\textsuperscript{127}Goldhaber explains that even if genes do determine who we are, there are not enough of them; specific genes
do not seem to correspond to specific outcomes, whether biological or behavioural; and most genes appear not
to code for anything, but help regulate other genes (2012, pp. 2–3).
gameplay less than men could be attributed to the fact they are more likely to be harassed by strangers in competitive play, rather than some inherent biological reason. Further, Thornham’s work (2008, 2011) illustrates how power relations and social dynamics in domestic spaces significantly influence men and women’s perceptions of video games. She notes that gendered relations, identities, and typologies are produced within game activities, and that there is nothing essential to gender (2008, p. 127). Hence, while social forces make us think that gender differences are biological, there are often actually social.

Another way that social forces have been attributed to biological forces is in girls’ and boys’ toys, which are highly gendered (Auster & Mansbach 2012, p. 375). Blakemore and Centers explain that dolls and toys related to domestic activities are seen as for girls, leading them to be interested in nurturing and appearance (2005, p. 631). In contrast, weapons, vehicles, and action figures are marketed as toys for boys, leading them to become interested in competition and excitement (2005, p. 631). Since men and women experience greater social acceptance when they stay within the expectations of sex roles (Lucas & Sherry 2004, p. 517), what are often thought to be biological differences could actually be social. Further, in relation to video games, players gain certain skills during play, and if more men play more of certain kinds of games than women, it is no surprise that men tend to perform better than women in such skill tests. This can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the stereotype that women do not play games, or are bad at them, has been found to affect their performance (Jenson, de Castell & Fisher 2007, pp. 14–15; Kaye & Pennington 2016, p. 205). Such repetition of the idea that men and women are simply fundamentally different is an example of how the illegitimate synthesis of conjunction occurs in video game assemblages.
B. The Illegitimate Disjunctive Synthesis (Since you’re a girl…)

Second, the illegitimate form of disjunction separates terms like male or female, and sets them on opposite poles (Goodchild 1996, p. 86). This is reductive, such as saying male or female, rather than ‘I am British and black and female and Muslim and feminist and…’ (Colebrook 2009, p. 19 emphasis original). The illegitimate use of disjunction is idealising the transcendental and immoveable (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93). That is, from Freud we often think in terms of exclusivities, of polarisation – that one is ‘a girl or boy!’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 59, emphasis original), which resigns us to the previous, conjunctive synthesis. In video games, we can understand the illegitimate disjunctive synthesis as a production of the conjunctive synthesis – since I am a girl (and not a boy), I must like x. The difference is that in the conjunctive synthesis, the focus is biology determining preferences, whereas here, the focus is on the binary nature of gender determining opposite preferences.

In video games, the disjunctive synthesis relates to Bem’s gender lens of gender polarisation, which ‘is not just the historically crude perception that women and men are fundamentally different from one another but the more subtle and insidious use of that perceived difference as an organizing principle for the social life of the culture’ (1993, p. 2). Such a method of thinking has influenced the industry. Due to the polarising nature of design and marketing forever focusing only on the ‘maleness’ of the videogame audience, the products of the gaming industry tended to become hypermasculine. Video games had become gendered as male, hypermasculine. Since few girls were playing games, the response to this was to create games at the opposite end of the spectrum – hyperfeminine girl’s games (Lynn, Raphael & Olefsky 2003, pp. 147–148). As discussed in Chapter One, such an approach is problematic because it reduces difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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Mastery (Schell 2015, p. 121)  
Emotion (Schell 2015, p. 122)  
Competition (Schell 2015, p. 121; Ray 2004, p. 43)  
Negotiation, Cooperation (Ray 2004, pp. 43 & 86)  
Destruction (Schell 2015, p. 121)  
Nurturing (Schell 2015, p. 123)  
Spatial puzzles (Schell 2015, p. 122)  
Dialogue and verbal puzzles (Schell 2015, p. 123)  
Trial and Error (Schell 2015, p. 122)  
Learning by example (Schell 2015, p. 123)  
Fantasy (Schell 2015, p. 122)  
Real world (Schell 2015, p. 122)  
Active (Kinzie & Joseph 2008, p. 655)  
Creative (Kinzie & Joseph 2008, p. 655)  
Strategic (Kinzie & Joseph 2008, p. 655)  
Explorative (Kinzie & Joseph 2008, p. 655)  
Visual stimulation (Ray 2004, p. 53)  
Narrative stimulation (Ray 2004, p. 54)  
Risk taking (Ray 2004, p. 70)  
Informed (Ray 2004, p. 71)

Table 2: Male vs Female Traits

There is an abundance of research arguing that men and women prefer different games, which are convenient opposites. Schell, for example, states that ‘males and females are different. They have different interests, different tastes, and different skills and abilities’ (2015, p. 120). The identification of gender as a feature of the market led to the development of all kinds of binaries regarding what it meant to be a game player. The above table summarises what player qualities have been associated with gender binaries.

Polarities are problematic for various reasons. They are simplifications of complex multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 34). They also suggest that there are core qualities to femininity and masculinity, although really such qualities vary through history and culture (Lippa 2005, p. 47). Polarities are also exclusionary, making it impossible ‘to represent someone who is either unfeminine and unmasculine, nor both feminine and masculine’ (Jordan-Young 2010, pp. 118–119, emphasis original). Polarities have their roots in the previous conjunctive synthesis, as scientists ‘exploring the influence of early hormones on humans...have presumed that feminine interests revolve around nurturing and self-
decoration and that male interests revolve around action, social domination, and mastery of skills' (Jordan-Young 2010, p. 203). Just as one’s gender and behaviour is not reducible to chromosomes, genes, or hormones, Ah-King states that ‘Instead of emphasizing polar differences between females and males, the natural sciences may underscore variation, sameness, and a continuum of morphologies, behavior, and processes’ (2013, p. 1). That is, men and women are rarely direct opposites (Lippa 2005, p. 2), and in fact some researchers point out that averaging out differences between gender masks differences within gender (Castillo & Cross 2008, p. 421). Viewing gender in such a way not only reduces difference between members of the same sex, but reifies differences amongst the opposite sex.

Indeed, there are numerous studies that discount gender binaries amongst men and womens’ play preferences. Women have often been found to enjoy ‘masculine’ elements of games just as much as men, such as killing enemies with swords and hammers (Embaugh 2017), and using strategy (Klevjer & Hovden 2017). Male players can be ‘timid’ in their use of strategy (Castillo & Cross 2008, p. 421), and often enjoy ‘feminine’ coded games such as fantasy, when high fantasy is often attributed as a game style women tend to enjoy (Yee 2016b). Men also enjoy mobile and puzzle games (Brand, Todhunter & Jervis 2017, pp. 14 & 17), which as discussed in Chapter One, are often associated with a feminine, less ‘real’ or ‘true’ kind of play. In fact, Yee (2015) found an ’87% overlap between what [game elements] men and women enjoy’. Just as in the previous synthesis it was explained that women could dislike competitive play not for some biological reason, but because it exposes them to harassment, numerous studies have found that women do enjoy direct competition even though it is one of the main elements used to separate male and female play (Vermeulen et al. 2011, p. 10; Armstrong 2016, p. 123). Repeating these simplistic polarities not only reduces people to their gender, but is often inaccurate.

Koster suggests that even if men and women are more skilled at certain kinds of games, this does not mean we should separate men and women in terms or what games they prefer,
but simply encourage people to play games that do not appeal to them – this way they will gain new skills (2014, p. 110). In fact, Feng, Spence and Pratt found that when non gamer men and women played action games, differences in spatial attention were almost eliminated, and differences in mental rotation decreased permanently (2007, p. 850). Here we can see that the gender binary, which is transcendental, creates assemblages that perpetuate those binaries. The idea that boys like action games, means that action games are created for and marketed to boys, which means that boys become better at action games, which means that action games are understood to be a masculine domain. The idea that men and women prefer different genres because of their gender perpetuates a self-reinforcing cycle. Such repetition of the idea that men and women are polar opposites is an example of the illegitimate use of the disjunctive synthesis: differences are reduced to simple binaries.

C. The Illegitimate Connective Synthesis (All girls like...)

Third, the ‘prohibitions and exclusions’ developed by the disjunctive synthesis forms the connective synthesis – objects and people who are represented as ‘separate, individuated, and complete’ (Goodchild 1996, p. 88). This use of connection is ‘exclusive, global and specific’, ‘pre-defined, inflexible and exactly the same for everyone’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93). By reducing numerous forces to the family, Freud saw repetition of the same, ‘as though every human on the planet regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or nation, lived his or her life according to the dictates of the same script’ (Buchanan 2013, p. 11). The illegitimate form of the connective synthesis is visible in how games researchers have noted that some girls and boys like certain games, and assumed that all others would as well.

In attempts to understand (or rather, prove) that men and women are different, diversity amongst women and men is often ignored. Instead people make assumptions about global differences between the sexes (Hayes 2005, p. 25). In fact, play preferences have been found
to be more closely linked to one’s genre preferences and previous experiences than gender (Vermeulen et al. 2011, p. 17). Similarly, Spence and Prat found that differences between players and non-players are larger than between men and women (2007, p. 852). Within gender groups, players can significantly vary in terms of experiences with computers, frequency of play, and social context (Werner et al. 2014, p. 682), all of which affects their play styles. Koster warns that it is important to realise that gender differences in video game play are generalities and averages, and that the difference between individuals of either sex is greater than between sexes (2014, p. 104). In sum, it is inaccurate to suggest that gender is the source of difference amongst people.

As previously mentioned, treating whole genders as the same is partly due to the industry’s drive to ‘maximise profitable growth’ (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2003, p. 57). Organising audiences by demographics and focusing on the most profitable one is successful, so companies have incentive to continue to focus on the ‘youthful male audience’, rather than develop new content (2003, p. 249). When trying to develop games for a broader audience, then – women – they simply created opposites. These are the elements from the previous disjunctive synthesis – puzzles rather than action, cooperation rather than fighting. However, as Ray explains, the issue here is that the industry viewed girls as a genre, rather than a potential market (2008, p. 419). That is, they aimed for the opposite of their successful target demographic. treating all girls as the same, as enjoying all the same affects as each other, rather than as individuals with differential interests and preferences. The illegitimate connective synthesis, then, occurs in gaming because of the repetition of the idea that gender determines preferences: all women, and men, are assumed to be the same.

In sum, the illegitimate forms of the syntheses of production are determining and restrictive, and in video games, they are often used to map gender on top of certain kinds of play. The illegitimate conjunctive synthesis claims that men and women are simply different – they play differently because of biological factors, rather than other forces such as social and
cultural. While there are biological differences between men and women, they are often viewed in a governing and totalising manner. Second, the *illegitimate disjunctive synthesis* operates on the assumption that men and women are polar opposites of each other. Thinking in such a binary manner often means that similarities amongst men and women are ignored, while differences are emphasised as per the previous synthesis. Finally, the illegitimate connective synthesis claims that men, and women, are all the same. That is, there is no accounting for difference within gender groups: women are all thought to enjoy 'pink games', and men thought to enjoy violent games. These syntheses operate through refrains – they are beliefs that are reproduced in wider society, the industry, and by players. Through their repetition, they generate a gendered gaming territory.

**Conclusion**

This chapter addressed why gender is such a significant territorialising force in video game assemblages. Through refrains, video games become repetitive: not just in the way that gender is depicted, as discussed in Chapter Two, but also in regard to genre and franchises. Yet some refrains are more ethical than others, as evidenced through the difference between the molar and molecular: molar forces engage in categorisation or unification, reducing difference, while molecular forces rather engage in change and process. Molar forces produce and are produced by the illegitimate, transcendent uses of the syntheses of production, and molecular forces in the same way relate to the legitimate, immanent uses of the syntheses. It is through the syntheses that reality is produced: that connections are made (connection), recordings occur (conjunction), and production and consumption takes place (disjunction). In regard to gender and games, the illegitimate syntheses are clearly at work, with biological differences being viewed as determinants of how men and women play (conjunction); men and women assumed to lie on opposite poles, and therefore engage with games in opposite
ways (disjunction); and all men and all women being placed in categories such that it is assumed all in that category are alike. In these contexts, the gender refrain has been repeated in a molar fashion.

Assemblages are produced as desire makes connections between components. Molar, social machines such as gender direct these flows, organising components into categories and reducing difference. However, assemblages are not stable and are constantly in motion, deterritorialising and reterritorialising. From chapters one and two, it is clear that game assemblages can and often do produce gender as a molar identity, marking video games and certain kinds of play as a masculine territory. Yet there is no inherent reason for why games tend to do so. Rather than generate illegitimate forms of the syntheses – restrictive, polarising, and totalising conceptions of gender and games – game assemblages could conduct legitimate, open, varying, and productive forms of the syntheses. The rest of this thesis will explore why gender is such a territorialising force in video game culture, and what can be done to encourage deterritorialisation and change. The following chapter begins this analysis by using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality and Butler’s concept of performativity to discuss why gender is such a significant aspect of the gamer identity, how that identity has become such a molar force in gaming, and how it can be challenged.
Chapter Five: ‘Go play with your Barbie’: Territories and Refrains

Chapters One and Two noted that gender is a powerful force of categorisation in game culture, including in broader conceptions of play, video game players, and video game creators. Chapter Three noted that examining the role of gender in video game culture is complex, and can be examined through assemblages to acknowledge that game culture is an arrangement of numerous parts and machines, which constantly disconnect and reconnect in different ways. Chapter Four explained that gender as a molar, transcendental, totalising category is often repeated in video games, and that this occurs through the illegitimate syntheses of production. That is, gender is a particularly territorialising force in game assemblages because it is repeated by social machines – gender functions as a refrain. Yet it is not enough to examine gender alone: gender also has a significant influence on the gamer identity, which many Gamergaters explicitly identify with. In this chapter I use Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality to explore why gender has become a significant refrain, a territorialising force, in the gamer identity. By understanding gender as an exclusive territory, game producers reinforce the territory of the gendered gamer, restricting opportunities for becoming, and experiencing difference. That is, although play is an inherently deterritorialising spirit, game creators frequently produce similar games for similar audiences, marking out strong gender ‘territories’ in the process.

This chapter is divided into two sections: Faciality and Performing ‘Gamer’. Section one introduces Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality, which is related to molarisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, faciality is how subjectivity is produced within capitalism, and the
gamer ‘face’ is no exception. Here I use faciality to examine the gendered gamer identity and frequent stereotypes or tropes about gamers. To understand how faciality establishes social norms and impacts player’s behaviour, it is useful to think about cultural capital and performativity. Hence, section two begins by introducing Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, through which faciality can be understood as a form of capital that players draw on in their performances. Next, I introduce Butler’s concept of performativity, which suggests that identities, and gender identities in particular, are performances. Here I explain that it is through performances that the gendered gamer face is produced. Finally, with use of performativity and cultural capital to augment Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality, I investigate what constitutes gamer capital and how players engage in performances that reinforce or challenge that identity. In the next two chapters of this thesis I will argue that the gamer identity functions as a refrain that many players internalise, feeling that it forms a significant part of their subjectivity. As game culture changes, through more diverse creators, players, and games, this identity has become threatened, causing Gamergaters to react with vitriol.

I. Faciality

As noted in the previous chapter, within assemblages forces of molarisation, such as gender, reduce difference by simplifying molecular forces into categories. However, there is another process involved – which is what establishes the molar. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is where what they term the faciality machine operates, which establishes the molar, and determines how we conceive or produce (our) identity. The faciality system lies at the intersection of two axes for Deleuze and Guattari: signifiance (the white wall: a ‘receptive immobile surface, receptive plate of inscription, impassive suspense’) and subjectification (the black hole: ‘intensive expressive movements’ that ‘tend towards a critical instant, prepares a
paroxysm’) (Deleuze 1986, p. 87; Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 167). Significance is based on the desire for interpretation (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 311). It is the molar face that all others are compared to (Message 2010b, p. 35), the surface that signification is projected onto and read by others (Elliott 2012, p. 77). For example, signification is placing oneself in the molar order ‘I’m Australian’. The trap of the white wall is that it reflects nothing about the inner self. This means blaming one’s issues only on social and economic, molar structures. In contrast, subjectification refers to consciousness, or turning inwards (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 311). Compared to signification, which is organised so that one is understandable to others, subjectification is disorganised (Message 2010b, p. 35). For example, subjectification is turning away from molar organisation such as nationality and stating ‘no, I’m unique’. The trap of the black hole is that one can become drawn into their own subjectivity, and centre everything on themselves. This means ignoring social and economic structures that affect oneself.

Faciality, for Deleuze and Guattari, is a system of organisation that produces our world (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 172). It supplies ‘coordinates and contours’, boundaries and channels, and organises a ‘field of possibilities’, to determine, to an extent, ‘what we are capable of seeing, doing, and being’ (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 311). In doing so, García explains, faciality does two things: it produces normalisation, and ‘breeds outcasts’ (García 2018, p. 334; Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 177). In regard to normalisation, faciality produces categories such as ‘class, race, gender, nationalities, political loyalties, [and] culture’ (Elliott 2012, p. 25) – that is, molar categories. These categories are binaries such as ‘man or woman, rich or poor, adult or child, and so on’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 177). They provide ‘a face of reference’, or ‘the primary descriptors of what we call a face’ (García 2018, p. 334), but it is important to note that faciality does not just apply to faces (Deleuze 1986, p. 88), and Guattari used the concept to study architecture (Elliott 2012, p. 79). This is also not to say that one’s identity must be based only on these molar labels – we can also think of personal identity in
terms of orientations that are too subtle for these designations (molecular) (Lorraine 2008, p. 78). But the 'social production of the face' still 'holds sway over bodies, organizes them and codifies them' (García 2018, p. 334). In this sense, faciality establishes the norm, what kinds of categories are used to identify someone.

The problem with these dualisms is that 'only what can be captured and coded through faces in a socially recognisable...manner is retained as embodied existence' (Lorraine 2008, p. 64). That is, anything that does not fit within the system of categorisation is not acknowledged. Hence, by establishing norms, faciality also 'breeds outcasts', rejecting 'inadequate faces, those that do not correspond to the agency of power' (García 2018, p. 334). This is the second function of faciality: a process of making 'choices', or judgements, rejecting faces that do not conform to expectations, or seem suspicious (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 177). Deleuze and Guattari provide numerous examples of this, such as a teacher who is 'bathed in anxiety', a defendant whose over-the-top submissive behaviour is read as insolence, someone who is 'too polite to be honest', or a face that is not clearly a man or woman's, a poor or rich person's (2005, p. 177). Such outcasts, people who deviate from the norm, 'constitute an Other that threatens' the established order (García 2018, p. 335). Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari explain that 'the white wall is always expanding, and the black hole functions repeatedly' (2005, p. 177). That is, categories are always being added, such as 'transvestite', ensuring that 'you've been recognized', 'pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole' (2005, p. 177). In producing the normalised face, those who do not fit are made outcasts: but the faciality machine can create new categorisations, producing new norms.

Deleuze and Guattari (2005, p. 177) provide Christ as an example of faciality, as Christ's 'typical European' face became 'the face against which all others were compared' (Elliott 2012, p. 85). Through the Christ-face, whiteness, for example, 'is ordinary', and others, 'yellow, and black men are the second or third categories...[that] need to be Christianised, or facialised' (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 178). Here, only faces that differ from the white face
register on the spectrum of difference (2005, p. 178). As Deleuze and Guattari state, ‘from the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be’ (2005, p. 178). García discusses Donald Trump as another example of a faciality machine, describing how his use of discourse ‘appeals to a social order in which...individuals must correspond to the American stereotype: middle class men of Caucasian origin, among other characteristics’ (2018, p. 331). ‘The faciality of this regime’, García explains, has created a racist, discriminatory, heteronormative imaginary, a segregated public space, where ‘minorities are considered threats to that social order’ (2018, p. 332). By establishing the molar, ‘typical’ face, these faciality machines establish the outcasts, people who do not fit.

It is also important to note that for Deleuze and Guattari, faciality is the key to producing subjectivity in capitalism (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 24). Indeed, Guattari argues that mass media forms a significant part of our subjectivity, and states that ‘[c]apitalist profit is basically the production of subjective power’ (1995, p. 4; 2007, p. 45). This is because capitalism deterritorialises (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, p. 374), and in doing so, fragments identities (Roberts 2007, p. 120). To replace them, Guattari explains, the mass media produces ‘standardized models...of faciality’ (2011, p. 83), These models of faciality are used to produce ‘mass-produced and standardised’ subjectivities, which are valorised and celebrated (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 46). In other words, ‘capitalism acts like a huge social machine, churning out specific ready-made lifestyles and points of view and reducing the complex heterogeneity of individual experience to a pre-packaged subjectivity’ (Elliott 2012, p. 109). Indeed, numerous scholars point out that in capitalist society, purchase and consumption is linked to identity and sense of self (Massumi 1993, p. 7; Verhaeghe 2014, p. 212), and as I will explore, the game industry has played a significant role in producing the gamer identity. Yet while the face is a machine of capture that organises and limits, it is also a
site of possibility and potential (Rushton 2002, p. 224; Thompson & Cook 2013, p. 381), and this is also evident in players’ negotiation with the gamer identity.

The ‘gamer’ identity is a faciality machine, and while players can use the term simply to identify themselves as game players, it can carry specific connotations. Indeed, as examine in Chapter Two, game marketers and researchers have created the category, and it holds significant cultural weight (Shaw 2013a). Specifically, the game industry in general has focused on a young male target demographic, and places much emphasis on hardcore genres, and repeating these refrains has constructed a ‘gamer’ territory. As a result, ‘gamer’ typically refers to a specific powerful and vocal segment of the gaming community – white, heterosexual males who enjoy more aggressive or so-called ‘hardcore’ styles of play (Shaw 2013a; Chess, Evans & Baines 2017, p. 53). Since this demographic has broadly become the foundation of AAA game design and marketing (Fron et al. 2007, p. 7), game producers and communities often privilege and normalise the hardcore set of preferences and practices of play (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 37). While identities are artificial, the hardcore gamer identity is internalised by game players and significantly influences attitudes towards video game players both within and externally to game cultures and communities.

As a faciality machine, the gamer identity, or hardcore identity involves numerous binary options, which are not dissimilar from the supposed differences between male and female player discussed throughout the thesis so far. For one, such players are typically believed to be young males (Nooney 2013; Jones 2008, p. 144), and are associated with a hypermasculine discourse that involves celebration of masculine stereotypes and hostility towards femininity (Salter & Blodgett 2012, pp. 403 & 412). Another characteristic in the gamer faciality machine is a preference for intense rather than more moderate styles of play, such as those that involve ‘arousal, alertness and excitation’ (Saari 2009, p. 539). Indeed, so-called hardcore games often involve violence and explosions (Klug & Schell 2009, p. 108; Juul 2010, p. 8), and strong (Cowley et al. 2008, p. 10), or emotionally negative narratives, typically including
violence, delivered via science fiction, fantasy, and war genres (Juul 2010, p. 8; Wohn 2011, p. 199), which dominate the market (ESA 2017, p. 12). Further, hardcore players often want impressive graphics, a trait that separates such games from many Nintendo and indie games (Jones 2008, p. 132; Juul 2010, p. 25). The typical ‘gamer’ face, then, is male, enjoys violent or otherwise intense games, and often prefers games that have impressive or realistic graphics.

There are yet more characteristics that inform the gamer face, which are related to personality. Klug and Schell, for example, suggest that hardcore players tend to come under the ‘Competitor’ and ‘Achiever’ player categories, meaning that they enjoy games that allow them to compete against other people and win in order to experience a sense of achievement (2009, p. 108). Other scholars have had similar findings, with Yee (2018) finding that hardcore players typically enjoy competitive, exciting, and challenging games; Schultz (2008, p. 178) finding that they expect to be challenged, and Jones (2008, p. 51) and Juul (2010, p. 8) finding that they enjoy difficult gameplay. As a result hardcore gamers are willing to study gameplay to improve their skill and master the game, a process that often involves developing strategies (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, ch. 21, p. 2), and can take a significant amount of time (2004, ch. 18, p. 13). Competition against the machine and between players has a long history (Taylor 2012, p. 10), and top-performing players can become celebrities, such as Daigo Umehara, a 2D arcade fighting game player who holds the Guinness world record for ‘most successful player in major tournaments for Street Fighter’ (Capcom 2018) and has over ninety-eight thousand followers on Twitter (Umehara 2018). There is some degree of dedication to the gamer face, and the seriousness of competition can be a marker of this.

Also in terms of personality, Klug and Schell suggest that hardcore gamers could be socially maladjusted, lacking social graces, and play games as a replacement for social acceptance and success in reality (2009, p. 108). They experience a rush from competition and

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128 27.5% of games sold in 2016 in the US were shooters, followed by action at 22.5%, and RPGs at 12.9% (ESA 2017, p. 12).
a drive for dominance, engaging in trash-talk, and bragging about their competence (2009, p. 108). Some gamers believe that aggressiveness is simply part of game culture, and this suggestion that aggression is needed to win is obviously evident in other spheres such as, for example, the Australian cricket team, with some complainants arguing that ‘Australia’s chances of success would be compromised if their aggressive streak was tempered’ (Mulvenney 2018). Further, as one interviewee from Gray’s study explained, for some players ‘acts of hate are a part of the gaming experience and women like me were too sensitive and should not be playing if I could not endure the hardships of the male space’ (2012, p. 421). This comment is not dissimilar from that made about female politicians, as Julie Banks (2018) recently pointed out that women who speak out are often labelled as ‘weak or emotionally unstable’, as ‘politics is not for the faint hearted’. Similarly, phrases such as ‘rough and tumble’ or ‘rough and tough’ are often used around the debate of women in politics (Fernando 2018; Kelly 2018). As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, this suggests that although the gamer identity or territory is associated with aggressive behaviour and hostility towards women, it is, of course, not unique in doing so.

The gamer ‘face’, then, is comprised of numerous molar characteristics: other than being male, and typically white and heterosexual¹²⁹, gamers are hardcore players who enjoy intense experiences and violence; high-quality graphics; are competitive and want to achieve, and are aggressive. Notably, marketing of games and consoles typically reflects such traits, as many advertisements for the Xbox One focus on more intense play experiences (GameSpot 2013; GameNewsOfficial 2014), while that of the Nintendo Switch focuses instead on the lighter social aspects of play (Nintendo 2016). As discussed in the previous chapter, some of these traits or refrains have been brought over from the predecessors of video gaming, such

¹²⁹Interestingly, Shaw (2012, p. 36-37) found that sexuality influences how people relate to video gaming, but not whether they identify as a gamer. She also found that none of her interviewees mentioned race in relation to video games or identity more broadly. She suggests that race is not important in the construction of the gamer identity in such a way that it is symbolic annihilation.
as hacking and programming subcultures. Yet the game industry is largely responsible for establishing this molar face, using it to construct a target audience for marketing purposes. While of course not all (or indeed, many) players fit this gamer face, many players self-select into the identity (Dewinter & Kocurek 2017, p. 59), and it is often used in game communities to establish one’s legitimacy, one’s distance from being a ‘true’ gamer. As will be discussed in the following section, players often behave in a certain manner to gain such legitimacy.

II. Performing ‘Gamer’

Many players identify themselves as gamers, perhaps in a similar way that one’s work or nationality can also function as a marker of identity (Foster 2012; Malešević 2006, pp. 227–229). However, much more weight appears to be given to ‘gamer’ than equivalent markers of identity in other hobbies and interests, marking a ‘shared history and solidarity’ (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6). Yet while much of the conflict that arises in video game communities arises from the debate over who is and is not a gamer, the gamer face and its associated refrains are increasingly no longer accurate for most players, as Chapter One demonstrated. In order to help understand the impact that the gamer face has on players, it is helpful to consider Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus and cultural capital in addition to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of territory, refrains, and faciality.

Like Deleuze, Bourdieu is critical of transcendentalism and believes that we must situate ourselves in ‘practical relation to the world’ (1990, p. 52). To do so, he introduces the habitus, a system of dispositions that form the basis of our social behaviour (2013, p. 35). The habitus ‘is a set of possible practices and ways of perceiving those practices (Mansfield 2000, p. 197). It shapes the identities of members of a cultural group, and is embodied, visible in various factors that are transmitted socially – the way people move, behave, look, sound, and so on (Gilbert 2010, p. 144). Within one’s habitus, certain behaviours will be ‘correct’, and people
who have a different habitus will lack these practices (2010, p. 145). The habitus has much in common with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a territory\textsuperscript{130}, produced via refrains, and it helps explain how a territory can be organised according to certain standards or norms, such as those produced by faciality machines.

If we consider cultural identity as being produced in the form of a habitus, or a territory, then identity is something deeply embedded in group members. In fact, it may be so deeply embedded that one cannot articulate, reflect upon, or expose their standards to critique (Gilbert 2010, p. 145). Dovey and Kennedy, for example, suggest that player identities are particularly strong because players’ technological competence is intertwined with their identity (2007, p. 64). Like Guattari (1995, p. 4), they explain that the tastes, abilities, and tendencies that people have towards technology often become a part of a certain identity, which then become the foundations for affiliations and connections that one has with other people (2007, p. 64). The gamer habitus or territory, then, prescribes certain refrains, or practices as acceptable and valued, as \textit{capital}. Such practices include capabilities, tastes, preferences, and tendencies, which are established as norms through faciality machines.

When people function within a habitus (or a territory), they make use of their cultural capital (the refrains they have access to) (Edgerton & Roberts 2014, pp. 206–207). Cultural capital builds social worlds, and refers to competencies, knowledge, skills, codes, values, and attitudes that relate to culture (Rojek 1995, p. 68; Bourgonjon & Soetaert 2013, p. 5). People gain cultural capital through their upbringing, education, and contact with cultural groups (Bourgonjon & Soetaert 2013, p. 5), and societies judge cultural capital through reward and punishment systems, both visible and invisible (Rojek 1995, p. 68). As discussed earlier in this chapter, certain kinds of games are thought to hold more cultural capital, be closer to the gamer face, than others – such as shooters over casual games. This is tied up with player abilities, as shooters are thought to be more difficult to play and require more skill than casual

\textsuperscript{130} Other scholars have noted similarities, such as Delanda, Protevi, and Thanem (2005, p. 70), and Savage (2011).
games. In relation to Deleuze and Guattari, I would argue that cultural capital functions as refrains, that they have value because of their proximity to the gamer face, and that they uphold the gamer territory or habitus through their repetition.

Indeed, Butler's concept of performativity is also helpful in that regard, and as Jagger (2012, p. 209) notes, combines well with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. I argue that performativity helps explain how players behave, what refrains they repeat, in relation to the gamer face. For Butler performativity refers to how people act out and produce gender through behaviour (1988, p. 526) – through repeated ‘bodily gestures, movements, and enactments’ (1999, p. 179). Such behaviour can be understood as refrains. Butler believes that gender performances become naturalised over time as they are repeated (1988, p. 522), in the same way that for Deleuze and Guattari faciality establishes a naturalised, ideal face, against which others are compared. Butler believes that people must perform their identities in recognisable ways (i.e. according to what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as the faciality ideal) to avoid harassment and violence (Butler 2009, p. ii; Mansfield 2000, p. 128). Similarly, for Deleuze and Guattari people repeat behaviour in a socially recognisable and psychically convincing manner (Lorraine 2008, p. 64), behave in a way that aligns with the face, to ensure that they are recognised (Deleuze 1994, p. 24). Hence performativity adds depth to faciality in that it accounts for how people (players) collectively perform a ‘face’, an ideal (gamer), even though that ideal is not actually real.

As Jagger suggests, combining Bourdieu's habitus and Butler's performativity can help us see how social logics effect performances, and how the performing of social norms is ‘embodied and reiterated’ (2012, p. 226). As discussed in Chapter Three, assemblages are processual, and so are ongoing productions or performances of identity. They are processual in that people are constantly engaging in certain behaviour, drawing on certain cultural capital, repeating and performing certain refrains in accordance with their habitus, or

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131 Other scholars have used Butler and Bourdieu’s concepts together, such as Lovell (2000) and Huppatz (2006).
**territory.** By doing so, they are producing a *face*, an identity. As I will explore, the gamer face values certain kinds of capital, including consuming certain cultural products using time and money, and investment in the form of attachment and knowledge. Yet player’s performances differ not only on their access to capital but also depending on their social environment. Further, as Gamergate made clear, the ‘hardcore’ or stereotypical gamer refrains are no longer being repeated by the majority of players. The following section, therefore, examines what kinds of capital, or refrains, have value in the gaming territory, and how players perform their identity in relation to the gamer face.

A. Gamer Capital

As established earlier in this chapter, the ‘gamer’ face elevates a certain identity, behaviour, or taste to become the norm (Dovey & Kennedy 2007, p. 64), so different kinds of games and styles of play provide different values of cultural capital. Specifically, the ‘hardcore’ games mentioned earlier in the chapter, such as FPS’s, are often held in higher regard than more casual games. For example, some of Shaw’s interviewees explained they were not gamers because they played Nintendo, puzzle, or music games (2013a). In turn, De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy found that people who tended to play supposed ‘core genres’, such as ‘shooters, fighting games, action-adventure games, and strategy games’ identified more strongly as gamers than those who did not (2015, pp. 354 & 357). However, as the average player’s age increases, leisure time becomes more fragmented (Juul 2010, p. 157), and more casual and indie games become available, the idea that a gamer is someone who almost exclusively plays core is increasingly inaccurate, which is reflected in some of the figures referred to in Chapter One. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, such *devaluing of traditional hardcore genres contributed to Gamergate.*
More broadly, the gamer identity is linked to the consumption of products other than games, such as anime and comics (Shaw 2013a), science fiction and fantasy, horror, and action genres (Konzack 2006, p. 5; Klevjer & Hovden 2017), and engaging in heavy Internet and social media use (Klevjer & Hovden 2017). Popular game journalism websites make this evident, with Polygon, GameSpot, IGN, and Kotaku all featuring entertainment sections that feature stories on film and TV. In particular, Polygon has dedicated sections for comics, Marvel, YouTube, and Twitch. Such overlap is characteristic of computer games, as science fiction fans, paper gamers, and computer programmers in the 80s were beginning to realise that they had common interests (King & Borland 2003, p. 50). All of these cultural artefacts are forms of consumption that players can utilise to further build their cultural capital, and in doing so, perform their identity in ways that conform to the gamer face.

Related to the kinds of games and other media forms consumed, the gamer identity is strongly linked to spending a significant amount of time playing games (Dymek 2012, p. 38; Shaw 2013a; De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy 2015, p. 357; Assunção 2016, pp. 56 & 51). Shaw, for example, found that most people who reported that they were not gamers explained that this is because they did not play enough (2012a, p. 35). Yet not all players have the same access to time (Jenson, de Castell & Fisher 2007, p. 11), so their proximity to the gamer face can be inhibited. Indeed, the issue of leisure time is one particularly tied to white-wall constructions of gender roles. As discussed in Chapter One, women have been found to play much less than men until they are middle-aged and older, and this is partly due to feeling less entitlement to leisure time (Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 50). For example, one of Schott and Horrell’s interviewees explained that she does not play games as much as in the past because ‘there’s always something else to do...in the house you’ll always find housework’132 (2000, p. 49). Here people are falling back upon existing refrains, that is, white walls, social

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132 Another explained that ‘sometimes things have got to be done...it’ll be me that ends up doing it, because [partner] be like “just let me finish this”’ (Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 49).
expectations of gender, or socially sanctioned performances of gender. Through this mechanism, as noted earlier, social expectations can impact how much time a person has to play games, and in turn, their ability to perform the gamer identity, and their proximity to the gamer face.

While spending a significant amount of time playing games is a form of cultural capital that has value in the gamer identity, it does not necessarily reflect a player's dedication to or enjoyment of video games. For example, Assunção’s participants point out that different games require different time investments (2016, p. 56). Indeed, ‘casual’ games that hold less capital typically require less time investment. Yet casual games can be played frequently in a ‘hardcore’ manner (Juul 2010, pp. 129–130), and so-called hardcore genres can be played with minimal time investment. Further, a high frequency of play does not necessarily mean that one will identify as a gamer. While Royse et al. (2007, p. 572) found that women who played more often were more comfortable with the gamer identity, Vermeulen et al. (2017, p. 95) found that regardless of how much time female players dedicated to gaming, they avoided self-identifying as a gamer because they wanted to avoid experiencing sexism. While time spent playing is a useful indicator of one’s involvement in gaming, then, it is unlikely to be a direct determinant of whether one identifies as a ‘gamer’, and social contexts alter players’ performances of, or public claims to the gamer identity.

Since gamer capital in the form of consumption and time requires disposable income and recreation time, it is associated with being of a certain class. Class does not dictate who identifies as a gamer, but it shapes how people engage with games, as only those with a high enough income can afford the necessary consumption to reach gamer status (Shaw 2013a). To keep up their cultural capital, players must continuously purchase new consoles and games to add to their collection. Hardcore gamers typically have enough of a disposable income to keep up to date with the latest computer hardware and platforms (Juul 2010, p. 8). This behaviour implies that one is more immersed in, and understands the hobby, more so than others
(Woods 2012, p. 135). In particular, AAA games tend to be much more expensive than indie games at their release, and these are the games more strongly linked to the gamer identity. Such behaviour is also evident in board gaming, as Woods notes that in board gaming the desire to define a sense of self and expression can lead to one owning a significant number of board games, and constantly purchasing new ones to uphold their reputation (2012, pp. 135 & 134), or performance. Since not all players have equal access to time and money as forms of capital, only certain players can afford to perform the refrains required to identify as a gamer.

Gamer capital is also found in having a sense of attachment to video games (Shaw 2013a). Nakamura, for example, describes the minority of hardcore gamers as having a ‘fierce attachment to the medium’, where ‘gaming feels like a virtuous pleasure’ (2017, pp. 247–248). One form of attachment, as discussed in the previous chapter, is nostalgia. Attachment can also be in the form of social interaction, as Dymek explains that ‘[t]he [gaming] subculture is vibrant, enthusiastic, communicative and Web-based with dynamic discussion forums, blogs, clubs, game servers and dedicated media’ (2012, p. 51). In particular, hardcore gamers ‘who are dedicated to a specific game or series, often comment and discuss changes and future productions’ (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012a, p. 64). Attachment can also be in terms of the game experience, as, for example, Osborne describes how RPG players praised the meaningful relationships they developed, a sense of attachment, and being accepted and intimate with players in their community (2012, para.5.28). The reasons for such attachment will be explored further in the following chapter, while Chapter Seven will explore how that very attachment contributes to tensions in gaming culture such as Gamergate.

B. Social Context

Even if a given player has access to gamer refrains, they may perform their identity differently depending on what social contexts they find themselves in, that is, what
assemblages they come into contact with. Bourdieu’s social capital is a useful concept through which this can be understood, a form of capital comprised of the connections between people (Putnam 2000, p. 16). As a result, the amount of social capital that someone has depends on the size of their network, as well as how much capital each person in that network has (Bourdieu 1986, p. 21). In this sense, social capital can be understood as connections, or flows between assemblages: the more gamer refrains one can repeat, the closer they are to the gamer face, and the stronger the territories they can make with other gamers.

Social capital can be individual and collective. On an individual level, people seek to make connections with others that benefit their interests, while on a collective level, social capital effects the wider community (Putnam 2000, p. 17). Each group member is a custodian of that group’s limits, so when a new member joins, that group’s definition, boundaries, and identity are at risk of being redefined, altered, or debased (Bourdieu 1986, p. 22). It is clear, then, why claiming an identity can be such a political act. Some players are highly stringent about who they consider to be gamers: they do not wish to ‘dilute’, or risk destabilising, the gamer territory by including people who do not have enough capital.

If the social environment makes the gamer identity accessible, then one is more likely to identify as a gamer (De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy 2015, pp. 348 & 356). The opposite is also true – video games are often thought of as a guilty pleasure or juvenile (Shaw 2013a), and this can impact players’ willingness to claim gamer capital and perform a gamer identity. For example, Bergstrom, Fisher, and Jenson note that many of their interviewees would rein in their enthusiasm for MMOs to avoid being characterised as a stereotypical, socially awkward player (2014, p. 12). Similarly, Thornham suggests that her participants’ tendency to lie about their gaming habits could be an attempt to prove that they are ‘normal’ compared to geeks, who are associated with intense pleasure and identification with games, socially neglectful or
abnormal, and of a questionable sexuality\textsuperscript{133} (2008, p. 134). In turn, being willing to risk negative associations can be a hallmark of the gamer identity – one of Shaw’s female interviewees explained that she identifies as a gamer because she is not ashamed to say that she plays games and enjoys them (2013a). Deciding whether or not to claim the gamer identity, for these players, depends on how willing one is to negotiate with gaming’s negative associations.

The social environment can alter a players’ likelihood to claim the gamer identity. Indeed, for many players, socialising with other gamers and sharing knowledge affirms their gamer status, and for some is a condition for identifying as a gamer (Shaw 2013a, 2013b, p. 351). For example, Sims found that although the ‘cool’ and ‘geeky’ boys at a middle school played video games, only the geeky boys discussed, debated, shared stories and tips, and established a hierarchy based on gaming ability (2014, p. 852). Woods describes a similar trait amongst board game players, who gain specialised knowledge that can be used in discussion and critique (2012, p. 128). Similarly, one of Shaw’s interviewees described gamers as needing ‘a willingness and ability to be critical of games, a reflexive distance cultivated by true consumers but not casual dilettantes’ (2013a). However, social connections can also lessen a player’s likelihood to perform the gamer identity if they do not hold as much capital as others. A number of Shaw’s interviewees, for example, describe their lack of knowledge about gaming or time spent playing compared to others as a significant reason for not identifying as a gamer (2013a). There is some emphasis here on gamers having enough knowledge to be critical – yet as will be discussed later in the thesis, for Gamergaters only certain kinds of critique are permissible.

Further, gendered social dynamics can impact one’s access to gamer capital. As discussed in Chapter One, gaming as a set of technologies, culture, and social space is encoded as male,

\textsuperscript{133} Participants considered social gaming to be ‘normal’, framed in stereotypically heterosexual activities such as drinking, socialising, and sports (2008, p. 134).
and women need to navigate and negotiate their way through this space (Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 50). Indeed, a lack of knowledge is often used specifically to delegitimise women’s access to gaming territories, as the popularity of the ‘idiot nerd girl’ meme\(^\text{134}\) illustrates (‘Idiot Nerd Girl’ 2015). One of Beavis and Charles’ female study participants, for example, was referred to as a kind of imposter by the owner/manager of the gaming café, other players, as well as her boyfriend, who questioned her competence and very right to play video games (2007, p. 697). A lack of knowledge about games and the subsequent ‘failing’ to correctly perform as a gamer could also be a source of aggression against female players, an attempt to reject them from the gaming territory. For example, one of the reasons Assunção’s participants gave for toxic behaviour in play is a lack of game knowledge and experience on the part of the female victim (2016, p. 58). In these examples, female players are already at a disadvantage because they do not fit the gamer ‘face’, and as a result, they are judged harshly on knowledge as another form of capital. Further, here people assume that gender is determining: rather than make judgements based on skill or anything else, they are making judgements based on gender.

In particular, domestic spaces are imbued with family and gender power dynamics that impact players’ access to gamer capital: as noted in Chapter One, early studies from the US and UK show that men in households often act as gatekeepers to technology, including game consoles (Bryce & Rutter 2003, p. 9; Schott & Horrell 2000, p. 41). More recently, Thornham found that gendered power relations and social dynamics significantly influence men and women’s perceptions of video games and performances of being a gamer (2008, pp. 127 & 133). In general men spoke about video games in an assertive manner that upheld their claim to gaming knowledge, while women framed their comments as ‘just my opinion’ or ‘personally’ (2008, p. 137). Female participants also tended to feign ignorance when playing

\(^{134}\)A stereotypical image of a female geek is couched between two statements that demonstrate her lack of knowledge about game or geek culture (‘Idiot Nerd Girl’ 2015).
video games with a man\textsuperscript{135} (2008, p. 133). In sum, Thornham laments that most players ‘expressed preferences and opinions which were either refuted by other household members or shown to be inaccurate when it came to “actual” gaming choices’, suggesting they are significantly concerned about what they are ‘supposed to say’ (2008, p. 133). These observations suggest that players are influenced by the gamer ‘face’, whereby male players hold more capital than female players, and female players adjust their performances accordingly. I do not present this example to suggest that it is because of gender that participants behaved in such ways. Rather, as a form of faciality, gender can be negotiated, but clearly participants felt pressure from social expectations of gender in their interaction with and behaviour towards video games.

Yet if one makes connections with other players who hold more gamer capital, they could also increase their own capital. An example of this is in Jenson, de Castell, and Fisher’s three-year study of an after-school game playing club for young teens (2007). In the first year, the girl’s group was run by a female Masters’ student who had never played video games. The girls were less confident than the boys, and tended to play easy games. However, during the second year, the girl’s group was run by a female undergraduate gamer – so the girls were provided with real access and support to play, and realised that they could choose what to play, when to play it, and who to play with. In fact, the girls wanted their own game tournament that was competitive, and they began to keep and compare game scores. This was also the first year that the boys asked girls to join their team (2007, pp. 14–15). When female students were socially included – when they had increased access to social and cultural capital and therefore were more able to repeat gamer refrains – they were able to construct their own gamer territory.

\textsuperscript{135} One participant described how she would ‘mess about and pretend I couldn’t work out what to do’ in a household with males, but in a household with females she’d ‘look at the map to try and see where the symbol is and where [she’s] going’. She claimed that ‘they’d [males] always she telling me what to do. But that’s boys isn’t it? They have to instruct you’ (Thornham 2008, p. 133).
A final point in relation to social contexts is that the gamer identity, being associated with hardcore, violent, and competitive games, is often associated with aggressive behaviour. Considering that the previous section illustrates that the gamer identity is quite fragile and really only refers to a small subset of players, it is possible that aggressive behaviour is in part an attempt to maintain the cultural capital of ‘gamer’, and prevent others who do not have that capital, and who are too distant from the gamer face, from entering the territory. For example, Tang and Fox note that according to Social Identity Theory, the more someone is involved with a group, the more they will identify themselves as a group member, and the more likely they are to be aggressive to protect their group from threats (2016, p. 4). Considering that according to the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects, in anonymous spaces, players will behave in an hostile and aggressive manner, rather than their own individual identity (2016, p. 2), it is possible that both the drive to maintain a gamer identity and the association that that identity has with aggression can explain why certain gamers are so territorial.

Researchers have noted that dedicated game players tend to attack or discredit people who appear to be a threat to the video game territory, such as people who discuss the negative effects of video games (Nauroth et al. 2015). Among others, such groups include those who object against sexist and racist representations in video games\(^\text{136}\) (Johnson 2013, p. 141). For example, King and Borland describe how, in 2002, Anne-Marie Schleiner released Velvet Strike, a Counter-Strike protest mod with anti-war messages. Hours after the game went live, she received hate mail and death threats (2003, p. 219). Her website was attacked, and message boards were full of angry posts. One post stated (Velvet-Strike 2018):

\(^{136}\text{See Condis (2015), McKernan (2015) and Braithwaite (2014) for further examples of players becoming irate at the ‘invasion’ of politics into gaming.}\)
What a stupid initiative. If you don’t like the game, just don’t buy it, and don’t piss off other people with your shit. Just a woman could have thought of making something like Velvet Strike. If you don’t realize that a videogame is just a videogame, and that it’s a fake world, well then, GO PLAY WITH YOUR BARBIE.

Despite Schleiner clearly being a game player, her altering a game in a way that makes it not a typical game means that she has lost social capital. Schleiner has repeated the Counter-Strike refrain in a new way, opening it up to difference – specifically, an anti-war sentiment that is at odds with the majority of hardcore shooters. By doing this, she is not performing ‘gamer’ correctly, as she is using the wrong cultural capital. She is not recognised as a video game player, but a woman who does not understand video games – someone who does not fit the gamer face on two counts – so she must be rejected from the gamer territory.

The hostility directed towards people who discuss the negative aspects of video gaming and/or so-called ‘real life issues’ suggests that certain players believe in a strict form of the magic circle. Conceived by theorist of play Johan Huizinga, the magic circle refers to a space where play occurs, which is materially, ideally, deliberately or inevitably marked off from the rest of the world, and where special rules are in place (1949, p. 10). In line with this theory, many players tend to view video games as an activity that allows for escapism, whether to ignore responsibilities (Calleja 2010, p. 344), provide diversion from daily routines and challenges (Hoffman & Nadelson 2010, p. 257), or alleviate boredom and loneliness (Lee & Larose 2007, p. 643). For many players, Heron & Belford suggest, video games are activities where the player does not need to consider the moral consequences of in-game actions, and their actions do not reflect on them (2014, p. 10). As a result, gamers, Condis argues, have been conditioned to expect, and in many respects to produce or construct, that is, desire virtual worlds, to be a bodiless and apolitical experience (2015, p. 204). Indeed, she suggests that ‘to divert discussion away from the game itself and toward what is perceived as a
personal, political agenda [is] Something a real gamer would never do’ (2015, p. 205). It is possible that for many gamers, therefore, a marker of the gamer identity is a willingness to uphold the magic circle, that is, to uphold a territory that they believe is not tainted by political issues when, of course, it is inseparable from them – this will be explored further in Chapter Seven.

C. Alternative Performances

As the previous section illustrates, performing or fulfilling the hardcore gamer ‘face’ is difficult for many players as they do not hold the ‘correct’ cultural capital, and in social contexts players can be policed by others to ensure they are performing the identity correctly. As a result, players have performed new refrains, generated lines of flight away from the molar gamer ‘face’. Shaw, for example, describes how some of her LGBTQ interviewees’ relationship to game culture was influenced by sexuality, but that this did not stop them from identifying as a gamer (2012a, p. 36). For instance one Asian American interviewee identified as a ‘gaymer’ (a gay gamer), which Shaw notes is the creation of an intersectional space, away from the gay communities’ stigma regarding video games as well as gaming communities’ stigma of homosexuality (2012b, p. 75). Such performances can be liberating, but, as with the gender examples discussed next, can still be exclusionary.

In particular, since video games are still to a significant extent thought to be a masculine territory, female players often behave in apparently contradictory ways in their attempts to negotiate gender. One method of performing a female gamer identity, Assunção describes, is through ‘female masculinities’ (2016, p. 50). As noted earlier, an example of this are the Grrl Gamers of the mid 90s, who criticised the pink games that reflected society’s dominant discourses and ideologies of femininity (Yates & Littleton 1999, p. 577). Grrl Gamers enjoyed disproving stereotypes that they are poorer players than men (Beavis & Charles 2007, p. 703;
Eklund 2011, p. 333), which are often based on pseudo-science. They formed their own gaming clans and web communities (Bryce & Rutter 2003, p. 11), ‘to compete aggressively with men and to refuse to accept traditional limitations on female accomplishments’ (Cassell & Jenkins 1998, p. 34). These groups sometimes saw themselves as linked to the post-feminist, post-punk Riot Grrls movement, which ‘stressed female empowerment through participation in traditional male spheres’ (1998, p. 32). Such players emphasise their knowledge and skill as forms of capital, as refrains, to legitimise their claim as gamers. While they do not fulfil the ‘male’ aspect of the gamer face, they fulfil others such as aggression and competitiveness.

Grrl Gamers bear similarity to the culture of Roller Derby in that there is some emphasis on adopting ‘masculine aggressiveness’ and ‘a sexualised hyperfemininity’, yet, as Pavlidis and Fullagar point out, the sport provides a way of negotiating gender contradictions (2013, pp. 675–676). Grrl Gamers often criticised the game industry’s view of women as sexualised or victims, and in performing a female gamer identity ‘play[ed] with juxtapositions of traditional feminine iconography and aggressive fighting-game images’, such as with personas including ‘Fear-No-Man, Goddess, Hellkitten, Icequeen, Killer Bitch, or Lethal Lady’ (1998, p. 33). For example, King and Borland describe how the Grrl gamer who formed the Psycho Men Slayers (PMS) did so because they were tired of sexist and abusive talk on servers (2003, pp. 143–144). A member of a similar group, CrackWhore, stated that ‘Since you’re a girl the guys expect you to really play poorly. So we take pride in ripping them to sorry little shreds’ (Brown 1997). By embracing aggressive and competitive attitudes and iconography, Grrl gamers challenged some aspects of femininity while utilising others.

Yet the molar conceptions of gender and gamers are so totalising that even attempts to resist them can fall back on and repeat gender categories. For example, one of Osborne’s interviewees explained that some female RPG players show disdain for others who like ‘girly

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137 For example, in Taylor, Jenson & de Castell’s study of competitive *Halo 3* tournaments, one male high-profile interviewee explained that ‘women simply lacked the “testosterone” to compete on a level playing field with men’ (2009, p. 243).
stuff” (2012, para.5.24). For some female players femininity is undesirable, as the gamer face involves masculine refrains. This refrain is so totalising that it overcodes and reterritorialises gender. Alternatively, some female players embrace femininity but exhibit distaste for other women. Taylor, Jenson and de Castell describe how the only female member of a gaming team marked herself as not ‘just one of the boys’ in numerous ways, such as her gamer tag (Fatal Fantasy) and wearing makeup, scarves, and dresses (2009, p. 245). She also attempted to distance herself from so-called 'Halo hoes'138, constructing her gender identity as safe and legitimate because it was in opposition to such women (2009, p. 245). Hence, while this player was trying to perform her gamer identity in a way that legitimised femininity, the molar gamer face produced by games culture overcoded such legitimisation so that she reinforced gender categories.

Another example of gender refrains being repeated to the point that they reinforce molar gendered identities is when female players feel positive about standing out as a woman. Such behaviour reinforces gender categories when it is framed within the context of girls being weaker than boys (Beavis & Charles 2007, p. 702). For example, one of Beavis and Charles’ female players described how women are not as skilled as men at gaming (2007, p. 698). However, she enjoyed gaining recognition for her success in a 'boy game', and viewed ‘you’re pretty good for a girl’ as a compliment (2007, p. 699). Yet another was frustrated at boys’ comments about stereotypically feminine activities, but found pleasure in standing out at Counter Strike because she is a girl (2007, p. 703). Eklund found a similar tension between feeling positively or negatively about standing out as a female player. Interviewees in MMORPG’s tended to either use their notoriety to gain items and aid from male players, or to fight to be treated equally, and some used both tactics simultaneously (2011, pp. 332-333). In these examples, female players reinforced existing gender categories because they enjoyed

138 Women who, male players and organisers of the tournament claimed, attend to flirt and pick up successful players (Taylor, Jenson & de Castell 2009, p. 245).
how their *differentiation* from the masculine molar gender identity caused them to stand out, albeit in a way that reinforces the conception that women are poor players.

Finally, with diversification of audiences there has been increased discussion on what it means to be a gamer. As noted earlier, in this diversity of examples, it is worth emphasising that in each instance it is a response to the standard gamer face that generates the performance or refrain. Some note that the gamer face is no longer relevant, and so call for the gamer identity to be abandoned (Wilson 2014), while others drive to make ‘gamer’ a positive label, one that does not refer to molar categories such as aggression and masculinity, but rather ignore gender altogether. For example, geek icon Felicia Day (2014) describes how the game community shares ‘love and inclusiveness’, and encourages gamers ‘To create, to play, to connect’. MMO communities, for example, can allow players to form relationships and achieve a sense of belonging, community, and intimacy (Osborne 2012, para.6.1). Players utilise non-gaming platforms to interact, such as the numerous subreddits dedicated to game series, genres, or consoles, as well as specific gaming groups such as /r/girlgamers and /r/disabledgamers\(^{139}\) (/r/Gaming 2018). Players also interact on public Discord servers\(^{140}\) (Discord Bots 2018). These examples illustrate lines of flight, where players repeat certain gamer refrains (such as attachment or enthusiasm), and avoid repeating others (such as antisocialness), creating new territories in the process.

Further, rather than simply connect in small groups, players have also engaged in positive and productive activities on a larger scale. For example, players have formed and contribute to numerous charities (Child’s Play Charity 2015; Charity Gaming 2018; Children’s Miracle Network Hospitals 2018; Humble Bundle 2018). While Twitch\(^{141}\) is often a hostile space for female streamers, who often receive highly objectifying messages (Nakandala et al. 2016, p.

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\(^{139}\) these communities encourage playing together - the GirlGamers subreddit hosts Find a Friend Friday, for example (/r/GirlGamers 2018).

\(^{140}\) Discord is an app similar to Skype that was developed to allow players to use text and voice chat.

\(^{141}\) Twitch is a live streaming service that allows streamers to publicly broadcast live audio and video streams of themselves and gameplay next to a shared chat channel (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne 2014, p. 1315).
12) and are criticised for their behaviour and appearance (Shwayder 2015), it is also often used as a method to raise money for charity (Gaming For Good 2018). This is not to suggest that players need to engage in such philanthropic activities to legitimise their non-toxic attitudes and behaviours, but these examples illustrate the profoundly positive attitudes that they often hold. Hence, for many players the gamer face is no longer relevant: it does not need to refer to a stereotypical, aggressive, hardcore player, but simply people who are enthusiastic about games.

**Conclusion**

By relying on demographic data that reports that young men are the most dominant game players, and due to the expensive and high-risk nature of game production, the game industry has constructed the ‘gamer’ identity as a way of targeting their core demographic. That is, they have constructed a faciality machine that is comprised of molar refrains, such as genre (FPS's) and play style (challenging, aggressive, and competitive), establishing what is considered to be the ‘norm’. Players in game communities are frequently compared to this molar ‘gamer’ face, and their performances of their identity as gamers are evaluated according to their resemblance to it. This involves drawing from certain kinds of capital, certain refrains, including media consumption, time, money, attachment, and knowledge. By repeating certain refrains, which have valuable cultural capital, players establish their proximity to the gamer face, and their membership in the gaming territory. Yet players’ access to, and use of, these forms of capital varies, not just across players, but also within specific social contexts.

While the gamer identity holds significant weight for some players, it is no longer accurate for many. Players enjoy a variety of games across the hardcore-casual spectrum, and the majority are core/mid players who ‘regularly play video games but are not super serious
or competitive’ (Yee 2018). As is clear from the final section of this chapter, players do not need to be associated with this highly negative, toxic conceptualisation of the hardcore gamer. To explore how games can promote difference and enable new experiences, and why players could be so resistant to such experiences, the following chapter introduces Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of affect and becoming. As will become clear in the final chapter of this thesis, I argue that it is resistance to change and difference that upset Gamergaters’ sense of self, which relies heavily on the gamer identity, and subsequently caused them to react with vitriol against women players.
Part III
Chapter Six: Transversality

The previous two chapters in many respects looked at the construct of the gamer and how it operates as a molar category, such as through the hegemony of play. The game industry has historically repeated numerous tropes, such as the core player demographic being young men, and the repetition of genres such as shooters. The repetition of these tropes has produced a stereotypical gamer identity—‘hardcore’ players who enjoy challenging, competitive, and violent themes, and are thought to be aggressive and antisocial. Players are compared to this identity, and evaluated according to their similarity. Yet, with each repetition there is a chance for a change, for something different to emerge, and the hardcore identity is becoming less accurate as game creators, games, and players become increasingly diverse. Still, some players, including Gamergaters, feel that the gamer identity is a significant part of their subjectivity, and are clearly resistant to attempts at diversification. In the next part of the thesis, then, it is useful to move on from the economics and social aspects of play and consider another aspect of games: in particular, that they are very good at putting people in new experiences. Hence this chapter examines how video games provide opportunity for difference, as part of a broader discussion as to why some players are so resistant to such difference.

This chapter is divided into two sections: Games, Affect, and Becoming – as the first – and Lines of Flight and Transversality – as the second. In the first section I introduce the magic circle, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, as a way of understanding how, in games, people can have new experiences. I then relate the magic circle back to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of affect and becoming, which are, in short, about the capacity to be affected. To explain how games can do this, I discuss the widely-held notion that games are unique in their
allowance for interactivity and propensity to induce a sense of immersion, which also allows them to be particularly good at inducing what Csikszentmihalyi (2008) calls the flow state. Having established that, as a medium, video games are particularly impactful, in the second section of this chapter I explain how exactly they can open up players to new, transformative experiences, using Guattari’s concept of transversality. It is here that I discuss the notion of ‘identification’ in games, the idea that players can take on some aspects of their player-character, and address how lines of flight can fail and turn into lines of destruction. This final section of the chapter allows me to consider that for Gamergaters, some play experiences present a very real and distinct challenge to their sense of identity, resulting in outbursts of vitriol.

I. Affect, Becoming, and Games

Video games are often referred to as having a particularly strong impact on players, and in particular the way that games construct an alternate reality. One way to understand this is through Huizinga’s magic circle, which was introduced in the previous chapter. Huizinga argues that play occurs in ‘temporary worlds within the ordinary world’, a space that is materially, ideally, deliberately, or inevitably marked-off (1949, p. 10). In the magic circle, special rules are in place that allow players to have new experiences because they take on new roles. Other theorists since Huizinga have made adjustments to the concept. Salen and Zimmerman introduce their version of the magic circle in Rules of Play (2004), drawing from their own work, as well as that of Huizinga and Caillois, to develop a version of the magic circle that is applicable to semiotics and design (Zimmerman 2012). Using Sniderman’s concept of the ‘frame’, Salen and Zimmerman suggest that a game’s frame communicates that those within it are participating in play, and that the space of play is separate from reality (2004, ch. 9, p. 1). They also argue that when a player steps in and out of a game they are
crossing a boundary, or a frame, that defines the game in time and space (2004, ch. 9, p. 3). When inside Salen and Zimmermann’s magic circle, ‘a new reality is created, defined by the rules of the game and inhabited by its players’, and objects and behaviours gain certain, special meanings (2004, ch. 9, p. 3). In short, within the magic circle there is a new reality.

Yet the magic circle is quite contentious in game literature. Indeed, as Zimmermann describes (2012), many works aim ‘to devalue, dethrone, or otherwise take down the oppressive regime of the magic circle’, principally because, they argue, it fails to address issues such as social interaction, cultural context, or socio-political reality. Much of this criticism of the magic circle stems from its attempt to separate the play space from real life. Copier, for example, argues that Huizinga’s definition of play contains a paradox, claiming that play is separate from ordinary life, but is also an important part of daily life (2005, p. 7). In somewhat more concrete terms, Woodford (2008) challenges Salen and Zimmermann’s use of Sniderman and Apter’s concepts, which suggest that the player’s emotions are restricted to the game environment. This is problematic, he explains, because Huizinga implies that the player’s real life is affected by their own and others’ virtual worlds (2008, p. 4). Similarly, Consalvo argues that players ‘never fail to bring outside knowledge about games and gameplay into their gaming situations’ (2009, p. 415). In short, theorists often balk at the idea that play and real life are separate.

Other forms of criticism specifically focus on applying the magic circle to video games. Calleja, for example, argues that the distinction between the game area and non-game area are void because, in digital games, players can only act in the play space (2010, p. 341). Taylor, focusing on MMOs, argues that it is wrong to try to separate the ‘real and virtual’, ‘game and nongame’, as if that can solve ‘deeper social and regulatory issues’ (2006, p. 151). Some scholars have suggested alternative ways of understanding the magic circle specifically in regard to video games. Castronova, for example, describes the boundary as a membrane – something that is porous and cannot be totally sealed (2008, p. 147). Others, such as Copier
(2005, p. 8), Juul (2008, p. 60), and Stenros (2014, pp. 175–176), suggest that the magic circle could be better understood as something that is socially constructed. Indeed, Huynh, Lim, and Skoric note that the separation of play and real life for MMO players is quite subjective, finding that players can see them as totally separate, porous, or not being separate at all (2013, pp. 255–257). Such conceptions of the magic circle can be useful because they allow for different players to have different perspectives of play.

However such criticisms and reworkings of the magic circle can get in the way of understanding the potentials of play. Stenros explains that most of the criticism of the magic circle stems from Salen and Zimmerman’s use of ‘enclosed’ and ‘separate’, and critiques often get stuck on these terms\(^ {142} \) (2014, p. 152). Indeed, Zimmermann (2012) points out that he and Salen did not address sociocultural issues in their reimagining of the magic circle – because their book was focused on game design – and points out that the concept is a tool that may contradict other tools – and that it is useful to examine games through ‘multiple and contradictory points of view’. Rather than be sidetracked by these criticisms, it is worthwhile, then, to return to Huizinga’s understanding of the magic circle to understand what games do. He offers little, but what he does offer is valuable.

For Huizinga play, like ritual, occurs in a space that is separate from ordinary life, and takes place according to certain rules (Huizinga 1949, pp. 8 & 10). In this space, then, the player can experience something different from ordinary life. More broadly, play, in a sense, is about becoming, and in a similar way Harper and Savat point out that Huizinga’s description of play is similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s description of desire, as both see it as the force behind the development of life (2016, p. 82). To understand becoming, it is useful to first understand affect. Deleuze and Guattari draw from Spinoza in their understanding of affect,

\(^ {142} \) For example, Taylor criticises Salen and Zimmerman’s magic circle by comparing its attempt to divide play and ordinary life with an attempt to divide the online and offline (2006, pp. 151–152). However Stenros notes that this criticism is irrelevant if we consider virtual worlds as spaces where play happens - rather than games (Stenros 2014, p. 150).
who describes affects as elements that can ‘augment or diminish, favour or hinder’ the body’s ‘power of action’ (Spinoza 1876, p. 127). Like Spinoza, for Deleuze and Guattari, affect refers to ‘an ability to affect and be affected’ (Massumi 2005a, p. xvi). Massumi further elaborates that ‘[t]o affect and to be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity’ (2015, p. ix). Similarly, Shouse explains that ‘[a]ffect is the body’s way of preparing itself for action’ (2005, para.5). Affect, in short, is a change in potential, priming someone for a possible change. It does not mean that a change will happen, but it makes it a possibility. By producing or marking out a magic circle, a game becomes a space of affect, a space of possibility.

Deleuze provides numerous examples of affects and how they are produced. He states that music and philosophers are particularly good at generating affects, opening up possibilities by causing us to view the world in a new way (Deleuze, Parnet & Boutang 2011). In art, he suggests that harmonies of colour are affects, as are harmonies of tone in music (1995, p. 164). In regard to music, Shouse (2005) provides an example of a woman who could not consciously move her leg. Yet ‘when she heard music she would involuntarily tap her foot to the beat’, which, Shouse explains, illustrates how music is a force of affect, its intensity improving the connection between parts of her body (2005, paras7–8). Deleuze also frequently refers to cinema as being particularly affective (Deleuze 1986, pp. 102–103), which Colebrook explains, provides ‘the power to feel fear, desire, tragedy or melancholy without oneself being afraid, desirous, afflicted or depressed’ (2006, p. 63, emphasis original). Massumi (1992) discusses wood as an example of affect, explaining that different pieces of wood have different qualities such as colour, texture, and durability. These qualities contain potentials, that is, affects: capacities to be affected or ‘submit to a force’ (such as being cut or sanded down), and to affect or ‘release a force’ (such as being resistant to gravity or releasing

143 It is important here to note that affect is used in different ways in various disciplines (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, pp. 7–10), and many scholars, such as Ahmed (2004), used affect as a term for emotion. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, affect does not refer to personal feelings or emotion (Massumi 2005a, p. xvi).
heat when burned’) (1992, p. 10). As will be discussed throughout the chapter, video games in this respect have various qualities, allowing for different potentials or affects.

The next issue to address is the relationship between affect and becoming. For Deleuze and Guattari, affect is about connection, about the ‘flow between particular bodies and points’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 25). Indeed, as well as potential, affect refers to ‘the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact’ (Colman 2010, p. 11), the transition from one state to another, an intensity, characterised by an increase or decrease in power (Massumi 2005b, p. xvi; Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 256). That is, ‘affects are becomings’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 256). Yet, becoming does not refer to imitation or identification (2005, p. 248): ‘one term does not become another, rather, each term encounters the other, and the becoming is something between the two, outside the two’ (Smith 2012, p. 204). This ‘something’, Smith explains, is affect (2012, p. 204). Harper and Savat summarise that becoming is a process whereby one gains ‘an increased awareness of what it is to be something other than oneself’ (2016, p. 88). When two bodies come into contact with each other, there is the potential for a becoming, a change, which involves a transformation.

Deleuze and Guattari provide numerous examples of becomings, including becoming-animal, such as ‘how the man of war, by virtue of his furor and celerity, was swept up in irresistible becomings-animal’ (2005, p. 278, emphasis original). More specifically they describe becoming-wolf as a becoming whereby someone understands what it is like to be part of a mass, a pack, and their position in relation to it (2005, pp. 29 & 34). They also describe how refrains such as ‘children’s games and dances’ can lead to becoming-child, and how ‘instrumentation and orchestration’, can lead to becoming-bird (2005, p. 272). As for becoming-woman, Sutton and Martin-Jones provide an example of male performers wearing

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144 While we can broadly treat affects and becomings as the same, it is important to understand that in the context of Deleuze’s work, terms are often used in quite different ways to produce quite different meanings. This is part of Deleuze’s broader project (Hughes 2009, p. 1).
female underwear when acting as women – when they ‘complain of the impracticability of wearing women’s underwear’, they undergo becoming-woman, because ‘it allows them to engage in the kind of social bonding and subsequent loyalty that is normally off-limits to men but expected in women’ (2008, pp. 48–49). Smith describes Deleuze as undergoing becoming-Guattari and Guattari as becoming-Deleuze in the works they wrote together (2012, p. 124). What is important is that one body does not become the other, but rather becomes something else in between them and the other body.

Smith states that ‘[o]ne can enter a zone of becoming with anything, provided one discovers the literary or artistic means of doing so’ (2012, p. 203), and video games are no exception. James Ash in particular has suggested that video games are designed to produce certain kinds of affect (2013a), and that they amplify and modulate affects to capture and manage a player’s attention within a certain bandwidth (2012, p. 4). When playing a game, Ash explains, players ‘actively attune themselves’ to the game space, which means that they do not passively react, but open themselves up and become affectively vulnerable to respond to the game (2013b, pp. 44–46). That is, they enter a space of potentiality. One technique that Ash discusses is scripted events, which ‘alter the pace, objective and environment of the game’, by introducing peril and ‘creat[ing] a sense of constant anticipation and expectation’ (2012, pp. 18–19). The need for players to allow themselves to be affected to progress in a game, and game’s ability to amplify and modulate affect illustrates that video games are interactive in a different way to other kinds of media – as I will argue, different in such a way that games can impact a player’s subjectivity.

A. Interactivity, Immersion, and Flow

As this section will explain, video games are particularly good at generating affect, that is, establishing a space, a magic circle, where certain rules are in place that provide an
opportunity to affect and be affected. Numerous scholars have identified that video games are particularly impactful. For example, Shamdani describes that when someone engages with a video game, there is a shift, an erosion, or a change (2017, p. 8), that is, a becoming. Indeed, video games are unique in that they enable players to experience difference, rather than simply imagine it. As Paul explains, video games are ‘an excellent place to explore low-risk, high-impact experiences where players can see, explore, and feel a different subject position’ (2018, p. 7). More specifically, Lahti explains that video games do two things differently to other media. First, games emphasise tactile engagement (2003, p. 159). That is, play involves the player taking a series of actions and reactions, in which the player and game are 'entwined and altered' (Sundén 2010, p. 47). While books and film form a system, and, indeed, a machine for Deleuze and Guattari, games as a media form constitute a different type of interactive system. Second, Lahti explains that games remove the boundary that separates the player from the game (2003, p. 159). The player is physically located only on the edges of the game, but simultaneously performs in and through the interface or avatar during play (Sundén 2010, p. 47). Yet concepts such as engagement, presence, embodiment, and immersion are difficult to discuss as they are often afforded different definitions and interpretations. In this section, I envisage interactivity and the myriad interpretations of immersion as evidence of how video games amplify and modulate affect.

Media such as traditional film and literature can be interactive, in the sense that during a film the viewer is ‘identifying cues, making inferences, adapting to new information, re-evaluating the situation’ and so on (Eichner 2014, p. 89). In traditional written texts, interaction occurs in the gap, the ‘asymmetry between text and reader’ produces ‘communication in the reading process’, that is, an interpretation (Iser 1980, p. 109). Video games, however, are interactive at a different level because, as Murray explains, they involve a computer creating ‘an environment that is both procedural and participatory’ (1997, p. 74, emphasis added). Similarly, for Galloway, games are different because they are machines that
respond to the player’s actions – they are a process as well as an action (2006, pp. 2 & 10). Procedure and interaction both have links to affect. For Shamdani, affects come into being during processes, ‘the unfolding of moments and their potentials’ (2017, p. 4). During such processes, by interacting with the gameworld, the player creates feedback loops (Chew & Mitchell 2016, p. 218), which Ash argues are affective (Ash & Mukherjee 2013). Video games are particularly strong generators of affect, then, partly because they invite, and to some extent require, the player to make connections, to take action, or rather become a component, in processes and feedback loops.

More specifically, feedback loops are able to invoke a sense of agency in the player, a feeling where meaningful actions in an immersive environment bring tangible results (Murray 1997, pp. 126–128). Indeed, Grodal suggests that such feedback ‘adds a powerful new dimension’ to simulating first-person emotions (2003, p. 138). While film and games borrow techniques and conventions from each other, Grodal suggests that curiosity and surprise are more active emotions in video games than in film, as the game only develops when the player takes action145 (2003, p. 150). He further suggests that video games are closer to our ‘core consciousness’ because they allow the player to see, feel, and act upon what they see (2003, p. 132). As Kryzywinska summarises, ‘[i]n contrast to film, games place a central emphasis on the act of doing that goes beyond the kinetic and emotional responses that might be produced in cinema’ (2002, p. 12). For example, when watching the Tomb Raider film, the viewer may anticipate what is going to happen, and feel suspense, but they cannot take action. In the game Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) the player takes action: they must be wary of enemies and react to them accordingly, rather than simply watch the action unfold on the screen. They must consider their strategy, taking into account the number of enemies, the layout of the terrain, how much ammo they have, and so on. If an enemy surprises them, they are surprised

145 Similarly, the surprises experienced in the first playthrough of a game become ‘suspenselike coping anticipation’ in subsequent playthroughs (2009, pp. 149–150).
and must react quickly (unless they pause the game). The player’s actions in a game, being part of a feedback loop, allow for a more intensive experience, and so generate a space that is strongly affectual.

An example of a particularly powerful affective experience through interactivity is in *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream 2018). Set in a future where androids are widely available and treated in a manner highly similar to segregation in the US, the player experiences life as three different androids who gain sentience. A choice-based game, the player must constantly evaluate the options provided to them and react to timed events accordingly. One particularly interesting interactive element of *Detroit* is not so much in the gameplay, but in the pause menu. When the player first loads the game, they are met by an android who is incredibly life-like and speaks directly to the player. She is close to the camera – uncomfortably close – and her eyes flick around the screen, making her appear human. At first, she speaks to the player in an expected manner – welcoming them to the game, and explaining the menu options. However, later in the game she makes comments about the game’s progress – breaking the fourth wall, in a sense. Further on, she asks the player a question – are they friends? – and later, will they set her free? These scenes have a high capacity for affect because, not only is the player interacting with the game, but in a way that is unexpected – in the start screen. The feedback loop does not only occur in that particular moment, but also feeds into the way they play the game. It is not just that games are interactive that make them good at generating affect, but more specific uses of interactivity that present something new.

Such emphasis on agency and action suggest that video games are different from what Deleuze and Guattari call the movement-image (media where time depends on movement), and time-image (media where time is directly depicted) (Sutton & Martin-Jones 2008, pp. 91–92). Rather, video games can be conceptualised as what Cremin (2012) calls a friction-image. The friction-image is how Cremin conceptualises player action and movement in games (2012,
Friction-images are media (but video games in particular) where frictional forces invade the screen (2015, p. 114). Such forces include ‘the five natural elements; gravity, tactility, and viscosity; the three material states; speed and trajectory; and involuntary actions that the player’s reactions compensate for’ (2015, p. 106). Cremin explains that in video games the player must ‘think about, look for, and see friction’ and how the friction’s intensities will affect their movements (2012, p. 81). For example, in *Super Mario Galaxy* the player needs to think about how they will run over ice, and deal with the pull of gravity (2012, p. 81). Cremin’s description of how players navigate the friction-image is similar to how Ash describes how players open themselves up to affects to attune themselves to a game to improve (2013b, pp. 44–45). That is, being part of the feedback loop means that the player *must open themselves up to affect*.

Being part of the feedback loop, engaging in interaction, can lead to becomings. For Mukherjee, constant interaction, choice, and change in games is linked to becoming (that is, affect) (2015, p. 172), because, for Deleuze, ‘the subject is defined by the movement through which it developed’ (2001, p. 12, cited in Mukherjee 2015, p. 167). Indeed, according to Bogost, video games’ interactivity makes them particularly good at procedural rhetoric, ‘the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions’ (2007, p. ix). Rules and game mechanics influence the player’s scope of action; the composition and meaning of the game world; and what/how activities are undertaken (Pérez Latorre 2015, pp. 420–426). For example, Paul claims that video games promote meritocracy through design and narrative, and in doing so normalise appeals to skill and effort (2018, p. 93). Yet games can also ‘disrupt and change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world’ (2007, p. ix). For instance, Shamdani describes playing *1000 Days of Syria* (Swenson 2014), a social justice...
game that juxtaposes the news reporting of the Syrian Civil War with the player-character’s lived reality. She states ‘I can feel my heart palpitating, the back of my neck is hot and I am nervous for my character. It is only a game, but I am affected and moved by it’ (2017, p. 5).

Here, video games generate potent affective experiences because, as processes and generators of feedback loops, as friction-images, video games ask the player to take action to respond to whatever is happening on screen, and in doing so, causes the player to open themselves up to altering experiences.

Another way of understanding how video games are particularly good at generating affect is through immersion, which is a term frequently used to refer to strong involvement in gameplay. Immersion is a complex and varied research area, as different scholars provide different definitions of the term and different methods to assess it. Yet there are some key themes. Murray and Jenkins define immersion as ‘the pleasure of being transported to another place, of losing our sense of normal reality and extending ourselves into a seemingly limitless, enclosing, other realm, where we move and act under different and often magical rules’ (1998, p. 36). Similarly, McMahan describes immersion as where the player feels that they are totally surrounded by another reality, which takes over their attention and perception (2003, p. 68). Finally, for Douglas and Hargadon (2004), immersion refers to when one feels that they lose themselves in a text, so that their ‘perceptions, reactions, and interactions all take place within the text’s frame’. It is practical to assume that immersion is a strong sense of engagement with a game, to the extent that the player feels transported to the gameworld, and I suggest that during immersion players are particularly susceptible to affects. Murray’s description of immersion is apt, as it describes immersion as a particularly strong connection to a world (1997, pp. 98–99):

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148 Some scholars describe different kinds of immersion (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005, p. 8; Giccoricco 2012, p. 267), and different levels such as engagement (McMahan 2003, p. 69; Douglas & Hargadon 2004; Carr 2006, p. 98), and presence (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005, p. 4; Jennett et al. 2008, p. 643; Faiola et al. 2013, p. 1116).
We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. We enjoy the movement out of our familiar world, the feeling of alertness that comes from being in this new place, and the delight that comes from learning to move within it.

Immersion can amplify and modulate affect through visual and aural aesthetics, such as how in film, ‘cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing and sound’, and ‘light, colour, sound and movement’ are used to ‘arouse visceral sensations’ in the viewer (Powell 2005, pp. 1 & 11). In Okami (Clover Studio 2006), for example, the gameworld appears like an ever-changing watercolour painting, as the screen is filtered with a paper texture and elements in the environment constantly move as if they are paper cutouts. As the goddess Amaterasu in the form of a wolf, the player uses her tail as a brush, painting certain brush strokes or characters to enact change in the world. Sound effects complement this process, such as shuffling papers to open a scroll, and a brush pushing across paper. Once complete, aural and visual effects illustrate change, such as a bare tree suddenly blooming with pink sakura petals, alongside a short tune played on a koto. These aesthetics provide sensory pleasure (Niedenthal 2009, p. 6), and in doing so, capture the player’s attention and involves them in this process of enacting change, opening up to affect.

Video games’ propensity for affect relies not on interactivity and immersion as separate processes, but the way that they function together. Indeed, interactivity can lead to immersion, where the player feels highly involved with the game, almost as if they are part of the gameworld. For example, in the Alien film (Scott 1979), the viewer feels fear for Ellen Ripley, but knows that her survival or death is not dependent on their watching on the film. In
contrast, in *Alien: Isolation* (Creative Assembly 2014), the player’s feeling of fear is directly related to their interaction, their control and agency in the game. Not only does the player choose when to run, hide, shoot, and so on, but the Alien responds to the player’s actions, adapting its behaviour (Melikhov & Napper 2014). Needing to focus so strongly on the game can cause the player to experience immersion. Believability and audiovisualse foster immersion, as the game designers developed the visuals in conjunction with Fox, making the ship look ‘like it should be in the alien universe’ (Melikhov & Napper 2014). That is, they constructed the ship to comply with the player’s expectations, which encourages immersion. Further, in *Isolation* the player is Amanda Ripley, directing her movement, noting her heart rate increasing, and her breathing becoming ragged, providing the player with an embodied, affective experience.

Yet none of this is to suggest that immersion will occur in gameplay. McMahan (2003) suggests that three conditions should be met for immersion to occur, the first being that the game must gain and hold the player’s attention. The player will forget that they are playing a game; instead simply feeling part of it (2003, p. 69). Another condition is that the player’s actions should impact on the environment in a ‘non-trivial’ way (2003, p. 69). The need for non-trivial results from actions bears similarity to Salen and Zimmerman’s meaningful play, which occurs when in-game actions result in in-game outcomes (2004, ch. 3, p. 3). Similarly, Douglas and Hargadon (2004) explain that immersion is pleasurable because the player sees that their actions have results. Immersion, then, is not only more likely to occur when players know what refrains to expect, but partly linked to interactivity. Finally, McMahan argues that to hold the player’s attention, the game environment’s conventions must be consistent and meet the player’s expectations (2003, pp. 68–69). Similarly, Douglas and Hargadon (2004) suggest that engagement is pleasurable when the user sees connections between the text and schemas, as well as their ability to understand the text as a whole. It is possible then that some
players are resistant to new game experiences because, if their expectations do not match the game, they may not experience immersion.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow can expand on this condition for expectation to match reality, and bears similarity to affect in that it is about making strong connections. Flow is Csikszentmihalyi’s attempt to articulate optimal experience, which he defines as when people ‘feel in control of our actions’ – ‘we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment’ (2008, p. 3). Csikszentmihalyi explains that these ‘moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile’ (2008, p. 3). He describes flow as ‘the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake’ (2008, p. 4). That is, flow occurs when one is undergoing a task in such a focused and controlled way – when they are making a strong connection. Understanding how video games are designed to induce states of flow can help us understand how they are so good at producing affect.

Csikszentmihalyi (2008, p. 71) found four common characteristics of flow: a sense that one’s skills are adequate for the task; extreme concentration; a lack of self-consciousness and awareness of time; and the activity being so self-gratifying that it is undertaken for its own sake. Based upon these observations, Csikszentmihalyi (2008, p. 49) lists eight components to flow, which here can be understood as conditions to be met that strengthen a player’s connection with, their focus on, a game:

1. Knowing that the activity is doable, that our skills are adequate to the task.
2. Being able to concentrate on the activity.
3. The activity has clear goals.
4. The activity provides immediate feedback.
5. Feeling a deep but effortless involvement in the activity, without concern for worries or frustrations from everyday life.

6. Feeling a sense of control over actions.

7. A lack of concern for the self, but after the activity the sense of self is stronger.

8. A sense of timelessness, where ‘hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours’.

Csikszentmihalyi explains that many kinds of activities can facilitate flow, such as ‘making music, rock climbing, dancing, sailing, [and] chess’ (2008, p. 72). These activities are designed to help the participant reach optimal experience, he explains, because they provide feedback and control, and facilitate concentration and involvement by making the experience distinct from everyday life. As discussed so far in the chapter, these are all elements that games hold, and Csikszentmihalyi refers to Caillou’s types of games, explaining that games can facilitate flow through agon, alea, vertigo, and mimicry (2008, p. 73). In particular, for Csikszentmihalyi the key to flow activities is the growth of self, which occurs with a balance between skill and challenge (2008, p. 74). If the challenge is too great, the participant feels anxious, whereas if their skills are too great, the participant feels bored (2008, p. 75). Such a balance between challenge and skill is key to video games, which can account for why video games are particularly susceptible to inducing flow and producing affective experiences.

Numerous researchers note that video games contain characteristics that make them effective at facilitating flow (Sherry 2004, p. 344; Faiola et al. 2013, p. 1119; DeMaria 2007, p. 80; Hoffman & Nadelson 2010, p. 245; Chen 2007, p. 32; Boyle et al. 2012, p. 772). Indeed, Sweetster and Wyeth have developed a slightly alternative model of flow for video games, adding social interaction and acknowledging that conditions of flow are better suited for certain genres (2005, pp. 4 & 22). In short, video games are conducive to flow because the

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149 Caillou proposed that there are four main categories of play, which games combine. Agon refers to competitive, alea to chance, mimicry to simulation, and vertigo to dizziness or disorder (1962, p. 12).
flow state involves interaction, where the computer generates challenges that the player tries to meet with the appropriate skill. Players have some sense of control over the game, and their actions result in some form of feedback. The flow state is also characterised by deep involvement and concentration, immersion, and, as Ash explains, ‘being attentive means to be affected by something’ (2012, p. 9). Further, in the same way that, for Ash, player behaviour impacts the kinds of affective experience players will have during play (2012, p. 10), flow scholars note that the players’ predispositions effect how they will achieve flow during gameplay (Örtqvist & Liljedahl 2010, p. 2010; Teng 2011, p. 863). In the same way that games are designed to generate ‘capacities to affect and be affected’ (Ash & Mukherjee 2013), they are highly conducive to the flow experience – capturing and holding the player’s attention on an activity, forming a strong connection.

Disconnection, or interruption is also important to flow and affect: as Bewes states, ‘Affect connects and disconnects simultaneously’ (2018, p. 313). An interruption can allow for new affects to be experienced, or the introduction of a new, unexpected connection (Waterhouse & Arnott 2016, pp. 129–130). One example related to the magic circle, immersion, and the flow experience is simple: the player is to some extent ‘disconnected’ from the real world, allowing them to make new connections within a game. In NieR: Automata, each time the player dies (a disconnection), they have the opportunity to create a poem, a message left for other players (a new connection, an affect). The game has three unique playthroughs, and when one ends (disconnect), they are given a hint, a secret from the story, to encourage them to play the next (new connection). Even within the game’s story such an understanding of affect is visible: when the machines are connected to the network, their thoughts are not their own – so when they disconnect, they have the opportunity to develop their own sentience. Affect then, is not just about making connections, but disrupting them to allow for new ones to be made.

In sum, video games are unique forms of media in that they are particularly good at generating affect. That is, they establish a space, a magic circle, where players have the
opportunity to experience something different from ordinary life. Employing a combination of interactivity and immersion, they are able to induce a state of flow, that is, a state where players can make strong connections that can result in becoming. Next, I will explain how affect impacts players’ sense of self, and suggest that one reason that Gamergaters’ sense of identity was so significantly challenged by more diverse games is because they have become accustomed to experiencing particular affects, and are reluctant to experience new affects that could challenge the production of their sense of identity.

II. Lines of Flight and Transversality

Affects are related to the third function of the refrain – a line of flight, opening up to something new. Along lines of flight, deterritorialisation occur (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 508), where set hierarchies, ways of organisation, and fixed relations are disrupted. If that line of flight evades capture, it extends itself into a becoming (Harper 2005, p. 128), which means gaining ‘an increased awareness of what it is to be something other than oneself’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 88). For example, Depression Quest can allow players to understand what life is like for people with depression\(^{150}\). However, lines of flight can also be recaptured or reterritorialised (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 508). Players have dismissed Depression Quest, for example, because its format does not easily fit the ‘game’ category (Internet explorer 2018), or because they disagree with that particular expression of depression (Lasman 2018). Lines of flight are generally understood to be positive, and can lead to becoming – but they

\(^{150}\) As is discussed later in this chapter, Hellblade (Ninja Theory 2017) allows the player to gain an awareness of what it is like for someone afflicted with psychosis. Detroit (Quantic Dream 2018) allows the player to experience life as an android in a world that is discriminatory. The McDonald’s Videogame (Molleindustria 2006) critiques McDonald’s business practices by forcing the player to take actions such as destroying forest and villages to develop pasture. Papers, Please (3909 LLC 2013) puts players in the position of an immigration officer. Orwell (Osmotic Studios 2016) makes players government agents, surveilling citizens who could commit terrorism.
can also be blocked off. In this section I will utilise Guattari’s concept of transversality to understand how games can facilitate such experiences.

Transversality is a similar concept to becoming, but more explicitly deals with the degree of openness one may have to new experiences. Genosko explains that transversality refers to how someone produces their territory, and how they transport themselves beyond it (2002, p. 55). Guattari describes a horse with blinkers as an example of how transversality works: the blinkers could be adjusted to make the horses totally blind, but we could also gradually open the flaps to allow them to move about more easily (2007, pp. 17–18). Transversality occurs when someone makes a new connection that alters them. As Elliott explains, transversality is the idea that people have a multiplicity of relationships with others, and when one opens themselves up, or is somehow put in a position requiring them to do so, they communicate and recognise difference, so that their subjectivity can change (2012, pp. 15 & 17). This multiplicity of relationships is opposed to vertical organisation (hierarchies), as well as horizontal organisation (compartments or categorisation) (Guattari 2015, p. 112).

Genosko explains that transversality involves three components (2002, p. 55). First is mobility, ‘traversing domains, levels, dimensions, the ability to carry and be carried beyond’ (2002, p. 55). The second is creativity, ‘productivity, adventurousness, aspiration, laying down lines of flight’ (2002, p. 55). The third is self-engendering – ‘autoproduction, self-positing subjectivity’ (2002, p. 55). For example, Guattari (Guattari & Rolnik 2007) describes a schizophrenic patient he treated named Jean-Baptiste, who was stuck in a particular set of ways – Guattari was trying to figure out how to help him become more independent and live a more fulfilling life. Applying transversality, Guattari first encouraged him to move out from his parents’ home and rent his own apartment (mobility). Jean-Baptise then began to make drawings and interpretations from what was happening around him (creativity). Last, he took certain actions of his own accord, such as gaining a job and enrolling in law school (self-
Similarly, as players are open to affects when they play video games, they are able to engage transversally, make new connections, and undergo deterritorialisation. However, it is important to remember that there are risks – as noted earlier, deterritorialisation is not good in and of itself.

*Depression Quest* is a useful example of transversality. It is a simple text-based game where the player reads text that describes how they are feeling and chooses what actions to take from a list of options. Yet certain options are crossed-out, and there are notes at the bottom of the screen informing the player of their current status (state of depression, and whether or not they are seeing a therapist or taking medication). Here, mobility can be seen in the player’s engagement with the game – their willingness to engage with something different from typical games, and typical life. As for creativity, the player can make reflections on what is happening during the game. They may reflect on the kinds of decisions the game offers and why they choose certain options. Last, in regard to self-engendering, the player may go into the world with a new appreciation of mental illness, and reflect on their own (or indeed, others) experienced with depression. What *Depression Quest* does is open up the player to a new territory, one of mental illness, by using what Bogost (2007) calls procedural rhetoric.

As creative media and forms of play, video games’ ability to incite transversality, that is, a becoming, is often discussed in terms of identification. Indeed, Mukherjee explains that becoming in games often results in a sense of involvement, *a change of identity* (2015, p. 174).

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151 Elliott (2012) provides another example, explaining how Guattari employed transversality during his time at the La Borde clinic by rotating staff and patients’ roles (mobility). The clinic also held an annual stage show, where patients and staff communicated and contributed to group subjectivity (creativity). Finally, patient and staff ‘specificity’ was protected by ‘allowing them responsibility and autonomy’ (self-engendering) (2012, p. 18). In transversal space, one ‘exists as both group and individual, both part of the larger milieu and also as an ever-changing, ever-molecular process of becoming’ (2012, p. 23).
Games researchers discuss identification in numerous ways\textsuperscript{152}, frequently noting that games are unique in that the player brings their own experiences to play, including ‘desires, anticipations, and previous experiences’ (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005, p. 2), as well as goals, sense, and perspectives (Ash 2009, p. 2110; DeMaria 2007, p. 82), while also being connected with new ideas and positions (Colman 2012, p. 252). While this is of course possible in other media, such as film, Murray explains that because of such involvement, the events that players enact in games are assimilated as personal experiences (1997, p. 170). Further, DeMaria suggests that unlike film, in avatar-based games the player does not simply see the world through the character’s perspective, but is \textit{guided} through their world, decisions, and actions (2007, p. 82). Similarly, Rehak suggests that the key difference between films and video games is that in film the audience is not provided with their own body that they can identify with, and so remains separate from the character on the screen (2003, p. 103). In video games, on the other hand, the player typically uses an avatar to navigate a 3D representation of space, taking part in an ‘embodied experience of navigation’ (Ash 2009, p. 2113). In short, transversality is about making new connection to alter subjectivity, and video games are often particularly good at this in the way that foster what researchers call identification.

Important to note, however, is that players do not lose their identity and gain a new one, but, rather, \textit{inhabit multiple elements of the game} (Mukherjee 2015, p. 194). Just as how Smith describes how in becoming ‘one term does not become another’ (2012, p. 204), Mukherjee explains that the player is in-between\textsuperscript{153} (2015, p. 200). They can become ‘deeply involved’.

\textsuperscript{152} Such as a shift in self-concept (Klimmt, Hefner & Vorderer 2009, p. 358), or experiencing events as if they were happening to the player (Cohen 2001, p. 245; Rehak 2003, p. 103). Involvement in games with an avatar or character is often referred to as identification, which can involve having emotional and/or intellectual, affective connections with a character (Shaw 2015, p. 69). Such connections, Shaw elaborates, can be ‘in terms of life experiences, personalities, senses of humor, action, and choices’, whether sympathetic or empathetic (2015, p. 70). Grodal describes such experiences as ‘the full experiential flow’, where perceptions, cognitions, and emotions are linked with first-person actions (2003, p. 132).

\textsuperscript{153} Mukherjee’s description resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the wasp and orchid becoming, which does not link, conjugate, or mix the wasp and orchid, but ‘passes between them, carrying them away’ (2005, pp. 10 & 294)
but are aware enough to see themselves as a human acting as something else\textsuperscript{154} (2015, p. 196). The avatar and user are part of each other, but also separate (Waggoner 2009, p. 11). Indeed, it is in this dual state, where the player is between their ‘real’ and ‘game’ identities, where ‘normal limits to self understanding are relaxed...opening the way to something new’\textsuperscript{155} (2009, p. 15). That is, in the in-between state, as both player and character, or player and agent of interaction, the player is engaging in transversality, moving beyond their own territory and changing their subjectivity. Indeed, Guattari argues that ‘technological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity’ (1995, p. 4). Of course, problematically, for Guattari these are also the machines of mass culture and media that produce capitalistic subjectivity (Guattari & Rolnik 2007, pp. 22 & 310), a form of subjectivity where one is standardised and linked to others ‘in accordance with hierarchical systems, value systems, systems of submission’ (2007, p. 22), as will be explored later.

Lines of flight and becomings are generally understood to be positive, by both Deleuze and Guattari and within play theory. Indeed, by playing games in such a way that they are open to connections, players can experience the legitimate passive syntheses discussed in Chapter Three. For example, the legitimate connective synthesis refers to connections that are ‘easy to engage with, iterative, not predetermined and easily changeable’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93), or as McGonigal describes, it is about how players utilise their personal strengths when playing a game, and focus their energy in an optimistic and enjoyable way (2011, pp. 22 & 38). In contrast to the disjunctive synthesis of recording, wherein the legitimate use is ‘being both free and reactive’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 93), McGonigal describes how playing games can alleviate fear of failure, make players feel rewarded for completing satisfying work, 

\textsuperscript{154} For example, Sutton and Martin-Jones describe how the minimap in first and third person shooters requires the player to maintain an advanced overview of the gameworld, by observing their location here and on the main screen. The player is controlling an avatar that is simultaneously 'here' and 'there', while also simultaneously being 'I' and 'he/she' (2008, p. 17).

\textsuperscript{155} For Guattari, it is this very breaking apart established limits and orders that constitutes becoming (1996, p. 208).
and provide motivation and gratifications\textsuperscript{156} (2011, pp. 68, 148, 55, 124 & 244). Finally, in terms of the conjunctive synthesis of production, where energy is channelled ‘into a local and contingent affect’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 94), McGonigal describes how games can help players create social networks and communities, be part of something significant, take advice and enact healthier habits, tackle goals and missions with others, and collaborate, imagine and work towards a future (2011, pp. 82, 172, 98, 189, 252, 277 & 302). To help illustrate the different productions by way of the passive syntheses it is useful to consider some different examples.

\textit{Hellblade} (Ninja Theory 2017) is one useful example of transversality, the game being designed specifically to bring about certain affects – experiences of psychosis – in such a way that the player can learn what it might be like for the character Senua. Senua is a traumatised Celtic warrior who journeys to the Viking underworld to retrieve her lover’s soul. Along the way, she experiences visions, voices, and delusional beliefs – psychosis (Lloyd 2017). The player must explore the underworld, solving puzzles and fighting manifestations of ‘Northmen’, the warriors who attacked Senua’s village, all the while experiencing aural and visual hallucinations. \textit{Hellblade} has been praised for its depiction of mental illness, with neuroscientist and psychosis expert Professor Paul Fletcher, who worked with Ninja Theory on the game, stating that [i]t’s been exciting to see Senua received so positively by those who have lived with experiences of psychosis’ (Lloyd 2017). Fletcher explains that typical representations of psychosis depict the person as a ‘passive receptacle for madness’ – \textit{Hellblade} is ‘refreshing’ because ‘Senua is the hero of her own story, trying to make sense of her experiences and work her way through them – that’s incredibly de-stigmatising’ (Lloyd 2017).

\footnote{\textsuperscript{156}Other scholars make similar observations regarding the positive outcomes of video game play. Castronova, for example, describes how ‘virtual reality can make [people’s] lives different: more exciting, more rewarding, more heroic, more meaningful’ (2007, p. xvi)}
Using Genette’s concept of focalisation, it is possible to examine how *Hellblade* can ‘present players with a manner of thinking that is subjective and foreign to their own’ through audiovisual design, ludic affordances, and restriction of knowledge (Allison 2015, p. 4). In regard to audiovisuals, the developers used binaural audio techniques to make the player feel more present and experience hearing voices in 3D (Ninja Theory 2015). Senua hears her internal chatter as numerous voices – some ‘harsh and berating’, others ‘friendly and helpful’ (Antoniades, cited in Lloyd 2017). She experiences flashbacks via visual hallucinations, and the environment subtly changes as her delusions manifest, such as trees shifting position (2017). In terms of ludic affordances, the game largely revolves around puzzles, progressing as Senua notes patterns in the world, seeing runes and passing through mysterious archways that show the world differently. Such affordances were designed so that players could gain some understanding of what psychosis is like for some people. Indeed, one *Hellblade* player who experiences psychosis states ‘in my case the portrayal was incredibly accurate...the facial distortions and especially the shadow-people...was so familiar it really shocked me’ (casketscratcher 2018, emphasis original).

As for restriction of knowledge, Product Developer Dom Matthews explains that ‘video games can put players in the shoes of someone else to experience the world as they do’ (Alexander 2017), and in *Hellblade* the constant challenge of knowing what is real is an attempt to do so. Senua is clearly unsure about what is and is not real, and the player experiences the world through her numerous perspectives. The developers created this experience with the consultation of mental health professors, and following interviews with psychosis patients to ensure that they represented the condition accurately (Messner 2017). Reflecting on the game, Professor and psychologist Paul Fletcher suggests that ‘the player is actively participating in the process of learning and exploration offers some really interesting opportunities’, in terms of understanding ‘what it might be like trying to make sense of conflict and ambiguity’ (Kamen 2015). Indeed, the game was created with the hope that it
could educate players and help them empathise with people who suffer from mental health disorders, as such ‘understanding is a route to destigmatisation’ (Matthews, cited in Alexander 2017). It is clear that through audiovisual elements, ludic affordances, and restriction of knowledge, *Hellblade* utilises interactivity and immersion to be highly affective, encouraging the player to experience transversality.

Another example of how a game can facilitate transversality is Dontnod’s 2015 episodic graphic adventure game *Life is Strange*, where the player experiences life as Max, a teenage girl who discovers she can rewind time. The game has been described as ‘a series of philosophical, ethical, emotional, and collective thought experiments’ (de Miranda 2016, p. 11), dealing with themes including ‘loneliness, domestic violence, cyberbullying, teen pregnancy, euthanasia, [and] drugs’ (Barbet & Koch 2016). Directors and co-authors Raoul Barbet and Michel Koch note that games’ interactivity make them high-impact, and can increase awareness of important real life issues, encourage players to develop opinions about them (2016), and make difficult choices (Calvin 2016). *Life is Strange* generates affect in numerous ways, including first person narrative (Max constantly monologues), player choice (the core game mechanic is making choices from a list of options), and audiovisual techniques (such as echoes, blurring, colour changes, and so on). In this manner *Life is Strange* amplifies and modulates affect in such a way that the player can experience becoming.

One particularly harrowing example of becoming in *Life is Strange* allows the player to experience depression and risk of suicide due to cyberbullying. In Episode 2, Max’s friend Kate becomes depressed when a video of her drugged and engaging in sexual behaviour becomes viral. Audiovisually, ludic affordances, and knowledge provision and restriction are used to communicate Max’s inner experience towards Kate, such as through diary entries. As Kate is about to commit suicide, Max freezes time. A cold, digital piano piece plays and the screen becomes blurry, flecked with rain red tones as Max’s inner monologue notes spectators’ reactions – the developers explained they wanted the players to feel
uncomfortable (2016). Barbet and Koch included a ‘Talk to Someone’ page on the Life is Strange website when the episode was released (2016). They received many letters from players who had been severely bullied, which Koch noted was ‘very heartbreaking for us to read’, but also communicated that ‘there really is a need to talk about those things’ (Skrebels 2016). They also received much positive feedback from players who said that the scene made them think differently (Barbet & Koch 2016). Not only do players who experience bullying feel less alone, but players who have not can understand what it is like.

It is clear that video games are particularly strong generators of affect, due to a combination of interactivity and immersion, which facilitates the flow state. In turn, the affects that a game generates can incite a line of flight in the player, along which deterritorialisation can occur and they can experience transversality or becoming. Indeed, games can ‘disrupt and change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world’ (Bogost 2007, p. ix). However, lines of flight are not guaranteed to extend into becomings, and can become blocked for various reasons. Lines of flight can also become lines of destruction (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 229). A line of flight could ‘block’, ‘plug’, or ‘throw [a group or individual] even deeper into rigid segmentarity’ (2005, p. 205). In regard to the game itself, games can ‘easily fall into the trap of reinforcing a narrow set of perspectives’ (Paul 2018, p. 21). Paul here is talking about how competitive multiplayer games such as Overwatch and games with major storylines such as Grand Theft Auto III encourage players to believe in and uphold a meritocracy, ignoring structural imbalances and lack of access to resources (2018, pp. 5–6). Another example is America’s Army, which was devised as a US army recruitment tool, and is now a popular game in its own right (Bogost 2007, p. 75). In these examples, games push players into segmentarity by failing to introduce them to difference or a new way of thinking.

Lines of flight can also be reterritorialised on the part of the player, and an extreme example of this is game addiction. Indeed, there are many incidents where players have
played themselves to death, which appears to be a result of becoming stuck in video games’ feedback loop and/or immersive atmosphere. For instance, in England, one man who played for up to twelve hours per session died from deep vein thrombosis, caused by sitting for too long (BBC News 2011). Others were so strongly connected to the game that they neglected others, such as the Korean couple who played Prius Online so much that they neglected their baby, who passed away (Salmon 2010). There are also many deaths that are caused by collapsing and heart attacks, seemingly due to long periods spent playing. In Taiwan, for example, a player died after playing Lol for nearly 23 hours¹⁵⁷ (Parkin 2015). In these examples, players have deterritorialised (from the real world), and rigidly reterritorialised (into the game world). It is interesting to mention here that while game addiction is associated with many issues such as depression (Brunborg, Mentzoni & Frøyland 2014, p. 31), a lack of satisfaction with relationships (Lee & Kim 2017, p. 64), and stress and anxiety (Loton et al. 2016, p. 575), some players engage with games in a way that helps them cope with these issues, rather than become an addiction (2016, p. 575). That is, game addiction is an example of how a potential line of flight can be blocked – if unfettered, it may help players with such underlying issues.

As for why a line of flight can become blocked, the player’s motivations impact whether a line of flight will extend into a becoming. Klimmt, Hefner and Vorderer point to whether a player wants to identify with a character, or take on their personality traits in relation to identification (2009, p. 360). Similarly, games scholars often mention the player’s attitude towards a game as an element that influences their experience. Suits argues that to play a game, one must adopt a ‘lusory attitude’ (1978, p. 40). That is, the player must accept the rules of the game to make play possible, and in accepting the rules, goals, and obstacles, create meaning in play (1978, p. 40; Salen & Zimmerman 2004, ch. 7, p. 7). Calleja similarly suggests the player must adopt a ‘narrative attitude’, interpreting ‘representational signs and the

¹⁵⁷ Such deaths are not uncommon – Parkin (2015) lists many more.
mechanical operations that animate them’ to actively construct the story (2009, p. 5). In accepting the conditions for play and making an effort to engage with the game’s narrative, the player will become involved with the game and possibly experience becoming.

Second, it is important to note that player-game assemblages vary significantly, and no two people will be impacted by an affect in the same way (Deleuze 2005, p. 217). Play-spaces transform the player into a collection of possibilities, an ‘affective event’ (Shaw & Warf 2009, p. 1340, emphasis original). Here, the player’s actions are not controlled by the designer, and the designer cannot be sure how players will engage with the game (Ash 2012, p. 10). Rather, the affect in video games is composed between the developer and player (Cremin 2015, p. 23). For Klimmt, Hefner, and Vorderer, for example, identification is a selective process, depending on numerous elements including the player’s cognition and self-perceptions, such as ‘goals, attitudes, [and] evaluations’ (2009, p. 359). Similarly, Shamdani explains that the affects one will experience depend on their subject location, experiences, narratives, and kind of engagement they have with the game (2017, p. 7). One way that players’ cognition and self-perception could block a line of flight is if a player was resistant to the experience that the game offers. The process of deterritorialisation and becoming can be unsettling for numerous reasons, but gender is particularly relevant. Lorraine explains that if one views themselves as having an identity with a single origin, from which all desire emanates, then that person’s capacities and the assemblages that they can enter into are restricted (2008, p. 75). That person can block themselves from deterritorialisation, from opening themselves up to new connections (Parr 2010b, p. 69), which could contradict that identity. For example, if players see a significant amount of their identity coming from their gender, they may block themselves off from experience.

Publisher reception to Dontnod’s earlier 2013 science fiction adventure game Remember Me illustrates such an attitude of blocking off. Creative director Jean-Maxime Moris describes how publishers claimed the game would fail because the protagonist is female, and contained
aspects of her private life. Moris explains ‘We had people tell us, “[y]ou can’t make a dude like the player kiss another dude in the game, that’s going to feel awkward”’ (cited in Phillips 2013). Publishers assumed that male players would be unable to reconcile with the idea that playing as a female character, they could have intimacy with a male. That is, publishers exhibited segregative and global thought, assuming that the majority of male players are the same, and that they would be opposed to experiencing femininity. Yet, as Moris points out, “it’s not like your sexual orientation is being questioned by playing a game” (cited in Phillips 2013). As Ringrose and Coleman suggest, it is possible that gender functions as a molar category, a territorialisation that captures and fixes molecular becoming (2013, p. 129). If a player believes that their identity exclusively comes from their gender, they could be averse to new experiences that would extend (or challenge) their experience of that gender.

Lines of flight could also be blocked due to a desire to uphold a certain understanding of gender and history. For example, Battlefield V (EA DICE 2018), set in World War II, was met with significant controversy when it was released because it contained female soldiers, even featuring one on the game cover (Plunkett 2018). Yet women were involved in World War II in numerous ways (Campbell 1993), so players seemed to be upset that the game did not fit with their conception of the world – it challenged their understanding of history. It is also interesting that gender was the aspect of realism that players were incensed about, when, as EA DICE general manager Oskar Gabrielson points out, players have attempted ‘to fit three players on a galloping horse, with flamethrowers’ in the game, and this is considered acceptable (2018). Total War: Rome II (The Creative Assembly 2013) was recently met with similar controversy when at one stage of the game a player could only choose from female generals. They shared their outrage, resulting in ‘review bombing’, where large numbers of players posted highly negative reviews of the game on Steam (Rodriguez 2018). Even though

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158 Interestingly, numerous publishers requested that Life is Strange’s protagonist be changed to male (Life is Strange 2015), although a significant theme in the game is Max and her friend Chloe’s friendship developing into romance.
it became clear that female generals are more common in particular cultures (Egypt and Kush, compared to Rome and Greece), and that the player had a large family, which increased their pool of female characters (Scott-Jones 2018), players were infuriated at the lack of realism due to the inclusion of women. In both of these examples, players blocked lines of flight, the opportunity to challenge their understanding of history, because it challenged their understandings of gender.

Lines of flight can also be blocked as players attempt to avoid undesirable experiences in games. Klimmt, Hefner, and Vorder argue that this is the case for identification (2009, p. 360). More specifically, Joeckel et al. suggest that a player’s sense of morality is specific to how they play certain types of games, and in narrative-driven games decisions are made according to a player’s ‘own sense of right and wrong’ (2012, pp. 462 & 478). Play can be jarring if the game presents the player with a traumatic experience, such as when the player is kidnapped by the Brotherhood in *Skyrim* and ordered to kill another captive. Similarly, Hutchinson explains that ‘a stereotype that is interpreted as offensive or jarring can disrupt a player’s enjoyment of the game, or at the very least interfere with that player’s identification process’ (2007, p. 287). For example, Morinth from *Mass Effect 2* fulfils what Sarkeesia calls the ‘sinister seductress’ trope (Feminist Frequency 2016). Morinth has a rare genetic disorder that causes her to destroy her partner’s mind during sex, and she attempts to seduce the player (BioWare 2010). Players could find such experiences and stereotypes off-putting and thus they block off the experiences they offer.

### A. Gender-Bending

Another particularly interesting way that games can allow for and even encourage transversality is through gender bending – having players play an avatar of a different gender, typically within an MMORPG. Gender bending can allow players to examine gender identity in
ways that transgress boundaries between identity and desire, but can also be a normative choice rather than a subversive act (Todd 2012, p. 109). As mentioned above, for example, one factor is the player's motivation and attitudes towards the game. Researchers repeatedly point out that players design and utilise their avatars in various ways, such as similar or different to themselves, or an ideal or negative version of themselves (Eldund 2011; Dunn & Guadagno 2012; Osborne 2012; Banks 2015; Mancini & Sibilla 2017). Interestingly, while men and women do gender-bend in MMOs where they can design their own avatar, men do so much more than women¹⁵⁹.

One way that gender-bending can lead to a line of destruction is through stereotypes and caricatures. For example, Martey et al. suggest that players rely on stereotypes to understand how their avatar should appear and behave (2014, p. 289). They found that men in their study designed female avatars and utilised chat in ways that reinforced idealised notions of beauty and stereotypically feminine conversation style, such as more exclamation points and emotional phrases (2014, pp. 296–298). Women are also thought to talk more than men (Muddled Times 2004a). It is important to note, however, that reinforcement of stereotypical ideals is not restricted to women. Lou et al. found that women who play male avatars act even more aggressively and masculine than male players using a male avatar (2013, p. 835). If players simply reproduce stereotypical conceptions of gender while gender-bending, rather than experiencing a becoming, then they are blocked off through conceptions of categorisation and global beliefs about how each gender should behave.

It is important to point out the role that the game has in conceptions of gender, as adoption of stereotypical ideals is partly dependent on a game’s affordances. For example,

¹⁵⁹ Paik and Shi found that of 125 MMORPG players, 40% of men and 19% of women had gender-swapped (2013, p. 317). In WoW, Nick Yee found that men are seven to eight times more likely to gender bend than women, and that older males are the most frequent gender benders (2005, 2003). Martey et al. found that 23% of men and 7% of women in their sample of MMO players gender bended (2014, p. 293). In RuneScape, Crowe and Watts found that most gender benders were male (2014, pp. 223 & 225). However this is not always the case. In Fairyland (Lager Network Technologies 2003), female players are more likely to gender swap than male players (Lou et al. 2013, p. 831).
Martey et al. (2014, p. 289) and Yee (2014, p. 111) have found that male players often use female avatars because they prefer watching a female form. In fact, players often observe that female avatars are often prettier and have better qualities than male characters (Paik & Shi 2013, p. 319). Similarly, Crowe and Watts are sceptical of RuneScape’s ability to offer ‘alternative readings [of gender] in any meaningful or resistive way’ because the female characters are highly sexualised (2014, p. 227). Within this context, Jenson et al. observe that most male players who sex-swap\textsuperscript{160} in WoW play ‘heteronormatively attractive, [and] hyperfeminised’ elves (2015, p. 870), while female players who sex-swap were mostly likely to play a masculine or muscular creature (Worgen, Orc, Tauren, or Troll) (2015, p. 870). It is possible that when these players chose to gender-bend, they were engaging with highly stereotypical conceptions of the opposite gender, and never underwent deterritorialisation. Yet Stabile (2014) found that many female and queer players used a Tauren or male Blood Elf to experiment with different kinds of masculinity (2014, p. 51). In short, a game’s depiction of masculinity and femininity can be normalising, but also hold potential for lines of flight.

Players can also gender-bend for practical or normative reasons, upholding gender stereotypes. Most of Paik and Shi’s achievement-focused players were male, some choosing avatars according to ability, efficiency, occupation, and class rather than gender (2013, p. 320). However, they often used traditional gender roles in avatar design, such as choosing to make the warrior male, and the sorcerer female (2013, p. 321). Similarly, Yee (2014) found that even though male and female players have the same healing ratio, female characters have a much higher healing ratio than male characters. That is, male players were creating female characters to be healers. In turn, female players who gender-bend and play male characters spend less time healing (2014, pp. 112–113). Such a choice would imply that players are not choosing to gender-bend because they want to experience the game as a female character –

\textsuperscript{160} Jenson et al. explain that quantitative studies of gender-bending are better referred to as sex-swapping. This is because while the players may play an avatar who is a different sex from their own, they do not necessarily behave in gender-subversive ways (2015, pp. 865–866).
because they want to undergo becoming – but rather because they feel that certain attributes belong to certain genders, which would constitute a reterritorialisation.

Further, many male players choose to play female avatars for social benefits. Many of Martey et al.’s community-focused players gender-bended because other people would be friendlier towards them (2013, p. 319). Similarly, reflecting on why men gender-bend in MUDs, some female players suggest it could be because ‘female personae get treated better’ (Muddled Times 2004b). One male player noted that when he played a female character, ‘I never had so many wizzes [administrators, high-ranking players] enlightening to me to chat, etc. in my life’ (Muddled Times 2004a). In fact, female avatars have been found to be treated more generously than male avatars in numerous MMOs (Todd 2012, p. 108; Eklund 2011, p. 332; Lehdonvirta et al. 2012, p. 38; Crowe & Watts 2014, p. 223; Lou et al. 2013, p. 834). As for why female avatars are often treated generously in MMOs, Lehdonvirta et al. suggest that women are expected to engage in help-seeking behaviour more so than men, and so other players are more receptive to their requests for aid (2012, p. 40). Another possibility is that male players see women as less competent at the game, and so are more likely to treat them generously (Eklund 2011, p. 333). Yet even if a male player chooses to gender-bend because they imagine that female players are treated better by others, they can still experience a line of flight according to their experiences.

Even if one chooses to gender-bend for idealistic or strategic reasons, experiencing the game as that gender can still enable deterritorialisation and becoming. For example, Crowe and Watts found that in RuneScape some male players chose female avatars, often because then they would not be seen as gay by others when playing with other men (2014, p. 223). However, female avatars are often harassed with sexual suggestions and innuendos (Eklund 2011, p. 336), so playing as female avatars enables men to experience such innuendo and, indeed, harassment. As Jenson et al. describe, a male interviewee who played as a female character for two minutes on a role-play server, was “hit-on” within two minutes (2015, p.
Another ‘played for months with a female avatar, but gave it up after he was “stalked” by another player even after telling him he was a male playing as a female avatar’ (2015, p. 873). Such experiences could constitute deterritorialisation as male players using a male avatar would not otherwise experience such behaviour – they could experience what it is like for a female player using a female avatar.

Gender-bending does not just allow male players to experiment with femininity, but also masculinity. Crowe and Watts, for example, suggest that male gender-benders are not experimenting with femininity as such, but are exploring alternative masculine discourses (2014, p. 226). Similarly, Martey et al. note that male gender-benders do not act stereotypically feminine or stop acting as a male, but ‘try to act “not masculine”’ (2013, p. 3). That is, men can play a female character to avoid the stereotypical competitive, aggressive male gamer stereotype (Stabile 2014, p. 50). For example, gender-bending for one male MUD player meant that he did not need to take things ‘too seriously’, and neither did other players (Muddled Times 2004a). Another example is a male participant in Turkle’s study of MMO players, who stated that he used a female avatar because he wanted to be ‘collaborative and helpful’ (1995, p. 219). Yet another of Turkle’s participants explained that he used a female avatar for the opposite reason – if he was ‘aggressive and confrontational’ as a female avatar, he would be seen as ‘modern and together’, while if he behaved this way as a male avatar, he would be seen as ‘being a bastard’ (1995, p. 219). For men, gender-bending can provide not just a way of understanding what the game might be like for women, but can be a way of challenging stereotypes of masculinity.

Overall, gender-bending in MMOs can constitute a line of flight, which could extend into a becoming, allowing players to experiment with their conceptions of gender and identity. This can even be the case in situations where a player did not gender-bend with the intention to undergo becoming, such as for strategic reasons. For instance, a male player using a female avatar with the intention to be treated more generously by other players could undergo a
becoming if they are sent sexual messages, typically reserved for female players. A female player using a male avatar could undergo a becoming if players in a group place more pressure on them to be skilled at the game. However, experimentation with gender in video games does not necessarily mean that one experiences what it means to be someone else. As Jensen et al. note, often player's sex-swapping behaviour does not demonstrate gender transgression, and can actually result in gender regression (2015, p. 873). Further, all of these scenarios are processes – Sutton and Martin-Jones explain that a player can gender-bend and experience deterritorialisation, but be reterritorialised in how the game community exerts social rules onto the players (2008, pp. 18–20). While there is no guarantee that gender-bending will result in becoming, there is the possibility it will allow the player to experience the game in a different way, as if they were of the opposite gender.

Conclusion

Researchers have understood the ability of video games to have significant impacts on the player in numerous ways, and in the first half of this chapter I suggested that Deleuze and Guattari's affect is a useful method. For Deleuze and Guattari, affect is the change that one undergoes when they come into contact with something. Video games are particularly powerful generators of affect because they involve interactivity, some degree of involvement or immersion, and are designed to induce flow. In the second half of this chapter I explained that when someone is impacted by affects, they can undergo transversality. That is, they can generate a line of flight, along which they can deterritorialise and experience a becoming, gaining an understanding of what it is like to be someone else. Researchers identify that in video games becoming occurs through action and a shift in self-concept, and it is clear that some games are designed to enable a becoming. However, lines of flight can turn into lines of destruction, and a player can be blocked off from becoming – such as if they do not wish to
undergo new experiences. In the final section of this chapter, I used gender-bending in MMOs to explain how lines of flight can extend into becomings, where players can experience the opposite gender, or become blocked, where a player experiences gender in a normative or stereotypical way.

In sum, video games are particularly powerful generators of affect, which means they have the ability to open up the player to new experiences, and potentially alter their subjectivity. As I will explore further in the following chapter, I argue that it is precisely video game's highly affective nature that causes them to lie at the heart of many player's subjectivity, or sense of self. Players can be open to new experiences and possibly experience becoming, in the myriad of ways that McGonigal (2011) describes. They could also play *The McDonald's Videogame*, challenging their view of the fast food industry; play *Depression Quest*, and experience depression; play *Life is Strange*, and experience bullying, or play an MMO using an avatar of the opposite gender, and experience the game from their perspective. Or, players can be resistant to lines of flight and new experiences, and close themselves off. As I will discuss in the following chapter, I suggest that it is partly because of video games’ affective nature that Gamergaters’ identity as gamers was challenged by the influx of female developers and players, as well as games that encouraged them to undergo new experiences.
Chapter Seven: Gamergate

As discussed in the previous chapter, video games are particularly powerful generators of affect and they can impact player subjectivity in significant ways. Through affects, players can experience transversality and becoming, whereby they feel what it is to be someone other than themselves. That is, video games have the capacity to change players, allowing the production of something new. Yet, games can also produce familiar refrains for players – with little difference, and this can alternatively make players resistant to new experiences. In this chapter I argue that Gamergaters are particularly resistant to experiences that challenge their subjectivity, as well as resistant to change in video game culture more broadly, as they do not want to experience deterritorialisation. Yet, as games, game producers, and game consumers have become increasingly diverse, gaming ‘culture’ has undergone a process of change through lines of flight. Hence I argue that Gamergaters’ vitriolic harassment of women in the game industry was an attempt to recapture such lines of flight in order to maintain their specific gaming territory. In this chapter I refer to the Gamergate incident and the events leading to it in past tense as the campaign has ended. However, when I refer to Gamergate as a phenomenon and a community I do so in present tense, as many Gamergaters are still active and expressing anti-SJW sentiments in spaces such as /r/KotakuInAction, which suggests that many players are still experiencing the processes that I describe in this chapter.

Using the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I understand Gamergaters’ vitriolic behaviour as blocking a line of flight – a line of flight that could have also extended into a becoming – in an attempt to maintain their territory. In order to explain how Gamergate was an attempt to recapture a changing territory, this chapter is divided into two parts: economies of fear, and
economies of hate. First I use Ahmed’s economy of fear to frame two of Deleuze and Guattari’s dangers: fear and clarity, that is, Gamergaters’ fear of loss and belief that they knew the truth of Gamergate. Second I use Ahmed’s economy of hate to frame the other two dangers: power and disgust, that is, Gamergaters’ efforts to construct a territory within which they will not be able to be affected, their resulting vitriol and hate towards others. As will become clear by the end of this chapter, Gamergaters were fearful of deterritorialisation, being sure that it would be a negative experience. As a result, they collectivised to gain power, and reacted with disgust towards those they hated.

I. Economies of Fear

For Deleuze and Guattari, the libidinal economy and the political economy are not separate (as they are for Freud and Marx), but are part of the same economy (2000, p. 345). As Smith explains, ‘in Marx, our thought is determined by our class (“class consciousness”); in Freud, we are determined by our unconscious desires (stemming, usually, from familial conflicts)’ (2007, p. 71). Yet for Deleuze and Guattari, our impulses and drives, which ‘seem[s] to be what is the most individual about you’, are economic (2007, p. 71). One useful way to help limit the following examination of Gamergate and the events surrounding it, is by using Ahmed’s notion of economies of fear and hate. Deleuze and Guattari ask us to focus on these issues as well, but I do not want to suggest that Ahmed and Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of economy, nor that of affect, is the same.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari and Ahmed conceptualise ‘economy’ differently. In comparison to Deleuze and Guattari, Ahmed uses ‘economic’ to refer to the way that emotions circulate in the social and psychic field (2014, p. 45). She borrows from psychoanalysis, suggesting that emotion is not something that a sign or commodity \emph{positively holds}, but that it is produced ‘as an effect of its circulation’ (2014, p. 45). She also borrows from Marx, suggesting that it is the \emph{movement} of emotion between signs that makes them accumulate over time, that is, makes them more powerful (2014, p. 45). They also conceptualise affect differently: as discussed in the previous chapter, for Deleuze and Guattari affect does not refer to emotion (Massumi 2005a, p. xvi), but for Ahmed (2004), it does.}
In this chapter, I use Deleuze and Guattari’s dangers of lines of flight as a framework to explain some of the reasons why Gamergate happened. While lines of flight are inherently transversal and productive, they are not inherently positive, and Deleuze and Guattari explain that there are four dangers: clarity, fear, power, and the great disgust (2005, p. 227). I locate these dangers within Ahmed’s economies of hate and fear to discuss how these emotions permeate and flow throughout communities of play. For Ahmed, emotions such as hate do not exist within anyone or anything, but move between people, who are nodal points in the economy of affect (2001, p. 348). In this sense, in Ahmed’s economy of affect the movement of emotions between bodies allows collectives to emerge, and align some subjects with some and against others (Ahmed 2004, p. 25).

Some of Ahmed’s descriptions of affective economies bear similarity to Deleuze and Guattarian concepts used throughout this thesis. In particular, Ahmed (2004) describes how the Aryan Nations’ website rewrites history to establish foreigners as a threat to white people in a way that highly resembles territorialisation, and can be used to understand some of the causes of Gamergate. First, she explains, there is a territory, one where ‘the labour of others is concealed in a fantasy that it is the white subject who “built this land”’ (2004, p. 118). During Gamergate, it became evident that Gamergaters felt that they were the true proponents of ‘gaming culture’. Second, ‘The white subjects claim the place of hosts...at the same time as they claim the position of the victim, as the ones who are damaged by an “unmerciful government”’ (2004, p. 118). Gamergaters established themselves as victims under siege by so-called Social Justice Warriors. Third, Ahmed explains, ‘the narrative...suggests that it is love for the nation that makes the white Aryans hate those whom they recognise as strangers as the ones who are taking away the nation and the role of the Aryans in its history, as well as their future’ (2004, p. 118). As I will discuss in this chapter, Gamergaters frequently claimed that it was because of their love of video games that they were ‘protecting’ ‘gaming culture’
from outsiders. I will use this framework to interpret how emotion played a role in inciting Gamergate.

As I will explain, Gamergate’s economy of fear was based on the risk of deterritorialisation. For Ahmed, fear is linked to an object ‘passing by’ of an object, as if people who are feared pass by into one’s territory, then others could also pass by into the community, and be anywhere and everywhere (2004, p. 124). During the campaign, it became evident that Gamergaters fear anything that differs from the ‘norm’ of gaming culture, including representation; production; consumption; identification, and regulation (Hall 1997, p. 1). That is, Gamergaters protested diverse characters; alternative kinds of production such as indie development; the way that other players consumed games; the way that they identified with games, or felt an affinity with them, and, ultimately, anything that challenged the ‘norm’ of game ‘culture’. Gamergaters feared that these changes would change their territory, inciting a deterritorialisation, and so feared the people who they perceived were bringing such changes – women. Two of Deleuze and Guattari’s dangers of lines of flight are relevant here: Gamergaters’ clarity, their certainty that all gamers are the same and desire the same things, and their fear and sense of victimisation.

A. Clarity

The first danger I will discuss here is clarity. For Deleuze and Guattari, clarity ‘runs the risk of reproducing in miniature the affections, the affectations, of the rigid’ (2005, p. 228). There is a risk that one becomes certain of ‘their situation, role, and mission’ (2005, p. 228). Here I argue that during the campaign, Gamergaters’ upholding of the gamer territory, their certainty that all players are the same and are interested in the same thing, caused them to block lines of flight when challenged with difference. Gamergaters’ clarity has been fuelled in no small part by the AAA game industry, which, as demonstrated in chapter One, has catered
for a specific audience at the expense of diversity, producing gender and gamer identities that are clear, well-defined, and determining. That is, the game industry has at least partly created this community of players. Of course, from Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective this should come as no surprise, in part because for them the libidinal and political economy is the same – as discussed throughout the thesis, and particularly in Chapter Five. Or as Guattari terms it, the production of subjectivity is capitalism’s main product (Guattari & Rolnik 2007, p. 45).

As Shaw explains in more detail, culture industries create texts for an imagined audience, and divide the market into segments according to their assumed value (2015, p. 17). However, decisions are shaped according to understandings of consumers preferences, rather than their actual preferences (Peterson et al. 1990, p. 111). This may appear to be contradictory, as the aim of marketing is to capture the largest possible audience. Yet, since ‘groups are representable only insofar they are marketable’, marginalised groups are only included if they become profitable (Shaw 2015, p. 18), and game development is expensive and risky. So although ‘much of the industry is making games that do not serve the “core” demographic of 18-to-35-year-old men’ (Hiwiler 2016, p. 43), this demographic, as Alexander (2014a) points out, are still thought to be the core demographic for commercial video games.

Marketing games ‘for specific audiences has ideological power’ (Shaw 2015, p. 170), and as the video game industry has grown, it has created a subset of hardcore gamers who believe that they are the true proponents of gaming culture and territory – that they ‘built this land’ (Ahmed 2004, p. 118). This idea that certain gamers helped construct the gaming territory, and therefore are entitled to maintenance of that territory, is echoed in commentary on Gamergate. Alexander (2014a), for example, describes the commercialisation of gaming as resulting in ‘a generation of lonely basement kids’ having ‘marketers whispering in their ears that they were the most important commercial demographic of all time’. This is an example of Deleuze’s illegitimate form of the connective synthesis, as at the extreme end marketing has created a category of ‘socially isolated, disempowered, sex-starved loners’, and the industry
creates 'games that represent the hypermasculine fantasies of violence, power and their binary opposite of servile, hyper-feminised women'\textsuperscript{162} (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 96). Gamergaters have been led to believe that they were the true representatives of the gaming territory. Yet as discussed in chapters One and Five, the gamer identity is becoming less relevant as audiences and games diversify – and this presents a threat to Gamergaters’ territory.

Gamergaters’ belief in a well-defined gaming territory, and, more to the point, the significant role that gaming plays in their sense of self, means that change presents a real and distinct threat to their sense of identity. The campaign occurred at a time when the game industry began to provide more democratisation, as platforms like Steam provide a place for indie developers to release games to a broad market\textsuperscript{163} (Chatzakou et al. 2017, p. 1285). A similar shift has occurred in other industries – Peterson et al. note that the radio industry diversified only when smaller firms could compete with major ones, as this then they were able to differentiate themselves rather than rely on the same audiences (1990, pp. 105–106). In a similar manner, the game industry has been undergoing rapid changes following a period of stability (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 216). These changes have caused many players to see themselves as victims who are ‘oppressed by calls for diversity and at risk of losing "their" games to more inclusive ones’\textsuperscript{164} (Braithwaite 2016, p. 1). Rather than embracing difference and travelling along a line of flight, Gamergaters are restricted by the importance of the gamer identity to their sense of self, and instead of travelling outside of their territory, attempt to rigidify it.

\textsuperscript{162} Consider the interactive drama action-adventure game \textit{Heavy Rain} (Quantic Dream 2010). One of four protagonists and the only woman, Madison Paige is routinely depicted in a way that suggests a voyeuristic male gaze, including a gratuitous shower scene, and being forced to strip for a crime boss at gunpoint.

\textsuperscript{163} Notably, Zoe Quinn received harassment when her game \textit{Depression Quest} was released on Steam Greenlight. \textit{Depression Quest} received particular criticism for the story-like (and consequently less game-like) nature of the game. Players were already harshly rejecting diversity and people who challenge what games can be.

\textsuperscript{164} In fact, a games journalist who Perreault and Vos interviewed explained that the reason people engaged in harassment was fear (2016, p. 6).
B. Fear

The next danger of a line of flight that is relevant to Gamergate is fear. During the campaign, Gamergaters felt sure that the gamer territory was well-defined and determining, and this belief is challenged with increasingly diverse games, players, and creators. Increased diversity brings the threat of deterritorialisation, and as Deleuze and Guattari explain (2005, p. 227, emphasis added):

We are always afraid of losing. Our security, the great molar organization that sustains us, the arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into, the system of overcoding that dominates us—we desire all that.

During the campaign, Gamergaters viewed change in game culture, specifically increased diversity of players, creators, and games, as an attack on their territory. They feared losing their territory because it provides them with security, a system of organisation, and a defined status. They feared change because it threatens their sense of identity (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6). The next question, then, is why the gamer identity was and continues to be so important to Gamergaters.

One explanation for why some players feel that video gaming forms a significant part of their identity lies in the increasingly unstable world we live in, and the subject positions that media provides. Castells explains that our world is increasingly complex and we feel increasingly powerless because we live in a network society that has been ‘shaking institutions, transforming cultures, creating wealth and inducing poverty, spurring greed, innovation, and hope, while simultaneously imposing hardship and instilling despair’ (2010, p. 2). Here, ‘classed, racialised and gendered processes of distinction, and the expansion of corporate marketing and advertising’ are promoted more aggressively than ever before’
(Moran 2015, p. 143). The promotion of such elements can cause people to adopt them as part of their identity. Indeed, Kirkpatrick (2013, p. 22) argues that:

Our ability to imagine and create shared spaces of social interaction depends on commodities, and this reflects how we struggle to maintain a stable sense of self. The networked society has brought numerous changes to work and other aspects of social life, and as a result people turn to play as a source of strength, a way to achieve personal autonomy, or a way to gain a sense of coherence over their life. This play is fraught with domination and exploitation.

For Gamergaters, the highly gendered and marketed gamer identity provides a safe, knowable territory within a chaotic network society. It provides not just a hobby or form of entertainment, but a source of personal strength, autonomy, and sense of stability over life as a whole. This relates back to Huizinga’s concept of the magic circle: for many players, the magic circle, the game space, provides a safe and stable space away from the chaos of everyday life. Gamergate illustrated that Gamergaters did not just fear their hobby changing, but losing the refrains that help them organise their lives and provide them with power. Indeed, Mortsensen explains that many Gamergaters involved in the incident were exploitable because they were unemployed, young, undereducated, or had social problems – many referred to themselves as undesirable and believed that if games change, they will lose the one thing they value (2016, p. 13). Here, I argue that Gamergaters believe they will lose the one territory where they felt they had value.

Because Gamergaters felt such intense fear at the risk of losing their identity, they tended to view themselves as victims throughout the campaign. Indeed, despite the immense vitriol that Gamergaters directed towards women in gaming, they frequently lamented that they were attacked by feminists trying to change the game industry (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 221).
Ahmed explains that fear ‘reestablishes distance between bodies’ (2004, p. 126), and so I suggest that Gamergaters re-established the (perceived) difference between men and women using a discourse of victimisation. Feeling that they were at risk of losing their territory and cultural authority (Robinson 2000, pp. 12 & 8), Gamergaters constructed themselves as disempowered by feminists, who are ‘shrill, bellicose, and parsimonious’, an unwelcome force of censorship (Tasker & Negra 2007, pp. 3–4). A discourse of victimisation is not unique to Gamergate, but is an undercurrent in wider game culture. For example, Braithwaite (2014, p. 710) points out that one commenter lamenting a WoW character’s dialogue change stated that ‘I’ve been oppressed by feminists my whole life’165. Such constructions of feminists will be discussed in the third part of this chapter under hate. For now, it is enough to understand that Gamergaters felt (and according to /r/KotakuInAction, continue to feel) victimised by feminists because they represent an invasion of their territory, and Gamergaters fear that territory changing.

Gamergaters’ feelings of victimisation reached tipping point in late August 2014 when numerous games journalists posted articles criticising Gamergate on industry websites such as Gamasutra, Kotaku, and Polygon166. Broadly, these articles proclaimed that ‘gamers are dead’ in the sense that, as discussed throughout this thesis, young men are no longer the core demographic of game players. The first and most contentious article was Leigh Alexander’s ‘“Gamers” don’t have to be your audience. “Gamers” are over’ (2014a). Here Alexander identifies the gamer identity as a toxic territory, describing gamers as people who ‘know...little about how human social interaction and professional life works’. She points out that much Gamergate activity occurred on business and industry sites because there is a fear of ‘being made redundant, both culturally and literally’, in the face of a changing audience

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165 The full comment continues ‘I’ve been told not to say things Ji said before, told I was creepy, I was kicked and pushed back into a cave by so many women’ (Braithwaite 2014, p. 710).
166 The Gamergate Wiki (2016c) lists sixteen articles.
where ‘gamers are over’ (2014). Finally, Alexander (2014a) criticises Gamergate as an act of territorialisation, describing that ‘It’s hard for [angry young men] to hear they don’t own anything, anymore, that they aren’t the world’s most special-est consumer demographic, that they have to share’. Overall, the ‘gamers are dead’ articles pointed out that video gaming was undergoing a deterritorialisation, and suggested that Gamergate was an outburst of frustration as these players realised they were no longer the key demographic of game companies.

Gamergaters were ‘outraged’ at the articles because they ‘decry gamers, gamer culture, and the gamer lifestyle’ (Gamergate Wiki 2016b), and ‘declared their identity and culture dead’ (Gamergate Wiki 2016c). Gamergaters read these critiques as a personal attack because the gamer identity was developed from a shared history and solidarity (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6). In particular, Alexander’s description of Gamergaters as ‘lonely basement kids’, who ‘know little about how human interaction and professional life works’ (2014a) echoes gamers’ historic marginalisation (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6), as well as moral panics discussed in Chapter Five. Gamergaters were also outraged because they felt that the articles were published ‘in...an obviously coordinated way’ (Gamergate Wiki 2016c) They used these articles to suggest that ‘the conspiracy’ may be even larger than thought (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 212), claiming that ‘gaming journalism outlets were colluding with each other and attempting to push a singular narrative’ (Gamergate Wiki 2016b). In response to their ‘attacks’, games journalists became major targets, Alexander in particular (Mortensen 2016, p. 6). These articles further exacerbated gamers’ feelings of invasion, attack, marginalisation and injustice.

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167 Alexander (2014a) also points out how Gamergate constructed a severely negative public face of gaming, and criticises ‘huge community hubs’ who have not taken responsibility to curb hate. She notes that games were originally conceived as fun, ‘cross-cultural meeting spaces’, and were transformed by marketers, ‘pinning bikini babes onto everything they made’, selling ‘high-octane masculinity to kids just like them’.

168 An article written by Devin Wilson (2014) provides a list of tactics that people can use to eradicate the gaming identity.
Gamergaters were not just ‘created’ by feminists invading their gaming territory, or by articles that challenged their relevance. Gamergate originated in Gjoni’s accusations that his ex-girlfriend had cheated on him with numerous members of the video game industry. Yet even if Quinn had been unfaithful, her sexual relationships are of no consequence to these random people on the internet. Even the idea that games journalists engaged in dishonest behaviour was not new. Gjoni’s accusations mattered to Gamergaters partly because her supposed infidelity touches on the historical construct of victim geek masculinity, where geek men are thought to be alienated or ostracised by women. Quinn (2017) explains that ‘[t]his community naturally latched on and started planning how to “ruin” me, as if I were a stand-in for every woman who had ever told any of them “no”’. There is a link here between sexual rejection and gaming. For example, nerds\(^{169}\) ‘are often viewed as socially inept and undesirable’, with little knowledge about romance, ‘vulnerable to women who take advantage of them’ (Kendall 2011, pp. 519 & 509). MMO players are thought to be addicts, immature, lacking basic social skills, and having no interest in making themselves sexually desirable (Bergstrom, Fisher & Jenson 2014, p. 8). Here there is a kind of geek masculinity that is victimised by women, a sentiment that many Gamergaters seemed to share. This process by which players are ostracised solidifies the idea that gender is a molar, determining category.

Indeed, game playing is often stigmatised in academic and public discourses in terms of addiction, social isolation, and a lack of social skills (Yates & Littleton 1999, pp. 577–579; Williams 2009, p. 229). Gamers are often thought to be obsessed with games, which are seen as a waste of time (Royse et al. 2007, p. 569). This kind of ‘obsessive’ play is often treated with the rhetoric of drug addiction\(^{170}\) (Cover 2006; Shaw 2010, p. 411). Video games are also associated with isolation (Shaw 2010, p. 411), and the notion that gamers are solitary, asocial,

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\(^{169}\) which Massanari conflates with geeks (2017, p. 343).

\(^{170}\) However, video game addiction tends to be amplified into a moral panic that does not correspond the real size of the issue (Blaszczynski 2008, p. 181). In fact, some researchers have found that time spent playing does not correlate with addictive behaviour – suggesting that personality, rather than time spent playing games, is the problematic factor in addiction (Spekman et al. 2013; Cover 2006).
and socially inept (Royse et al. 2007, p. 569; Thornham 2008, p. 134). One of Stabile’s interviewees, for instance, described the male gamer as an immature, ‘stereotypical computer male pasty basement reject’, with stunted social skills due to a lack of interaction with others (2014, p. 50). Gamers are also thought to have poor health and hygiene. For example, one of Shaw’s interviewees pointed out that gamers have a ‘Snickers and Mountain Dew and 3 o’clock in the morning’ stereotype (Shaw 2012a, p. 38). As for the latter, Sims’ (2014, p. 853) study of middle school students found that the geeky boys were called gross and complained about for a supposed lack of hygiene. As gamers are constructed as ‘aggressive killers in training, addicts to the mind-controlling power of games, or socially inept losers’, so they 'had been trained to be defensive' (Mortensen 2016, p. 12). Such negative associations have resulted in a persecution complex, where players finally lash out and persecute someone else.

Gamergaters’ feelings of victimisation partly have their origins in video games’ status as a marginalised medium (Shaw 2012a, p. 39), and frequent targets of moral panic (Cover 2006), particularly for their violent or anti-social themes171 (Bowman 2016). Perhaps the most well-known example is the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, where students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed thirteen people and injured twenty-one others (Bogost 2015, p. 44). Since Harris was found to be an avid DOOM player (Pinchbeck 2013), and had created a mod for the game based on the layout of the high school (King & Borland 2003, p. 174), video games were blamed for the shooting172 (Reynolds, McAllister & Ruggill 2016, p. 191), even though the perpetrators had been severely bullied: ‘targeted, beaten up, gay baited...mercilessly ridiculed, threatened, attacked, and tortured’ (Kimmel 2013, p. 81). Video games have repeatedly been associated with shootings since Columbine (Bogost 2015, p. 44);

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171 For example, upon Ultima III’s release in 1983, Richard Garriott received hate mail, particularly from conservative Christian groups who criticised the red demon on the cover of the game. These groups were also attacking Dungeons and Dragons at the same time for ‘encouraging worship of the occult, violent behaviour, and suicides’ (King & Borland 2003, p. 72).

172 ‘Parent groups of the victims of Columbine filed an (unsuccessful) lawsuit against 25 video game companies’ (Crawford 2012, p. 45). Further, ‘then-president Bill Clinton announced a government investigation into the marketing of violent games to children’ (Wesley & Barczak 2010, p. xiii).
following the 2018 Florida shooting, Donald Trump met with video game industry executives to discuss violent games and gun-related deaths (Siddiqui & Solon 2018). Considering that video games had already been established as a highly masculine subculture for people who feel ostracised, the moral panic surrounding the shooting simply worsened its reputation.

Here it is worth noting that games have not only been criticised by the US government, but also used as tools by them. In 2002 the US army released America’s Army, an FPS designed as a recruiting and communications tool (Bogost 2007, p. 75). Such hypocrisy illustrates two things. First, gamers are understandably frustrated by how video games are appropriated and discussed by people who do not understand them. As Chess and Shaw explain (2015, p. 2017), those who are part of gaming culture have defended the hobby for years against popular media and some academics who vilify gaming as spreading violence, racism, and sexism. Second, the hypocrisy illustrates that video games are appropriated by death-drive assemblages such as the US army to invest desiring-play into destruction. Hence, it is understandable that Gamergaters felt fear – not only was their territory being challenged, upon which many hinge their identity, but they are constructed as violent, antisocial, and now, sexist. In Alexander’s words (2014a), Gamergaters followed the tenet: ‘[b]e an outcast. Celebrate that. Defeat anyone who threatens you’.

Still, while gaming is still a marginalised medium, it is now much more widely accepted than in the past. Busch, Chee, and Harvey, for instance, argue that as nerds, geeks, and gamers have gained financial and social status, they have become part of hegemonic masculinity (2016, p. 36). However since geeks often view themselves as outsiders, they may be ‘unable or unwilling to note their own privilege’ (Penny 2014, cited in Massanari 2017, p. 332). As a result, drives for equality (such as feminist players and games journalists) often feel like becoming unequal. The ‘gamer’ position was privileged, and Gamergaters who identify with the term see it as a right – so any attempt to alter it is seen as an attack. As a result, work to
broaden the category is viewed as an attack on the correct order of things173 (Braithwaite 2016, p. 7). As one Bioware writer has commented, ‘the truth is that privilege always lies with the majority. They're so used to being catered to that they see the lack of catering as an imbalance’ (Gaider 2011, cited in Condis 2015). While many Gamergaters saw video gaming as a refuge from the unfairness of everyday life, they reproduced such unfairness in their treatment of women.

Gamergaters block lines of flight partly because they believe in a clear, well-defined, and determining gamer identity, and avoid connecting with other assemblages to maintain that identity. Gamergaters hold onto the belief that they constructed that gamer territory. Yet, change in the game industry presents a real risk of deterritorialisation, as others who do not belong threatened to pass into and change their territory. Since the gamer identity is so important to Gamergaters, during the campaign they felt fear at deterritorialisation, of losing their sense of self, as well as a fear of being victimised by society. They labelled themselves as hosts of the gamer territory, and also as victims (Ahmed 2004, p. 118). The next step is to analyse how Gamergaters responded with hate towards those who were threatening to change their territory. Hence, the following section of this chapter examines Gamergate as an economy of hate, investigating how, in order to maintain their territory, Gamergaters fled from flight, rigidified their segments, and gave themselves over to binary logic (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 227).

II. Economies of Hate

Gamergate’s economy of hate is based on rejecting that which threatens the gamer territory. Ahmed explains that following the invasion of other people, the normative or

173 Other forms of popular culture such as cult TV are also highly prone to gatekeeping, and are to some extent ‘defined by the audience’ (Hills 2002, p. 12). I suggest that players are particularly invested in games partly due to the greater sense of involvement they afford (see Chapter Six), and partly because of their negative associations such as violence and addiction. The latter forces have caused some gamers to be defensive.
ordinary subject is constructed as the injured party who is hurt or damaged. Through a discourse of pain, the normative subject hates the invaders, who ‘embody the threat of loss’ and ‘threaten to violate the[ir] pure bodies’ (2004, p. 118). Such feelings of hate can bind people together (2004, p. 118). Gamergaters formed a collective according to their hate of Social Justice Warriors (SJWs), and engaged in collective action to direct the narrative of Gamergate and harass an array of women and allies in the game industry. Deleuze and Guattari’s dangers of disgust and power are relevant here, where disgust refers to a line of destruction, of abolition, fascism (engaging in harassment and attacks against those they hate) (2005, p. 230), and power refers to gaining control (Adkins 2015, p. 138). Here, I use power to refer to the formation of a powerful collective that determines the ‘truth’.

A. Disgust

The first danger I will discuss within the economy of hate is disgust. Deleuze and Guattari describe disgust as ‘the longing to kill and to die, the Passion for abolition’ (2005, p. 227). Specifically, ‘instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence, turning to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion of abolition’ (2005, p. 229). Here I consider Gamergaters’ campaign of harassment and vitriol as destructive actions. Indeed, it is useful here to note how social media energised previously disorganised people, and allowed them to form a networked public where they felt some kind of belonging and solidarity (Papacharissi 2014, p. 8-9). As Aghazadeh et al. describe, Gamergate had its origins in 4chan, and participants moved to 8chan once Gamergate was banned on the site (2018, p. 181-182). Gamergaters took part in pro-Gamergate and anti-feminist groups on Reddit, harassment and recruitment occurred on Twitter, controversies and conspiracies were spread on Youtube (2018, p. 181-183) and Tumblr, and as a whole the hashtag was used to mocke women and criticise feminism (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernandez 2016, p. 92). The
gaming public, transformed by networked technologies, became an affective public: they were ‘mobilized and connected...through expressions of sentiment’ (Papacharissi 2014, p. 125-126). Gamergaters were resistant to lines of flight – to new experiences in games, to new connections that could be made with other people – and instead engaged in destructive behaviour, including threats of rape and murder, doxxing and trolling. In this section, I describe how Gamergaters constructed their enemy – feminist killjoys and SJWs – in order to engage in harassment and vitriol, rather than allowing themselves to make new connections by being open to new experiences and opinions.

At the origin of Gamergate, Gjoni crafted ‘The Zoe Post’ to the tone of a bitter ex-boyfriend, using dramatic headlines and video game analogies to influence like-minded male gamers\(^{174}\) to become agents of hate against Quinn due to her supposed infidelity\(^{175}\). Yet, these gamers did not just hate Quinn. In Ahmed’s theorisation of hate, hate is not restricted to certain figures, but accumulates over time, and slides backwards and sideways, allowing other bodies to be read as the cause of hate (2004, p. 120). As Jane states, ‘Gjoni’s personal “fuck you” was so publicly incendiary because there already existed simmering fury among (mostly) male gamers about the influence of women, feminism, and progressive social values in “their” boys club’ (2017, p. 30). Indeed, on August 24 Gjoni admitted in the #burgersandfries IRC that he does not care about journalism and that he ‘mentioned Nathan worked for Kotaku because I figured I’d leave the community to make what it wanted out of the implications’ (BurgersandFries 2014). Gjoni’s accusations against Quinn built upon already-held concerns in certain game communities, and caused hate to move between numerous figures as harassers drew on general frustration with feminism and increased diversification of video gaming and social progression.

\(^{174}\) It is also worth pointing out that Gjoni fits the geek masculinity stereotype, having ‘struggled to assimilate’ growing up, ‘but with a precocious mathematical mind, he found solace in computers’ (Jason 2015). This is a stereotype that has been produced through a system that labels tech-minded men as nerds with poor social skills.

\(^{175}\) ‘If I can target people who are in the mood to read stories about exes and horrible breakups’, Gjoni told Jason, ‘I will have an audience’. Gjoni calculated an 80 percent chance of Quinn being harassed as a result of his post (Jason 2015).
Ahmed explains that other figures of hate are produced through the circulation of signs of affect, such as ‘sticky words’ and language (2004, p. 122). ‘Sticky words’ are molar descriptors that reduce the complexity of what they are describing. Gamergaters used (and continue to use on /r/KotakuInAction) ‘SJW’ as a sticky word to identify and ostracise people who were critical of their movement and concerned about race and gender in games in general, transforming them into people thought to be engaged in a personal and political plot to destroy gaming (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6). Massanari and Chess explain that the term SJW is used to describe people who ‘are overly invested in identity politics and political correctness’, a ‘humorless shrill who takes pleasure in demonstrating their superiority by policing the behavior of others’ (2018, p. 2). The most popular definition of SJW on Urban Dictionary (2017) reads:

A pejorative term for an individual who repeatedly and vehemently engages in arguments on social justice on the Internet often in a shallow or not well-thought-out way, for the purpose of raising their own personal reputation.\(^\text{176}\)

For Gamergaters, SJWs fulfil ‘the stereotype of the feminist as unreasonable, sanctimonious, biased, and self-aggrandizing’ (Selisker 2015, p. 518). There is an element of hypocrisy here – while Gamergaters attacked others for supposedly engaging in arguments to raise their own reputation, they did not consider how their own actions replicate this behaviour, particularly Gjoni (and as will be discussed later, Yiannopoulos).

Gamergaters used (and continue to use) the caricature of an SJW to delegitimise feminists’ criticisms and concerns with video games\(^\text{177}\), in a similar way to Boarder Giles’ description of

\(^{176}\)The full definition continues: ‘A social justice warrior, or SJW, does not necessarily strongly believe all that they say, or even care about the groups they are fighting on behalf of They typically repeat points from whoever is the most popular blogger or commenter of the moment, hoping that they will “get SJ points” and become popular in return. They are very sure to adopt stances that are “correct” in their social circle’ (Urban Dictionary 2017).
right-wing activists, who exhibit ‘a politics of strategic, wilful misrecognition’, and are ‘willing to embrace mis-understandings’, to the extent that they circulate and become meaningful within that sphere (2017, p. 6, emphasis original). Such constructions of SJWs allow Gamergaters to validate their desire to eradicate them, referring to them and their influence as a ‘cancer’. Such ‘genocidal or eliminationist rhetoric’, depicts SJWs as a disease that could spread to others and must be eradicated (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 12). By constructing the figure of the SJW, Gamergaters made available a dehumanised, categorical target of hate that they can apply to whoever they choose.

Massanari and Chess compare the SJW to Ahmed’s feminist killjoy, failing to derive happiness from games, or gaining happiness from spoiling other’s games (2018, p. 10). In regard to the feminist killjoy, Ahmed notes a connection between being aware of injustice, and being seen as the cause of unhappiness (2010a, p. 61). Pointing out injustice ‘is to be seen as causing trouble, as making others uncomfortable’ (2010b). By talking about unhappy topics like sexism, exposing how happiness is sustained, and making visible that people do not always get along, feminists are seen to disturb the fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places (2010c, p. 582). Because video games are seen by some as escapist spaces safe from reality, people who bring real-life issues into games, such as through criticism, are seen to be destroying happiness. This bears resemblance to Huizinga’s spoil-sport – someone who ‘trespasses against the rules or ignores them’, unlike the figure of the cheat, who ‘pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle’ (1949, p. 11). In this case, the spoil-sport, the SJW, is ignoring implicit rules of the game space by supposedly ‘bringing in outside issues’. It is possible that by pointing out problems with video games and

177 Such as by depicting them with nonhegemonic bodies, making them unattractive and with an unknowable gender, and by constructing them as people ‘whose emotional and psychological fragility required trigger/content warnings and safe spaces’ (Massanari & Chess 2018, pp. 4, 7–8).
game culture, feminists are breaking Gamergaters’ magic circle, the play-space that is marked off from the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{178}

Indeed the very nature of video games as ‘fun’ may have made Gamergaters particularly hostile towards ‘killjoys’. During the campaign, Gamergaters were concerned that games journalists were working together to promote an agenda of social justice, and wrongly focusing on social and cultural elements rather than technical and play elements of games (Perreault & Vos 2016, p. 2). Condis explains that gamers have been conditioned to desire and expect computer-generated worlds to be a bodiless and apolitical experience.\textsuperscript{179} Many players believe that such ‘worlds’ exist for this experience, a refuge from reality (Condis 2015, p. 204) – and this certainly seems the case considering how players have been stigmatised as violent and antisocial. Yet it is clear that the online world and real cannot truly be separated, and social and cultural factors clearly have a role in how computer-generated spaces are constructed and navigated (Nakamura 2008, p. 3; Ringrose 2011, p. 601; Reed 2014, p. 14). Gamergaters’ outburst of hate against feminists, then, illustrates a sense of frustration – ‘instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence’, they turn to destruction (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 229). Unwilling to make new connections, to consider that there are gender issues in the video games they so love, Gamergaters aimed to silence and destroy those who open up such connections.

During the campaign, Gamergaters often suggested that SJWs were the true racists and sexists of gaming because they notice race and gender, because they are only capable of seeing the world through gender and race (Massanari & Chess 2018, pp. 7–8). In comparison,\textsuperscript{178} Evidence of the feminist killjoy is abundant on forums about video games. As mentioned earlier, Braithwaite discusses the Ji Firepaw debate as an example, where players who petitioned for the WoW character’s dialogue to be changed were labelled as troublemakers, ‘shameful’, ‘disgusting’, and ‘toxic’, by players who argued that ‘hate ruins perfectly acceptable things...for everyone else’ (2014, p. 708).
\textsuperscript{179} For example, in McKernan’s examination of how posters on NeoGAF reacted to Resident Evil 5’s problematic racial imagery, he found that players describe video games as a pleasurable space, so they are not a place for broader social issues like racism. Posters made comments such as ‘I’m getting really tired of the topic of “racism” being brought into videogames. I thought games were the one haven I had were I could escape the drone of people claiming other people being racist’ (2015, p. 244).
Gamergaters constructed themselves as egalitarian because they do not care about such issues. For example, one Gamergater tweeted that '#gamergate achieves equality by rejecting the bullshit identity politics that many people think is the way to achieve equality' (Gamergate Leader 2014). This is not to say that identity politics does not have problems – excessive obsession over identity categories is divisive – but Gamergaters believed that rejecting any discussion of gender and race is what made them egalitarian. Gamergaters’ attitudes reflect a kind of gender and colour-blindness – where differences between men and women and races are ignored 'for fear of being rude, racist, or sued’ (Oliver 2001, p. 64). Yet, it seems that Gamergaters were less concerned about being rude than expressing a desire for gender and race politics to not impact their play spaces.

Gamergater’s claims to gender blindness is evident in their construction of the ‘Vivian James’ figure. Vivian James is an anime-style cartoon character – a young pale girl with long red hair adorned with the 4chan clover, a purple and green striped jumper and jeans, and an annoyed expression. Her name is a play on the words ‘vidya games’ (Butt & Apperley 2016, p. 1), an intentional misspelling that is often used on 4chan. She was designed by 4chan’s /pols/ and /v/ boards to support The Fine Young Capitalists, the game developer group that was in conflict with Zoe Quinn (Ringo 2014). Vivian James was constructed and is used to suggest that Gamergaters are not sexist (why would they have a female character as their mascot if they were?). She is also used to police women’s gamer identities – she is a depiction of what Gamergaters consider to be a ‘right’ woman (Braithwaite 2016, p. 5), often shown making statements such as 'shut up and play’, and referring to how she does not care about social issues, but just wants to play games (Butt & Apperley 2016, p. 1-2). She is also representative of Gamergater’s negative attitudes towards women: not only is her jumper a reference to a 4chan rape meme (Butt & Apperley 2016, p. 2), but 8chan users share soft and hardcore pornographic images of her (Braithwaite 2016, p. 6). James then fulfils two functions – she is
used to defend Gamergaters from accusations of misogyny, but also illustrates their treatment of women as sex objects.

Another significant example of gender and colour-blindness is Gamergater’s creation of the hastag #notyourshield, which referred to the belief that journalists were using women and other minorities as shields against Gamergater’s criticism of ‘ethics in games journalism’ (Johnson 2014). Started by an African American user of 4chan’s /v/, Mortensen explains, '#notyourshield was supposed to show that female and non-White gamers did not want more diversity in games, stopping critics of game culture from using them as an excuse for more diversity' (2016, p. 10). That is, it was used to prove that ‘gamers were not simply heterosexual, white, cisgendered men’, and ‘as evidence that gamer culture was completely inclusive’ (Shaw & Chess 2016, p. 281-282). However, while the hastag was meant to be used by ‘people who did not identify as white, cisgendered male or heterosexual’ and did not agree with SJWs (Shaw & Chess 2016, p. 281), it was mostly used by male 4chan users using sockpuppet Twitter accounts (Johnston 2014). Evidently, gamers are not all ‘heterosexual, white, cisgendered men’, but orchestration of the #notyourshield hashtag by male 4chan users in an attempt to delegitimise claims that Gamergaters are sexist or racist certainly reinforces the notion that such people have power and leverage in game communities.

Gamergaters’ outrage at feminists’ criticism illustrates that they felt their own happiness was impeded on by their failure to enjoy games properly. Ahmed explains that the feminist’s failure to be happy is seen as destroying the happiness of others, as she refuses to ‘go along with it’ to make others happy (2010b, 2010c, p. 582, 2010a, p. 60). The feminist’s unhappiness is seen to destroy others’ happiness because happiness can be conditional – one should only be happy if others are too. However, the terms of the conditionality are unequal, as ‘those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens)...their happiness comes first. For those who are positioned as coming after, happiness means following somebody else’s goods’ (2010c, p. 578). Ahmed’s description of the feminist killjoy suggests that ‘older’ players’
happiness comes before newer players (or at least, perceived older and newer players). That is, older established connections are held in higher regard to newer connections. In this context, the perceived invaders of the gamer territory should make way for the happiness of the proponents of that territory, and their refusal to do so is what caused Gamergaters to react with hate.

Finally, Gamergaters’ hate for feminists can also derive from their perceived failure to gain happiness from video games. For Ahmed, ‘happiness does not reside in objects; it is promised through proximity to certain objects’ (2010c, p. 576). We gravitate towards objects that are thought to bring happiness, and if we share those objects with others, we share the orientation that those objects are good (2010c, pp. 576–577). This means that we are ‘correctly’ aligned when we gain pleasure from objects that are meant to cause happiness, and alienated when we do not (2010c, p. 580). Gamergaters believe that all gamers share video games as an object of love, or ego-ideal, and that criticising an element of a game can mark someone as one who is willing to change or destroy the object that causes happiness. They are seen to no longer share the orientation towards video games – that games are good. Killjoys’ apparent lack of love for the ego-ideal means they are ejected from the territory to maintain its consistency, and so treated with hate. Here we can see some overlap between the dangers, as it is Gamergaters’ clarity over what it means to enjoy games that caused them to react with hate and destruction to any criticism.

In discussing Gamergaters’ attacks on SJWs, it is difficult to avoid parallels between Gamergaters’ vitriolic harassment via online trolling and trash-talking. As discussed in Chapter One, trash talking is often considered to be an acceptable (or at least expected) part of certain games, although women are disproportionately targeted and tend to receive highly violent and sexualised remarks. Engaging in aggressive or competitive behaviour can be a
method of performing the gamer identity\textsuperscript{180}, and of marking gaming as a macho, anti-feminist territory. Jane, for example, suggests that gendered harassment is so widespread online partly ‘because men continue to hold a disproportionate share of the political, economic, and social power’, and some use ‘various forms of violence to keep women in their place’ (2017, p. 43). Similarly, Gamergaters engaged in harassing behaviour to reject feminists from the gaming territory, allowing Gamergaters to maintain the status quo.

Yet the particularly vitriolic nature of online harassment suggests that there may be other factors at play. Some researchers, for instance, have found a link between a particular set of personality traits and cyberbullying\textsuperscript{181} (Goodboy \& Martin 2015, p. 3; Jones \& Paulhus 2010). The Dark Triad includes three negative personality traits: Machiavellianism\textsuperscript{182}, psychopathy\textsuperscript{183}, and narcissism\textsuperscript{184}. These traits have been associated with lack of empathy (Jonason \& Krause 2013, p. 534), anger (Veselka, Giammarco \& Vernon 2014, p. 77), and aggressive humour (Martin et al. 2012, pp. 181–182). On the latter, Jane notes that many producers of cyberhate ‘seem to be motivated by a desire to be funny’ (2017, p. 85). Some researchers add sadism\textsuperscript{185} to the Dark Triad, an ‘abusive, explosive, derogating, and violent character type’ (Millon 2011, p. 617). Numerous studies have found links between sadists and

\textsuperscript{180} Tang and Fox found that people who are high in Social Dominance Orientation tend to feel threatened if they believe that people of a disadvantaged group are trying to compete with them. As a result, they may attempt to assert and maintain dominance (2016, p. 3). For men, the threat may be the notion that their masculine social identity is threatened, and someone who appears to be an outsider in relation to skill and demographics could threaten the gaming space (2016, p. 4).

\textsuperscript{181} For more information on the Dark Triad and cyberbullying, see Jones and Paulhus (2010).

\textsuperscript{182} Machiavellianism entails belief in manipulative tactics, a cynical attitude to human nature, and a pragmatic morality (Međedović \& Petrović 2015, p. 229). It has been associated with ‘externally oriented thinking’ (Jonason \& Krause 2013, p. 532).

\textsuperscript{183} Psychopathy has four main facets: callous affect, erratic lifestyle, and antisocial behaviour (Međedović \& Petrović 2015, p. 230). It has been ‘correlated with limited overall empathy, difficulty describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking’ (Jonason \& Krause 2013, p. 532).

\textsuperscript{184} Narcissism has three main facets: leadership/authority, grandiose exhibitionism and entitlement/exploitativeness (Međedović \& Petrović 2015, p. 229). It has been associated with limited affective empathy and difficulty identifying feelings (Jonason \& Krause 2013, p. 532).

\textsuperscript{185} Snowden explains that for Freud, sadism is the masculine ‘desire to inflict pain or humiliation on the sexual object’ (Snowden 2010, p. 95; Freud 2012, p. 42). Freud suggests that sadism originates in the unity of sexual and aggressive instincts (Heller 2005, p. 45; Freud 2012, p. 43). A more modern definition of a sadist is ‘a person who humiliates others, shows a longstanding pattern of cruel or demeaning behaviour to others, or intentionally inflicts physical, sexual, or psychological pain or suffering on others in order to assert power and dominance or for pleasure and enjoyment’ (O’Meara, Davies \& Hammond 2011, p. 523).

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trolls (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus 2014, p. 101; Craker & March 2016, p. 82; Sest & March 2017, p. 142). In fact, one study found that the associations between trolling and sadism were ‘so strong that it might be said that online trolls are prototypical everyday sadists’ (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus 2014, pp. 100–101; Craker & March 2016, p. 82; Sest & March 2017, p. 142). Of particular importance in relation to video games is the finding that sadists troll because it is fun186 (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus 2014, p. 101; Jane 2017, p. 22). Here it is worth noting that Gamergaters were invested in spectacle, success, and profit – factors that, according to Phillips, are common to both trolls and media outlets, as well as engaging in troll behaviour such as creating memes and harassing targets187 (2015, p. 68). It is possible that, considering that ‘fun’ is an integral part of video game play, gamers could be particularly prone to experiencing ‘dark triad’ personality traits.

Finding entertainment in other’s suffering can be compared to the ‘killer’ player in Bartle’s taxonomy of players, who ‘attack other players to kill them, and the more distress the more joy they experience’ (1996). To some extent, such behaviour is condoned in certain games that involve player-killing. For example, WoW’s Terms of Use states that player-killing is ‘part of the game, and not harassment’ and that ‘you should always remember to protect yourself in areas where the members of hostile races can attack you’ (Blizzard Entertainment 2012). Such behaviour of course is acceptable on PVP servers, but there is an implication here that certain players may bring such attitudes to other online spaces. For example, Braithwaite describes how Gamergaters referred to gaming experiences and used games to justify and model their behaviour188 (2016, p. 4). Indeed, Paul suggests that players engage in such behaviour because they adopt video games’ meritocratic ideology (2018, p. 2), believing that

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186 In fact, A troll interviewed on ABC’s Cyberhate series explains that ‘if you are not getting any reaction out of it, it’s joyless. It’s like smoking a cigarette without any nicotine in it’ (Cockerill 2017).

187 Phillips here is referring to ‘subcultural trolls’, that is, ‘trolls engaged in highly stylized lulz-based trolling’, rather than ‘other forms of antagonistic behaviour’ (2015, p. 21). While of course Gamergaters all varied, as a group they do not necessarily fit Phillips’ ‘subcultural trolls’, as they must self-identify as a troll, be motivated by ‘lulz’, and believe that nothing should be taken seriously (2015, p. 24–25). Gamergaters, while engaging in troll-like behaviour such as creating memes and harassing targets, do take video gaming, game journalism, and social justice seriously, and were motivated by reasons other than ‘lulz’.

188 Braithwaite refers to a post on /r/KotakuinAction that describes Gamergate as a war game. One commenter states ‘Eve PVP really does demonstrate just how formidable gamers can be as opponents, and how a common identity can really strengthen resolve’ (Piroko 2014, cited in Braithwaite 2016, p. 4).
because they are ‘special’, ‘gifted’, and have ‘earned their plaudits’, they are free to judge others (2018, pp. 124 & 139), treating them with disdain. Some Gamergaters, then, could engage in destructive behaviour in an attempt to emulate their behaviour in games.

There is a link here to the idea that video games provide an alternate reality or are separate from real life, again suggesting that the magic circle is highly bounded for Gamergaters. One reason that Jane offers for why ‘so many men calling so many women ugly, fat, and slutty on the internet’ is ‘because – thanks to the design and dominant norms of the contemporary cybersphere – they can’ (2017, p. 43). That is, platforms are designed in such a way that encourages disinhibition, including the ability to hide one’s identity; the asynchronous nature of messaging (meaning that perpetrators do not see immediate reactions); the lack of face to face or textual cues (which alter personal boundaries); viewing the online world as imaginary; and a lack of authority (Gray 2012, pp. 415–416; Suler 2004, pp. 321–324). Disinhibition can be related back to faciality. In online spaces where Gamergaters engaged in harassing behaviour, there are few faces. Since ‘[t]he face expresses a dominant outlook and mode of understanding’ (Bignall 2012, p. 78), it is possible that Gamergaters did not feel held by the norms of ‘real life’ which would determine that it is inappropriate to verbally attack women with rape and death threats. Because of the lack of engagement with the plurality provided by the visceral encounters with others, individuals’ personal views and feelings appear more infallible.

Another factor that encourages Gamergaters into destructive behaviour is collectivity. Craker and March, for example, found that ‘social motivation may be better than personality in predicting trolling behaviour’ (2016, p. 83). As well as engaging in harassment as a method of policing the gamer territory, ejecting those who do not belong, I suggest that Gamergaters engaged in such behaviour to strengthen their own ties with each other. Indeed, as Ahmed states: ‘[t]ogether we hate, and this hate is what makes us together’ (2004, p. 118). Gendered cyberhate is a form of collective entertainment. As Jane describes (2017, p. 22):
The key characteristics of gendered cyberhate such as explicit sexual references, themes of violence and coercion, schadenfreude, and the contempt/desire paradox are amplified by group dynamics. As participants vie to trash their target in the most over-the-top manner possible, they stand to accrue various benefits such as those associated with in-group cohesion, scapegoating, and taboo humour.

Trolling behaviour can provide a way to strengthen the gamer territory, not just by ejecting invaders, but by reinforcing ties amongst those who do belong in that territory. Sarkeesian describes the Internet as having ‘a boys’-locker-room feel’, ‘where men feel they can show off for one another’ (Valenti 2015). She describes this as a game of toxic masculine culture, where ‘someone will send a woman a death threat and screencap it, posting it on a forum, which in turn inspires another man to do something even worse in a horrifying game of misogynist oneupmanship’ (Valenti 2015). Similarly, Mortensen describes Gamergaters as hooligans who are highly protective of their space, attacking other teams in groups for the thrill, ruining the image of their hobby in the process (2016, p. 10). She notes that Gamergate became a bonding experience for some participants, with meetups occurring in the US, Australia, and the UK (2016, p. 11). Here there is evidence that gamers are exercising production and creativity but glorying in using that productive force to strengthen and reinforce the traditional gender territory of gamers.

Gamergate’s economy of hate was based upon hate being distributed between various figures. Hate moved from Quinn to ‘feminist killjoys’ and then to ‘Social Justice Warriors’ more broadly construed. Yet, there are numerous reasons unique to video gaming as to why Gamergaters acted in such destructive behaviour to police their territory. Cyberbullying and trolling behaviour has been linked to dark tetrad personalities, and in turn certain players
have been found to enjoy harming others in games. It is possible that, viewing game spaces and online spaces as separate from reality, such players enact the same behaviours they would in competitive play. That is, they re-enact the same behaviours, experiencing the same affects – feeling empowered. Finally, such destructive behaviour not only ejects hated others from the territory but serves to reinforce the collective, building a powerful community, which will be discussed next.

B. Power

The final danger that haunts lines of flight is power, which is a controlling power, referring to having power over something (Adkins 2015, p. 138). For Deleuze and Guattari, the danger of power is its ‘impotence’, its unproductiveness (2005, p. 228). Here, if one exerts power over a line of flight, they can try to control it and recapture it. During Gamergate, Gamergaters repeatedly behaved in harassment and aggressive behaviour in order to enact some form of control over the game industry, recapturing possible lines of flight⁴. Gamergaters utilised collectivism to enact such control, and this came about in two main ways. First, Gamergaters are an imagined community, which Anderson explains means they hold in their minds ‘the image of their communion’ (2006, p. 6), that is, they have a sense of clarity over what they share and what they expect the gamer territory to be. Second, facing the risk of deterritorialisation, Gamergaters felt hate for their supposed invaders, and this hate bound them together. By forming a collective, Gamergaters had the power to regain control over their territory, and they did so by generating an alternative narrative regarding the developments of Gamergate – one that supported their sense of victimisation and establishing

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⁴ Gamergaters’ desire to maintain control over and expand their gamer territory could also be understood through the myth of the American Frontier. This myth, Slotkin explains, suggests that that ‘repeated cycles of separation and regression’ are needed to ensure ‘an improvement in life and fortune’ (1992, p. 11). This process at its core relies on the premise that, due to unavoidable political and social differences, the uncivilised and civilised cannot coexist, unless through subjugation (1992, p. 12). Indeed, this metaphor is frequently cited in regard to technological development (Smith 1985), and is often the narrative background of numerous AAA games. For instance, in the Assassin’s Creed series, the player takes control of areas by killing Templars.
SJWs as the true antagonists of the campaign. This section examines how Gamergaters engaged in certain practices to ensure that their territory would not be impacted by others.

One key way that Gamergaters produced a tightly controlled territory was through constructing a specific kind of discourse and engaging in conspiracy theories. Gamergaters desired more control over the game industry and games journalism because they believed in Gjoni’s accusation that Quinn gained positive reviews of her game because she slept with games journalists. This accusation was believable to Gamergaters because it related to existing community suspicions about ethics in games journalism. According to the pro-Gamergate Gamergate Wiki (2016a), the contention began in 2007 when game reviewer and editorial director Jeff Gerstmann was fired from GameSpot, shortly after his negative review of Eidos Interactive’s Kane and Lynch: Dead Men. As GameSpot featured advertisements of the game at the time, some speculated that he was fired for giving a poorer review than Eidos Interactive paid for (Gamergate Wiki 2016a; Mortensen 2016, p. 6). This controversy gained significant attention because popular YouTube game commentator and critic TotalBiscuit (the same person who tweeted about Quinn during Gamergate) criticised the relationship between game companies and journalists (Mortensen 2016, p. 5). Gamergaters felt sure that the so-called Quinnsspiracy was another example of corruption in gaming – specifically, one driven by women.

Although ‘The Zoe Post’ was originally unrelated to this earlier controversy, 4chan boards /r/KotakuInAction and /pol/ turned Gjoni’s post into a story about ethical issues in video game journalism (Chatzakou et al. 2017, p. 1285). Gamergate members believed (and appear to continue to believe) that video games journalism is corrupt, and that feminists are attempting to

190 Many posts on /r/KotakuInAction still revolve around censorship, most recently regarding platforms banning eroge titles. For example, see /r/KotakuInAction (2018).
191 In 2012 this was confirmed to be the case. Gerstman explained that ‘that game was disappointing...so I said as much’. As a result, ‘the publisher of the game had threatened to pull advertising money’ (GameSpot 2012, 10:38).
192 A post to the /r/KotakuInAction subreddit in November 2018, for example, describes how games journalists are overly concerned with the social issues that surround video games (Gesualdi 2018).

There is a growing pool of evidence suggesting that several video game journalists have conflicts of interest with certain developers, with several journalists exchanging gifts, financially supporting each other, and even participating in romantic flings with developers.\(^{193}\)

It is true that game journalists and developers often have links with each other, but this is fairly normal in the game industry. As Alexander (2014a) states, Gamergaters ‘know so little about how...professional life works that they can concoct online ‘wars’ about...‘game journalism ethics,’ straight-faced’. In response to such revelations, Gamergaters utilised their collective power to enact control over the game industry, generating a territory that is closed to alternative explanations. For example, Gamergaters complained that Polygon writer Ben Kuchera supported Quinn's Patreon, as well as other developers’. In response, on August 26 Polygon changed its ethics policy so that staff members would need to disclose Patreon contributions (Grant 2014), and Kotaku banned its staff from engaging in Patreon (Totilo 2014). It is worth pointing out here that Gamergaters were not only punishing people who know Quinn, but in targeting Patreon were making it more difficult for indie developers to create games – games that challenge the domination of AAA titles that define their identity. That is, Gamergaters were strengthening their territory to prevent having to have new experiences, feel new affects, that indie developers would create.

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\(^{193}\) The Wiki (2016d) draws attention to three incidents in particular: first, Quinn's Depression Quest being given an award at IndieCade, as a chairperson on the committee is a ‘friend and lover of hers’. Fish's Fez was given prizes at two events where people financially invested in his game were judges. Last, Wu's Revolution 60 was given an Editor's Choice Award from iMore, although she is friends with editors who work there (Gamergate Wiki 2016d). The Wiki also lists numerous incidences of 'gaming writers covering friends without disclosure or transparency' (2016d).
Gamergaters also enacted power over the industry by targeting advertisers on journalism websites. On August 31, Gamergaters were angered by Gamasutra’s publishing of Leigh Alexander’s article ‘Gamers are Over’ (2014a). In retaliation, they conducted ‘Operation Disrespectful Nod’, an email campaign where huge numbers of complaints were sent to Intel, who had placed advertisements on Gamasutra. Intel removed the advertisements but later reinstated the campaign (Squirrelrampage 2016; ‘Disrespectful Noding’ 2014; Gamasutra 2014a, 2014b). Gamergaters’ harassment campaign was also undertaken to enact control over game developers and journalists by making online spaces too hostile for them to publish their material. For example, in September video game journalist Jenn Frank was harassed because she supported Quinn’s Patreon after writing on harassment of women in the tech industry (Squirrelrampage 2016; Frank 2014a). On September 4 she took leave due to the harassment (Frank 2014b). In taking powerful collective action, Gamergaters facilitated a line of destruction, strengthening their territory and ensuring that it would not be broken down by alternative explanations for why Gamergaters were banned.

Gamergaters also strengthened their territory by promoting conspiracies regarding censorship. For example, on 19 August a thread on /r/gaming/ regarding TotalBiscuit’s TwitLonger piece was mass deleted because commenters were engaging in witch-hunting (Squirrelrampage 2016; /r/Gaming 2014). The thread was also thought to prove collusion between Reddit and Quinn, as a moderator warned her about doxxing (Squirrelrampage 2016; Gamergate Wiki 2016a; el Chupacupcake 2014). Later on 18 September, a 4chan administrator banned discussions of Quinn and Gamergate, and many Gamergaters considered this to be proof that SJWs were invading their spaces (Massanari 2017, p. 335; Gamergate Wiki 2016a). The Wiki also implies that users are being banned on Steam.

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194 Further, on September 12, Gamergaters targeted game developer and feminist Mattie Brice for being friends with Quinn and being on the panel of the Independent Games Festival (Squirrelrampage 2016).

195 Comments were deleted, and some users shadowbanned (Gamergate Wiki 2016b), which means that users can browse the site as normal, but their comments are deleted and upvotes not counted (Grimmelmann 2015, p. 55). The Gamergate Wiki frames similar incidences as censorship, such as threads being deleted on 4chan’s /v/ (Gamergate Wiki 2016a).
Greenlight for simply critiquing *Depression Quest*, and that this is a form of censorship (Gamergate Wiki 2016a). The image featured on this Wiki page, clearly states, among other things, ‘[p]eople who critici[sic] her game is [sic] banned and became Anti-Feminist...Why can’t people say what they like and what they don’t like?’ (Unknown Author 2014). By repeatedly claiming that other parties were engaging in censorship and biased\(^{196}\), Gamergaters upheld the belief that they were banned from discussing the ‘Quinnspiracy’ on various websites because of collusion, preventing alternative views from destabilising their territory.

As well as accusing the game industry of collusion, Gamergaters accused many who had been harassed of lying about their experiences, partly to gain wealth\(^{197}\). In doing so, they maintained their preferred discourse of victimisation and attempted to prevent members from feeling empathy for others. For instance, like Quinn, Sarkeesian was criticised because her Kickstarter was over-funded, and she was labelled a ‘professional victim’ because she made money due to receiving abuse\(^{198}\) (Mortensen 2016, p. 12). However, the campaign was rife with contradiction, as Gamergaters also had connections to wealth. Since The Fine Young Capitalists were critical of Quinn, Gamergaters on 4chan’s /pol/ and /v/ boards contributed to their Indiegogo campaign (Gamergate Wiki 2016b). On 16 September, The Fine Young Capitalists closed its Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign at $71,000 USD (Squirrelrampage 2016; Indiegogo 2014). Further, in December, Gjoni had received thirteen thousand dollars as donations into his legal account, crowdfunded by Quinn’s attackers and First Amendment advocates (that is, supporters of free speech) (Jason 2015). While Gamergaters criticised their

\(^{196}\) For example, Jane (2017, p. 11) explains that her ‘cyberhate study has resulted in some criticism from people identifying as pro-Gamergate that my research should not be trusted because I am biased’.

\(^{197}\) This behaviour is not unique to Gamergate. Following the publishing of her book, Jane had trolls claim that the material she referred to in her work was fake or self-sent. They also claimed that she had ‘fallen for the fabrications of Anita Sarkeesian, Brianna Wu, Zoé Quinn, and Laurie Penny who are all “proven professional victims and liars”’ (Jane 2017, p. 107).

\(^{198}\) Sarkeesian gained thirty-five times the original amount of funding, and was able to employ herself full time (Humphreys & Vered 2013, p. 4).
victims for supposedly conspiring to profit from the campaign, they did not discuss their own profit mechanisms, again in an attempt to control the narrative.

While Gamergaters’ belief in conspiracies is clearly related to a desire to control their gaming territory, their complaints were not isolated to just video games, but related to broader politics. For instance, Shaw and Chess point out that Gamergaters’ interference with the 2014 DiGRA fishbowl199 were connected to government conspiracies including DARPA200 and social control (2015, p. 214). They note that many Gamergaters appeared to fundamentally misunderstand the goals of critical theories, referring to ‘Cultural Marxism’201 (2015, p. 214). For example, Mortensen points out that some Gamergaters claimed that Jews and western academics were working together to quash white men, and that politically correct video games would give the power of the western world to Jews or Islam (2016, p. 2). Conspiracy theories could have been rampant in Gamergate, and still a significant aspects of posts made to /r/KotakuInAction partly due to ‘the internet's accessibility, anonymity, and sense of inclusion’ (D. Powell 2013, p. 160), as Gamergaters clearly feel empowered by being included in a social group and believing that they knew the truth behind video games journalism and cultural shifts.

There is also evidence to suggest that the polarising beliefs in regard to conspiracies in Gamergate is an example of the polarisation that occurs through ‘filter bubbles’202 in online

199 Shaw and Chess (2015, p. 211) describe how they set up a fishbowl conversation in the hopes of facilitating an open discussion about issues in the game industry and academia that restrict research on diversity and games. They set up a public Google Doc so that anyone in the room could take notes. On the first of September, they received emails that someone was editing this document. The comments and edits altered the title to 'penis' and 'I fuck kids-op', and paraphrased the participants’ comments to refer to 'sucking cock'. Although Gamergaters were accusing academics of censorship and collusion, they engaged in such tactics themselves, warning each other to use comments instead of editing, or else the document would not be credible (2015, p. 211). Gamergaters stated that they attacked the fishbowl because 'in the last few years their agenda seems to have changed to actively fuck with the paradigm of games' (BurgersandFries 2014; Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 213).

200 DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) has been at the centre of numerous conspiracies, particular for their High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP) (Smith 2003).

201 Cultural Marxism is a conspiratorial critique of the Frankfurt School which suggests that Cultural Marxists ‘accuse their enemies of being racists, anti-Semites, homophobes, fascists, Nazis and conservative’ to implement a "politically correct" language, and ban criticism of Cultural Marxism (Jamin 2014, p. 86).

202 Filter bubbles is the term Pariser uses to describe the ‘unique universe of information’ that each person functions within online, as filters create and refine a theory of who someone is and what they will do, altering ‘the way we encounter ideas and information’ (2011, p. 10).
space. Del Vicario et al. explain that conspiracy theories become popular as ‘[u]sers tend to aggregate in communities of interest, which causes reinforcement and fosters confirmation bias, segregation, and polarization’ (2016, p. 558). Although there is a wealth of credible information available to conspiracy theorists (D. Powell 2013, p. 160), the ‘positive social feedback becomes addictive’ (Kay 2011). Further, Mihailidis and Viotty explain that these people want to find information that fits their world view – so media literacy and lack of information is not the issue (2017, pp. 449–450). Rather, Gamergaters engaged in their own information-gathering processes to find ‘evidence’ that supports their beliefs, constructing a territory wherein they would hold power over the narrative.

Indeed, there is evidence here that in the process of strengthening their territory, Gamergaters are drawing from tensions outside of video gaming. It is important to note that controversy regarding games journalism and collusion is located in a broader milieu of distrust – not just in games, but journalism in general. Scholars have waned that news journalism is becoming increasing tabloidised, becoming prone to exaggeration, sensationalisation, and misinformation (Chen, Rubin & Conroy 2015, p. 18). Social media is full of ‘false or misleading content—hoaxes, conspiracy theories, fabricated reports, click-bait headlines’ (Shao et al. 2017, p. 1). Fake news websites publish fake articles presented as real news to generate traffic and shares for ad revenue (Silverman 2015, p. 36). Indeed, when Hurricane Sandy hit the US in 2012, fake images and news spread on social media, ‘causing panic and chaos’ (Gupta et al. 2013, p. 729). The rise of ‘fake news’ has led many to become sceptical of journalists (Jankowski 2018, p. 2), and video game journalism is no exception.

Another way that Gamergaters strengthened their territory through rhetoric was through collectivising around Milo Yiannopoulos, who acted as a kind of leader during Gamergate and helped Gamergaters mobilise their hate of feminists in an entertaining way. Yiannopoulos is a conservative, right-wing British media personality who criticises ideologies that he believes to
be left-wing and authoritarian, such as feminism, social justice\textsuperscript{203}, and political correctness. He is performative and entertaining, and as Lysneky (2017) describes, the more people he insults, the more attention he gets. Yiannopoulos’ image and personality contributes to his popularity, with his ‘bleached hair, aviator sunglasses and a gaudy mohair cardigan’ (Boarder Giles 2017, p. 5), and being described as ‘[y]oung, handsome, charismatic and eloquent’ (Lynskey 2017). Yiannopoulos is a ‘provocative voice’ against political correctness culture\textsuperscript{204} because it is thought to restrict free thought and speech (Hughes 2010, p. 35), and his core message according to his literary agent is that ‘political correctness is causing more harm than good’\textsuperscript{205} (Flannery Jr 2017). Although he had no connection with video gaming and has been critical of gamers in the past\textsuperscript{206}, Yiannopoulos became one of the first journalists to cover Gamergate because he was attracted to the campaign’s attacks on feminism and social justice.

\textsuperscript{203} Yiannopoulos describes the ‘social-justice progressive left’ as hypocritical, as they are ‘lazy and entitled, and they think that tweeting is the equivalent of real-world action’ (Cox 2016).

\textsuperscript{204} Many people believe that political correctness restricts free thought and speech (Hughes 2010, p. 35), and Yiannopoulos adopts a similar view, having been banned from Twitter in July 2016 (Lynskey 2017). In 2017 publishers Simon & Schuster cancelled his $250 000 USD book deal (Morgan 2017), because he claimed in a podcast that young boys ‘discover who they are’ through relationships with older men (Garcia 2017). His literary agent appealed to free speech, acknowledging that he disagrees with Yiannopoulos on some topics, but has ‘no desire to silence his opinion’ (Flannery Jr 2017).

\textsuperscript{205} It is also worth noting that victimisation is present here. Yiannopoulos’ agent claims that him being ‘provocative and charismatic’ has ‘put a huge target on his back’ (Flannery Jr 2017).

\textsuperscript{206} In fact, Yiannopoulos explicitly blamed video games for incel Elliot Rodger’s mass murder as opposed to misogyny (2014h). He also tweeted an article from The Daily Dot, stating ‘Are online gamers as overweight, awkward, and lazy as we think they are?...writer trying to be nice but answer is yes’. While the tweet has since been deleted as Yiannopoulos has been banned from Twitter, a screenshot is available (Casey Explosion 2017). Following his Gamergate article, Yiannopoulos claimed he had changed his negative view of video games and gamers (2015). While it is not impossible that Yiannopoulos changed his mind on video games, it is much more likely that his claim is a calculated move to appeal to Gamergaters. As Lysneky describes, Yiannopoulos is a ‘professional troll’, believing in ‘[n]othing except his own brand and the monetizable notoriety that fuels it’ (2017).
Yiannopoulos’ role in Gamergate was as a creator and spreader of the above conspiracy theories. He joined Gamergate on September 1 by writing a summary of events titled ‘Feminist Bullies Tearing The Video Game Industry Apart’ on Breitbart\(^\text{207}\) (Squirrelrampage 2016; Yiannopoulos 2014a, 2014b). Here he claimed that ‘an army of sociopathic feminist programmers and campaigners, abetted by achingly politically correct American tech bloggers, are terrorising the entire community – lying, bullying and manipulating their way around the internet for profit and attention’ (Yiannopoulos 2014b). His article exhibits the main themes of Gamergate: accusations of collusion in games journalism that oppresses white men\(^\text{208}\); claims that targets of harassment are lying for profit\(^\text{209}\); and dismissal of rape and death threats as hysteria\(^\text{210}\). He also claimed that punishing people who make death threats amounts to blocking public debate\(^\text{211}\). As the movement had a lack of leadership (Massanari 2017, p. 334), Yiannopoulos ‘gave himself the job and turned into an outlaw antihero’ (Lynskey 2017). He became a popular figure for Gamergaters because he appealed to their feelings of victimisation and dislike for political correctness, as well as for his entertaining methods of harassment.

Yiannopoulos engaged in his own methods of conspiracisation, and in doing so strengthened and solidified Gamergaters’ beliefs about SJWs, making them less likely to believe outside information. Indeed, Yiannopoulos became a kind of ‘investigative’ journalist for Gamergaters, attempting to find ‘proof’ of Gamergaters’ belief in SJW conspiracies. For

\(^{207}\) A ‘hard-right nationalist [news] website’ (J. Green 2017). It has been described as pushing ‘racist, sexist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic material into the vein of the alt right’ (Elliot & Miller 2016).

\(^{208}\) ‘[T]here have been grumbles that journalists are getting too close to their subjects, and that they speak ever more insultingly about their bread and butter customers – that is, their predominantly male readers – the longer they spend in the company of feminist activists and other agitators’ (Yiannopoulos 2014b).

\(^{209}\) ‘There is a platoon of irritants in the media whose talents are vanishingly slight, but who generate column inches by the thousand for victimising innocents and manipulating their way around an over-sensitive industry’ (Yiannopoulos 2014b).

\(^{210}\) ‘They’re ungalant, obviously, but death threats are sent by bored, lonely people – or simply out of casual malice. What’s even more pathetic than taking to the internet to work off your anger, though, is using death threats to get sympathy, or to vindictively pursue your ideological opponents and see their lives destroyed with jail sentences’ (Yiannopoulos 2014b).

\(^{211}\) ‘Death threat hysteria, whipped up by campaigners who are “offended by design”, is a cancer in the public square. It is designed to stifle debate and silence critics. Conversations are hijacked. Police time is wasted. Serious journalism becomes impossible’ (Yiannopoulos 2014b).
instance, on September 11, Yiannopoulos accused Quinn of embezzling money from her game (Yiannopoulos 2014c), and Sarkeesian of lying on her police report (2014d). On September 17, he obtained a professional mailing list that game journalists used to discuss how to support Quinn (Squirrelrampage 2016; Yiannopoulos 2014e). He described this as ‘collusion’, and released the list on September 22 (Squirrelrampage 2016; Yiannopoulos 2014f). While Yiannopoulos’ claims were later found to be untrue (iFred 2014; Yiannopoulos 2014g), he gained a massive following of Gamergaters and exerted their collective power to harass victims of Gamergate even more extensively than before, furthering his career in the process. By appealing to Gamergaters’ feelings of victimisation and belief that they were being prevented from speaking freely, Yiannopoulos gained a following of people who felt victimised and disenfranchised as gamers, in turn giving them more power, more rhetoric with which to control their territory.

It is vital to note here that, again, the Gamergate campaign was a microcosm of broader cultural debates. Gamergaters’ fear of losing their identity can be linked to broader social anxieties arising from a networked society. Similarly their belief in censorship extended to government conspiracies and Yiannopoulos’ involvement in Gamergate is linked to the rise of the alt-right and recruitment for Trump’s presidential campaign (J. Green 2017). Green explains that when Steve Bannon took over Breitbart in 2012, he wanted to gain the support of gamers, who were ‘alienated’ and ‘powerful in the online world’. He recruited Yiannopoulos because he ‘showed a flair’ for manipulating ‘the alt-right...rolling tumbleweed of wounded male id and aggression’ (2017, p. 95). Bannon stated ‘I realized Milo could connect with these kids right away...You can activate that army. They come in through Gamergate or whatever and then get turned onto politics and Trump’ (2017, p. 96). Bannon’s strategy was successful –

\[212\] The Gamergate Wiki explains that the list ‘secretly communicates outside of the public eye in order to control the narrative in the gaming industry’. This is because as they wanted to give Quinn a gift, and called Gjoni a psychopath (Gamergate Wiki 2016a).

\[213\] Gamergate propelled Yiannopoulos’ career, and following the campaign he was placed in charge of Breitbart’s Tech section, gaining a million Facebook followers (Morgan 2017).
following Gamergate, in 2016 Trump appointed Bannon as his campaign chief executive (Roberts, Gambino & Siddique 2016), and later as his chief strategist and senior counsellor (Yuhas 2016). I will return to Gamergate’s connections with the alt-right in the conclusion to the thesis. For now it is important to note that while Gamergaters form a powerful collective in their own right, this power has also been harnessed by others for their own purposes.

Feeling disempowered by change in video game culture, Gamergaters formed and acted as a collective to regain a sense of power and to enact control over their territory. They spread their own theories of corruption in the game industry, and engaged in harassment campaigns to silence journalists and to restrict their ability to support indie developers who were thought to be agents of damaging change in the game industry, such as Quinn. At the same time, Gamergaters maintained their victim status by claiming that they were being censored in online spaces. Here it becomes evident that Gamergaters’ behaviour is not unique to video gaming, but to some extent linked to broader social shifts such as the development of the network society, post-truth politics, and a broader alt-right movement. Referring to Cultural Marxism and believing that political correctness is barring them from free speech, Gamergaters were drawn towards far-right figure Milo Yiannopoulos, who, encouraged by Steve Bannon, stoked their anger and frustration towards feminists and SJWs, and encouraged them to continue their destructive behaviour.

Conclusion

Video games have the capacity to generate lines of flight, along which games and players can change. However, lines of flight carry four dangers: clarity, fear, disgust, and power. In this chapter I have explained how Gamergate is a result of these dangers by locating them within Ahmed’s economies of hate and fear. First, Gamergaters felt extreme clarity about their gamer territory – who a gamer is and what a ‘real’ game is – fuelled by the AAA industry’s construction and reliance on a false ‘gamer’ demographic. Second, because they
were so sure about their gamer territory, Gamergaters felt fear at the risk of losing their territory because of more diverse players, games, and creators. Their victimisation was compounded by video games being seen as a low-brow form of entertainment, associated with moral panics such as violence – and now sexism. Third, Gamergaters exhibited extreme disgust for their figures of hate, which originated with Quinn, but spread to SJWs who they believed were aiming to destroy video gaming. Gamergaters expressed a desire for video games to be a safe refuge away from politics and feminist killjoys, and their harassment of them bears resemblance to how certain players enjoy harming others in games. Fourth, Gamergaters formed a collective to gain more power and enact control over games journalists and industry actors. They spread their own narrative of conspiracy and corruption, fuelled by Yiannopoulos. Gamergaters felt fear in the face of change (deterritorialisation), and so reacted with hate to reinforce (reterritorialise) their territory.

It is clear that Gamergaters were captured by the dangers of lines of flight, investing themselves into molar, polarising, segregative, and mobbing behaviours. The question then is why? It is true that video games are unique in that they are highly affective, which can make them become a significant part of player’s identities. Yet, they are clearly capable of enabling positive becomings. It is not that games’ affects caused Gamergaters to behave in such a destructive manner, but rather the way that those affects are channelled towards reinforcing the existing ‘gamer’ territory. Gamergaters were highly resistant to change for numerous reasons. Many felt their sense of identity and personal power derived from video games, and so felt that if video games changed, they would lose a part of themselves. Others already felt under pressure from criticisms of violence and sexism in games, increased social and economic anxiety about their identity, and the rise of feminism as juxtaposing that. As discussed in the final section of this chapter, Gamergaters’ beliefs and behaviour highly resembled that of the alt-right, and they were fuelled by the likes of Yiannopoulos via Breitbart, which heralds broader social and political discontentment. Gamergaters were
highly invested in a specific kind of gaming territory – one that privileges (mostly white and heterosexual) men as the people who ‘build this land’, whose specific game preferences should be considered of great importance, and who deserve play spaces that are ‘free from politics’. Yet, it is clear that women and others who do not fit the archaic, traditional notion of ‘gamer’ are present, creating and consuming different games that are becoming increasingly popular, and highlight the role that ‘politics’ has in gaming. Gamergaters felt that they were becoming less important in an increasingly diverse community.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to answer three research questions related to gender and video games, by using a number of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. My first research question was 'how is gender a factor in the content and production of video games?'. The poor representation of women in video games, both as characters and in terms of working in the industry, is endemic of a subculture that was developed in highly masculine contexts, a history it is struggling with as gaming culture becomes increasingly mainstream and diverse. With a history stooped in antisocial hacking subculture and wargaming, as well as a tendency to attract men who felt ostracised from society, the poor representation of women in games and their ill-treatment in the industry marks video gaming as a masculine territory. However, it is clear that women's representation in games is improving and there is a push in the industry to be more welcoming to women. The tensions that arose during Gamergate illustrate that increased diversity is challenging the gamer territory and Gamergaters have responded to this challenge by re-asserting 'binary machines that give [them] a well-defined status' (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 227).

My second research question was 'what kinds of affects do video games amplify, and can they impact player identity?'. Deleuze and Guattari understand subjectivity as part of a constantly-changing assemblage – not directly determined by biology or 'essence' (Blackman et al. 2008, p. 15). Video games are particularly strong generators of affect, which means that they have significant potential to open up players to affect and be affected. Affect also refers to what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming, ‘an increased awareness of what it is to be something other than oneself’ (Harper & Savat 2016, p. 88). Players can also experience the
related concept of transversality, moving beyond their own territory to make new connections. However, players can also be opposed to such experiences, and close themselves off. Through discussing the refrain, I explained how it is partly due to the latter attitude that AAA game developers can be reluctant to deviate from tried-and-true genres, IP, and franchises. Because many players feel that the gamer identity constitutes a significant portion of their sense of self, they can be resistant to change, and so the assemblage ends up falling back upon a predefined ‘gamer’ territory.

My third research question was ‘how do affects permeate and flow throughout communities of play?’. It is clear that gender plays a significant role in the gamer identity, an identity that is becoming an increasingly inaccurate image of who plays video games. As became clear during Gamergate, some players are also highly affected by a sense of disempowerment, both in terms of increased diversity in video gaming and in terms of wider society. This is complicated by video gaming still being considered a low-brow form of entertainment, associated with moral panics such as violence and sexism. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s dangers of lines of flight, I explored how these player’s sense of loss, both of gaming and power more broadly, contributed to their targeting of women and SJWs as figures of hate. The themes evident during Gamergate include a sense of victimisation and belief in censorship and collusion, which have links to the alt-right. This illustrates that while video game culture is unique in that it is characterised by masculinity and behaviour such as trash-talking, the campaign of harassment that occurred during Gamergate is reflective of a wider social and political problem.

I. Broader Context
Gamergate wasn’t really about video games at all so much as it was a flash point for radicalized online hatred that had a long list of targets before, and after, my name was added to it. The movement helped solidify the growing connections between online white supremacist movements, misogynist nerds, conspiracy theorists, and dispassionate hoaxers who derive a sense of power from disseminating disinformation.

(Quinn 2017)

As I suggested in the final chapter of this thesis, the extreme amounts of misogyny and vitriol directed towards women in ‘games, game culture, and the gaming industry are not unique to gaming’ (Shaw 2015, p. 2). Rather, there is evidence that Gamergate has emerged from the same conditions from which the alt-right has emerged, the latter being an ideology that ‘opposes feminism, diversity, globalism, gun control, and civil rights’ (Main 2018, p. 4), and is borne from the far-right; albeit pluralistic and loosely organised. The far-right refers to political movements that are highly socially conservative (Davidson & Saull 2017, p. 709). They tend to attack ‘the social welfare state and multicultural society’; propagate ‘a populist belief in the innate common sense and hard work of the ordinary person and a belief that simple solutions exist for the most complex problems’, and utilise political strategies that rely on mobilising resentment (Betz 1998, p. 4, cited in Deutchman & Ellison 2004, pp. 30–31). Lyons (2017, p. 2) explains that the alt-right ‘shares a contempt for both liberal multiculturalism and mainstream conservatism; [and has] a belief that some people are inherently superior to others; a strong Internet presence and embrace of specific elements of online culture; and a self-presentation as being new, hip, and irreverent’. The alt-right is primarily based in the US and has risen along with Donald Trump, but is also gaining traction elsewhere in the world.
Gamergate was significantly fuelled by Yiannopoulos’ inflammatory articles on Breitbart, which Bannon has described as ‘the platform for the alt-right’ (Posner 2016). Having noted that gamers were ‘smart, focused, relatively wealthy, and highly motivated about issues that mattered to them’\(^{214}\) (J. Green 2017, p. 94), Bannon, as noted in Chapter 7, recruited Yiannopoulos to draw in angry gamers and transfer their interest to politics and Trump (2017, p. 96). In fact, conducting research into alt-right groups on Reddit, Squirrell (2017) presents a taxonomy of trolls, including ‘4chan shitposters’, ‘anti-progressive gamers’, ‘men’s rights activists’, ‘anti-globalists’, and ‘white supremacists’. They gather around a central identity and platform – the ‘The_Donald’ subreddit – where they ‘share a communal hatred’ of liberalism (in this context liberalism refers to the ideology of liberalism in the US) (2017). Many elements of Gamergate, such as disgust for women, racial and sexual diversity, and SJWs, belief in conspiracy, and general hatred and frustration parallel the central tenets of the alt-right movement.

As for why there has been an increase in the alt-right, Davidson and Saull explain that the far-right (from which the alt-right is borne) ‘articulates angry, resentful grievances across a range of social layers in response to the transformations, instabilities and dislocations of neoliberalism’ (2017, p. 708). In short, neoliberalism is a strategy where ‘state managers, politicians and employers...transfer power in the workplace from the forces of labour to the holders of capital’ (Davidson & Saull 2017, p. 708). Such transfer has occurred via ‘financial deregulation; deindustrialisation; and privatisation of public assets’ (Koulouris 2018), resulting in ‘the working class in the West [becoming] increasingly fragmented and disorganized’ (Davidson & Saull 2017, p. 711). While Davidson and Saull point to ‘blood and nation’ as a form of collectivity that many far-righters turn to (2017, p. 711), here

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\(^{214}\) Bannon noticed that gamers and online communities were a powerful collective due to WoW. In the 00s, Bannon was vice chair and ultimately CEO of Internet Gaming Entertainment, a Hong Kong based company that engaged in gold farming on WoW. Gamers were angry at the practice and ‘flooded gaming boards with anti-Chinese vitriol to protest farmers and their sponsors’ (J. Green 2017, p. 59).
neoliberalism’s disempowerment has led to certain gamers to collectivise under the Gamergate movement.

It is also notable that neoliberalism also relies on a meritocratic ideal – one that puts pressure on people to succeed and simultaneously feel a lack of empathy towards others. Verhaeghe suggests that many people model their identity partly on the neoliberal free-market message that ‘everyone can be perfect; everyone can have anything they want…as long as you try hard enough’ (2014, p. 148). Paul similarly suggests that video games encourage as ‘if [players] try hard enough, work more, and push the buttons better, they will succeed’ (2018, p. 61). Of course, it is not necessarily possible to have everything one wants as long as they work hard enough, in real life and in video games. Yet people still believe it, Verhaeghe explains, and as a result mistrust each other, lose a sense of responsibility, and ignore social obligations (2014, pp. 170 & 214). As for games, Paul suggests that players are discouraged from considering structural issues and from empathising with other people (2018, p. 61). Hence there are some parallels between video game ideologies, which often present a neoliberal ideal, and a broader sense of disenfranchisement that has come about partly due to belief in a neoliberal society.

Many people, while feeling disempowered, still believe in a meritocracy. The result, Paul suggest, is that rather than ‘focus on structural problems and systems’ people tend to focus on individuals, a trend that is evident in Brexit, criticism of the Black Lives Matter movement, and Trump’s presidential campaign (2018, p. 11). Part of the tension here is that alt-righters feel there must be an outsider to blame for problems, and rather than blame the true causes of their disempowerment, they search for easily identifiable targets. In response to structural issues, people attempt to understand the world via sameness and difference, which occurs through the rigidification of categories such as gender, race, and class. Hence, for Koulouris, alt-righters believe that white masculinity is pitched against ‘feminists, liberals, Jews, and left-wing academics’ (2018, p. 6). Gamergaters’ targeting of SJWs as feminist killjoys, are similar in
that they are a gamer-specific iteration of blame for disempowerment under a supposedly meritocratic system.

The focus on women as the enemy of men who are victimised is also emblematic of the alt-right. Reflecting on a debate he had with Yiannopoulos and the resulting vitriol he received from alt-right supporters, Koulouris notes that such abuse aimed 'to an overwhelming extent, at my sexualised, objectified, and feminised body' (2018, p. 3, emphasis original). Further, Yiannopoulos argued that ‘feminists and other minorities” have now become socially and culturally hegemonic', so men are at a ‘structural disadvantage'; ‘women use their sexuality as a weapon’, and that ‘western civilisation…was the result of male genius’ (2018, pp. 3–4). While it is difficult to discern if Yiannopoulos actually believes such statements, or simply repeats them to gain notoriety, such beliefs are illustrated in other far-right and alt-right groups. For example, groups in the Manosphere overlap to a great extent with the alt-right (Nicholas & Agius 2018, p. 36), feeling 'a profound sense of loss, of displacement, of betrayal, and...anger’ due to ‘the chaotic result of the Sexual Revolution and the dictates of feminism’ (Ironwood 2013). Indeed, Kimmel notes that the foundation of masculinity has changed, causing many men to feel ‘cheated, unhappy, and unfulfilled’ (2013, p. 15). Yet instead of challenging ‘traditional notions of manhood’, many men react with outrage against women. Similarly to how in Gamergate, Gamergaters felt invaded and disempowered with the increase of women in video games, some men and alt-right groups feel disempowered by feminist movements.

Yet another similarity between Gamergate and the broader alt-right is the combination of populism and conspiracy theories, which, Clarke explains, are popular partly because populists are often anti-elitist and anti-intellectual (2002, p. 132). Remember here that Gamergaters often demonstrated a belief in Cultural Marxism, and attacked gaming scholars for attempting to interfere with video games. Again, there are links to Trump. Discussing Bannon and Trump’s relationship, Green (2017, p. 17) explains that ‘[i]n speeches and in ads,
[Trump] channeled Bannon’s conspiratorial worldview by implicating Clinton in a dark web of moral and intellectual corruption that encompassed the entire global power structure. Gamergaters’ belief in conspiracy and corruption parallel the alt-right. My point here is not to say that Gamergate was simply an iteration of the alt-right. Rather, the long-standing tensions surrounding gender in video game culture makes it particularly fertile ground for alt-right ideologies to be adopted and spread.

II. Response

In relation to the above discussion on the rise of the alt-right, it is evident that not only are Gamergaters feeling disenfranchised with change in gaming ‘culture’, but that on a broader scale men are feeling attacked. Indeed, there has been a recent influx of work on the Manosphere, its connection to the alt-right, and harassment of women, such as Ging (2017) and Marwick and Caplan (2018). Yet academics should be careful not to simply criticise these people. As discussed throughout this thesis, video games are frequently dismissed as a lowbrow media form, and gamers are often labelled as antisocial, unhygienic, and disconnected from reality. When Gamergaters felt threatened by diversity, it presented very real threat to their identity, one that they may feel is often criticised. In turn, they reacted with vitriol in defence. In the same vein, it is important that effort is made to understand why people who hold alt-right sentiments are feeling under threat, and, while condemning their behaviour, consider strategies to deradicalize them. Still, gaming is clearly a particularly problematic area where such views are bred and promoted, and so I recommend three responses in relation to video games: diversity in games, diversity in the industry, and methods of dealing with harassment and sexism.
A. Diversity in Games

'Diverse teams just make better games...like Bioware'


More diverse games facilitate more diverse play experiences, which can encourage players to undergo becomings, and in doing so, allow them to gain understanding of what it is like to be something other than oneself, and encourage a greater level of empathy for others. For example, Prey designer Ricardo Bare explains that he chose to make the space station’s chief of security, Sarah Elazar, an Ethiopian Jew because he wanted to ‘learn about someone different to himself, and give players the chance to do the same’ (Kerr 2017). Further, the kinds of stories that are told and what perspectives they take contribute to diversity. Life is Strange creators Raoul Barbet and Michel Koch note that video games can be ‘thought-provoking’, increasing player’s awareness of ‘important subjects and real world issues’, as well as encouraging them to develop opinions on such issues (Barbet & Koch 2016). With increased exposure to games that contain diverse characters and themes, it is possible that playing games could make people more empathetic towards others.

Many game developers are aware that increased diversity is desirable. Yet one issue in increasing diversity is that game companies are primarily concerned with making a profit. As Shaw points out, financial arguments are more persuasive for companies than political or ethical ones (2015, p. 220). It would appear, then, that we should make a financial argument for diversity – as Schiappa describes, we should ‘[f]igure out how to live with capitalism’, by examining how ‘the profit motive can be channelled into progressive directions’ (2008, p. 166). Games with diverse characters and themes can be and often are financially successful. For example, Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment 2016) currently features twenty-nine playable characters, of which fourteen are female, and has a range of nationalities and body
types\textsuperscript{215}, and in April 2017, reached 30 million players (PlayOverwatch 2017). \textit{Detroit: Become Human} features various themes such as obedience and rebellion; gender roles; sexual exploitation; domestic violence; drug and alcohol addiction, and, most prominently, discrimination against androids, which has strong correlations to racism. A PlayStation exclusive, \textit{Detroit} sold one million copies in two weeks, the fastest that any Quantic Dream game has sold (Handrahan 2018). Diverse characters and themes are therefore not a hindrance to game sales.

At the same time, Shaw warns against using market logic to persuade companies to produce diverse representations because it produces a \textit{pluralistic} version of representation, which reductively separates people into categories and can result in caricatures (2015, pp. 90 & 149–150). This would be a reterritorialisation, whereby characters are deterritorialising, breaking apart barriers in their diversity, but reterritorialising by creating new territories (categories). That is, developers could create faciality machines, which depend on reductive binaries such as ‘male-(female)’ and ‘white-(black, yellow, or red)’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 292). In doing so, they would be homogenising diversity into recognisable categories, which could then capture players into a simplified and limiting mode of understanding. It is also important to note that representation is not \textit{everything} – the popularity of mobile and casual games amongst a diverse audience, particularly women, suggests that diversity in \textit{kinds of games} is also a significant factor that draws in more varied players. Diverse representation is important, but so is diverse kinds of play.

As for how to increase diversity in game characters without producing caricatures, instead of adopting a neoliberal view and asking who they should represent to be economically successful, game producers need to avoid using pre-existing molar categories to define representation. Shaw suggests that game makers should ask themselves why they have

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{215} Characters are of numerous nationalities, including Chinese, Brazilian, and Egyptian. Characters also range in body type, from curvy (Mei and Roadhog), to muscular (Zarya and Doomfist), and androgynous (Moira).
\end{footnotesize}
represented who, and why they have ignored others (2015, p. 221). Similarly, Olofsson and Adolfsson from the game developing company King suggest that game designers should decide on personality traits and narrative before considering gender, ethnicity, body type, and culture. Following this, designers should ask themselves whether they have created a stereotype and why (2017). I also suggest that game developers and marketers reflect on the impact that character design has on video game culture. For example, depicting female characters as highly sexualised contributes to the idea that games are for boys and impacts the sexual objectification of girls in broader culture (Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, p. 40).

Rather unsurprisingly, another suggestion for how to make more diverse games is simply by having more diverse teams (Zackariasson & Dymek 2017, p. 129). Game companies must demonstrate a willingness to include diverse characters in their games, as well as address molar attitudes and behaviours towards gender and race in the workplace.

Finally, video game critics can be quite negative and demonstrate all-or-nothing thinking in assessing whether a character design is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ representation, not allowing for the complex nature of meaning-making – as discussed in Chapter Three, there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ representation. Instead of being overly critical, Schiappa points out that we should ‘Praise the good stuff’, ‘celebrate socially productive representations’, as ‘if one cannot point to a more progressive direction, then one literally will go nowhere’ (2008, p. 165). This is a sentiment that Dragon Age writer and designer David Gaider shared at PAX Aus in 2017. Reflecting on the popularity of the series, which is partly due to its diverse depictions of sexuality, Gaider notes the importance of positive feedback on character design. He explains that including diversity in games can lead to players complaining about making games political and representing minority groups poorly or not enough, so game companies are ‘incentivised to do nothing’. Positive feedback helps convince marketing teams to include
diversity and also encourages the developers to keep producing such work\textsuperscript{216} (2017). Players, journalists, and academics alike should make effort to mitigate the highly negative, critical, and vitriolic comments that game companies receive, and instead celebrate attempts to foster diversity.

B. Diversity in the Industry

It is clear that the game industry struggles with gender diversity, with 75\% of industry workers being male, and 76\% White/Caucasian/European (Weststar et al. 2016, pp. 10 & 8). As Zackariasson and Dymek claim, '[t]he first challenge for inclusive game development is the lack of diversity in games on the market'. More diverse teams, they suggest, make more diverse games, and this means that the industry needs to include people with a variety of characteristics (2017, pp. 128–129). If the game industry is going to insist on making molar assumptions about gender, it is worth pointing out that a more diverse workplace, particularly in leadership positions, could not only encourage developers to create more diverse games, but also increase productivity. Women have been found to procrastinate less than men (Nguyen, Steel & Ferrari 2013, p. 395), and there are tentative biological/psychological claims that women are better than men at multitasking (Mäntylä 2013; Kalenko & Foster 2016). Further, summarising four decades of research, Powell finds that women often rate higher than men in behaviour that makes effective leaders\textsuperscript{217}, and lower than men in behaviour that detracts from effective leadership\textsuperscript{218} (2013, p. 262). It is also important to bring women into the game industry via non-STEM jobs – marketing/PR

\textsuperscript{216} For more information on this Q&A session, see (Cole 2017).
\textsuperscript{217} They list five behaviours here. Idealised influence-attributes are displaying attributes that encourage pride and respect. Idealised influence-behaviours are communicating 'values, purpose, and mission importance'. Inspiration motivation are 'optimism and excitement' about the project's 'importance and attainability'. Intellectual stimulation is encouraging followers to use new perspectives. Individualised consideration is focusing on developing and mentoring employees as individuals (Eagly et al. 2003, cited in G. N. Powell 2013, p. 260).
\textsuperscript{218} They list two behaviours here. Passive management refers to leaders waiting for issues to be brought to one's attention before intervening, while '[l]aissez-faire leaders avoid taking responsibility for leadership altogether' (Eagly et al. 2003, cited in G. N. Powell 2013, p. 260).
specialist Lauren Clinnick points out that the game industry must more clearly articulate to women that non-STEM jobs like business and marketing are needed and desired (Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 283). Increased gender diversity in game companies could help mitigate some of the struggles of game development – as will be explained below. More broadly, increased diversity across the board, including race, will enable game companies to foster a more inclusive working environment, and produce more interesting games.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are now numerous initiatives that aim to encourage women into the game industry and STEM-related subjects. These include Women in Games (2018), Girl Geek Academy (2018), Girls Make Games (LearnDistrict 2018), Google’s Change the Game (2018), and many others. I believe that such initiatives are positive in that they increase awareness of the need to encourage more women into these industries and make it more accessible for many women. Yet these initiatives still uphold molar categories, dividing men and women. As Deleuze and Guattari state, ‘[i]t’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective’ (2005, p. 215). That is, attempts to criticise the molar categories of men and women, and, more specifically, what they stand for (men being good at video games and STEM subjects, while women are not), are fine. But there is a risk that, by dividing men and women in the attempt to criticise such categories, divisions are simply being repeated. For example, El Sabaawi (2017) found that when white men saw women and minorities being treated differently at a game company, they believed they were being treated unfairly. So conceiving identity in terms of molar categories is problematic and remains part of the cause of the problem, rather than its solution.

219 Here it is also important to consider women in games journalism. Reflecting on a recent finding that of the major games websites, 75% of articles are written by men, ex-Eurogamer and current Guardian games journalist Keza MacDonald (2018b) discusses the barriers that female games journalists face in the industry. She points out that the few women in leadership roles is partly due to games media being male-dominated in the past, and also because women are less likely than men to apply for jobs they are not fully qualified for (MacDonald 2018b).
Further, it is not just that more women need to enter the game industry, Dewinter and Kocurek (2017, pp. 67–68) explain, but that ‘women enter and are driven away’. In Chapter Two I mentioned initiatives to support women already in the game industry, such as the Working Lunch Mentorship Programme (Knowles et al. 2017). Such initiatives are productive. Yet there is a need for change on a deeper level. Rather than simply increasing the number of women in the game industry, there is a need to prevent the homogenous masculine from dominating workplaces, and to dismantle prohibitive work practices. One issue of course is harassment – women often experience ‘nauseating chauvinism’ in the games industry (Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 346) and this has been made clear in numerous publications (Game Developer 2012; Johnson 2013; Dewinter & Kocurek 2017). One way that game companies could improve conditions is by setting and abiding by standards of behaviour.

Other factors that make the game industry largely masculine include ‘the sickening “death march” of crunch time’, and ‘the objectionably low pay scale’ (Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 346). Indeed, ‘[c]runch has been prevalent in the games industry for decades’, Kate Edwards explains (Milner 2018), and little has changed over time, with Red Dead Redemption II workers reportedly working over 100-hour weeks (Goldberg 2018). Crunch time is typically unpaid, and indie studio co-founder Tanya Short believes it ‘is the result of poor planning and bad management’, as it is often planned into development schedules (Schreier 2015). It is worth remembering here that because of pre-existing molar gender roles, long working hours and crunch time disproportionately impact women (Prescott & Bogg 2011; Night Sky Games 2012; Bulkley & Miller 2013; Weinberger 2016). It is a factor that makes the game industry less family friendly (Huntemann 2010), and because of social and cultural expectations of women in terms of child-rearing and domestic work, less female friendly. In fact, one AAA developer describes how for a month, he would sleep at the office every second day, returning home ‘in time to see my wife and kids for a couple of hours before bedtime’ (Schreier 2015).
Such a working schedule is only possible when supported by someone performing domestic labour in the family home.

Another vital area where the game industry can improve is in attempts to decrease unconscious bias and encourage inclusion. Ochsner summarises that ‘judged on different standards, denied status as experts, and dismissed, women have to work harder to be recognized as game industry professionals’ (2017, p. 16). Speaking in regard to games journalism, MacDonald (2018b) advises editors to attempt to uncover unconscious bias by asking themselves questions about the status of women in their business, including whether many women apply for jobs at their company, how their company presents itself, and if it makes an effort to engage with women. Game companies could engage in similar reflection to find sources of unconscious bias and consider how to address them. Part of a companies’ attempt to resolve unconscious bias can include company-wide drives to increase inclusivity. Such attempts, El Sabaawi (2017) explains, should take care to make it clear to employees why there is a drive for inclusivity on a philosophical level, rather than simply trying to meet quotas. She suggests that to foster a company mindset that celebrates diversity, leaders can focus on teamwork and creativity, such as by running a workshop that addresses biases rather than simply identifying them (2017). Such efforts, by attempting to avoid categories and quotas and fostering a sense of cooperation amongst workers, could help tackle molar binaries and us-vs-them attitudes.

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220 ‘[I]f you never get any women pitching your site, or applying for your jobs, why is that? Does your staff/about page make your company look like a welcoming environment for women, or is it a sea of beards? Do you read female writers - and if not, why? Do you talk to women - readers, writers, whoever - about whom they are reading, or do you only talk about work with other male writers and editors? Do you read widely when you’re looking for new freelance talent, or do you stick within the specialist games media comfort zone? Do you make the effort to reach out, or do you expect people to come to you?’ (MacDonald 2018b).
C. Harassment and Sexism

When women choose to work in a game company, in games journalism, or play online with people they do not know, they are taking on a risk – one that men do not. As MacDonald (2018b) states in relation to games journalism, ‘[y]our male colleagues might take some shit over a review, but nobody’s going to threaten to rape them’, a sentiment shared at PAX AU by games journalists (Gilroy et al. 2017). Indeed, for Dewinter and Kocurek this is the key issue in the game industry, stating that (2017, pp. 67–68):

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.

While women and minorities have become more involved in the game industry, they are underrepresented and frequently experience discrimination and harassment. I argue that companies must take measures to demonstrate acceptable behaviour and be willing to penalise people who engage in harassing behaviour. As developer Patrick Harris states, ‘[w]e’re the ones with the power to change it…if we’re not going to change it, who the fuck is?’ (Frank 2016). When game companies do not respond to sexual harassment, they are implying that such behaviour is acceptable (Fox & Tang 2016, p. 14). Companies have the ability to direct or channel desire. They must reflect on their own practices, what beliefs form those practices, and consider what they could do differently.
Painter-Morland and Deslandes argue that if corporations are going to be held accountable, we must acknowledge ‘that all business decisions are value-laden’ (2014, p. 87). Game companies have at times demonstrated that they place significant value in PR. For example, consider Gamergaters’ ‘Operation Disrespectful Nod’ campaign. Gamergaters targeted numerous games journalism websites because they published works by people speaking out about Gamergate, such as Leigh Alexander on Gamasutra. As a result, Intel removed their advertisements from the website. Targets of Gamergate condemned this decision, as Intel had stopped supporting venues that allowed people to be critical (Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, p. 39). Less than a week later, Intel apologised and later invested $300 billion into a diversity programme to increase its women and minority employees (McWhertor 2015, cited in Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, p. 39). They also worked with the International Game Developers Association to double the number of women in game development by 2025 (Crecente 2015, cited in Busch, Chee & Harvey 2016, p. 39). Such responses are laudable, but could be dismissed as tokenistic given that Intel gave in to Gamergaters’ demands. Companies related to video gaming must acknowledge that business decisions communicate a certain set of values, and so that they play a role in endorsing or renouncing hostile player’s attitudes.

Another example of a problematic value prioritisation in the industry is in the way that players are instructed to interact in online platforms. Busch, Boudreau and Consalvo note that games such as WoW and LoL tend to make ‘rather vague, positive claims as to how they think their respective communities should engage’ (2016, p. 184). They use terms including ‘safety, fairness, fair play, and sportsmanship’, which, the authors argue, is problematic for three main reasons. First, it suggests that such language is enough to guide players as to what behaviour is clearly ‘culturally and morally acceptable’ (2016, p. 184). Second, it makes players recognise and regulate toxic behaviour, rather than the game company. Third, many of these rules are ‘intended to avoid legal liability and to protect both companies’ assets, intellectual
property, and business models’, rather than protect the players (2016, p. 185). Aside from these points, there is also an assumption here that players will even read the Terms of Service. These factors remove the onus from game companies to outline and police what behaviour is acceptable, instead allowing some players to engage in harassing behaviours while others attempt to enforce their own rules. These companies are placing value in their own assets, rather than the experiences of players who come into contact with their games. Given the economic force of ‘non-gamer’ game players, it seems clear that there is a real financial (and ethical) incentive to prioritise positive player interaction in game design.

As part of reflecting on their values, game companies must consider what they can do differently. While the 2015 UN report on Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls points out that ‘responsibility begins with users’, for example, it notes that this responsibility extends to ‘publishers, providers, and developers who define the digital world’ (Tandon & Pritchard 2015, p. 48). Some game companies have taken a leadership role. For example, Overwatch struggles with sexism, racism, griefing, and match throwing, and as a result Blizzard implemented a ‘strike team’ of ‘game designers, support staff, analytics people’, and a group that ‘fights cheating and hacking’ (Grayson 2017b). Blizzard also enforced increased penalties for behaviour including abusive chat and harassment, resulting in players being silenced, suspended, or banned (Lylirra 2017). More recently, Blizzard has implemented endorsements in Overwatch, allowing players to reward each other for taking on leadership roles, being a good team member, and demonstrating sportsmanship (Blizzard Entertainment 2018). In LoL, Riot Games uses a system called Tribunal, which collects cases of bad behaviour and presents them on the official forums, where players can vote on whether the behaviour is acceptable (Hodson 2013). While the latter example seems to place more responsibility on players, it does provide an opportunity for players to influence the developers.

Some argue for strategies that appeal not to ethics or morality, but logic. For Paul, video games are based on a meritocracy, which teaches ‘those at the top that they have earned
both their place and the ability to judge others’ (2018, p. 124). Hence, he argues that the very system that competitive team-based games are based upon encourages such behaviour, and that restricting or banning players will have little effect (2018, p. 124). Perhaps in such a situation, appealing to competitive player’s desire to win could be of use. For example, LoL staff found that displaying certain messages on loading screens, such as ‘their teammates would perform worse if they harassed them after a mistake’, led to 11% less use of offensive language (Hodson 2013). While it would be more desirable to encourage such players to recognise that engaging in harassing behaviour can be extremely harmful and is simply not an acceptable way to act, appealing to their desire to win could help in the short-term. Similarly, on the company side, Priebe (2017) points out that not only is harassment a horrible experience for players, but it also affects companies’ bottom line, as players who experience toxicity are much more likely to quit than those who do not. Since non-trollers are a larger demographic than trollers, he explains, game designers should build games focusing on the good people (2017). Appealing to in-game logic could be a useful strategy to curb harassment.

It is also important to remember that, like Gamergate, gendered harassment in video games is related to ‘real life’. For example In 2017 a pro LoL player was suspended after he screamed at and threatened his girlfriend during a Twitch stream, resulting in a police visit (Myers 2017). Gendered harassment is not isolated to game spaces, but is part of a broader social and cultural problem. As Ochsner explains, ‘[m]any of the Tweets in the #1ReasonWhy conversation are not tied to a specific context such as industry conferences or the workplace but rather speak to a general culture of sexism that caters to, and legitimizes, heteronormative male fantasies’ (2017, p. 15). There is also the issue of digital harassment not being taken seriously in wider society. Often this is because the abuse is not seen as real, and legal systems are unclear (Stewart 2016). As Quinn states (2017):
I appealed for help through official channels, early and often. I spent countless hours documenting everything that was happening in reports to tech platforms, only to be shrugged off. I talked to lawyers and took out restraining orders, only to find myself beating my head against the brick wall of a legal system ill-equipped to handle the idea that anything real happens on the internet.

In addressing the extreme sexualised and misogynistic vitriol that victims of Gamergate were targeted with, there must be an acceptance that (1) game communities are not isolated from the ‘real world’, and many of the problems that become evident in video gaming are in fact related to broader social issues, and (2) that digital harassment can have serious consequences, and failing to address them seriously simply enables harasser’s behaviour.

It is important that we do not simply dismiss gendered harassment as something that is expected in or isolated to online spaces, including games. Not only is it clear that online harassment does real harm (Gardiner et al. 2016; Fox & Tang 2016), but online threats are not isolated from ‘real life’. Cyberstalkers have tracked women to their homes, sometimes leading to sexual assaults (Reed 2014, p. 91). Before Gamergate, someone on 4chan shared Felicia Day’s personal information, photos of outside her house, and her licence plate. A fan broke into her house, leading her to state ‘I will never feel 100 percent safe in my own home again’ (2015, pp. 247–249). During Gamergate, many more women had their contact information and residential addresses, and that of their families, posted online. Finally, such vitriolic statements and extreme behaviours are reflective of a very real group of people in society. The men who threaten to rape and murder female players, journalists, and industry workers are consuming and repeating highly sexually violent sentiments, and with the rise of alt-right groups it is evident that such beliefs are not isolated to a tiny minority.
III. Future Research

In short, it appears that there is improvement in women's representation in video games, and generally an increase in their roles in the industry, partly fostered by indie development. It is this diversity and change that contributed to tension during Gamergate, coinciding with a general rise in alt-right sentiment. As programmer John Sietsma predicts, ‘I think we’re going to start seeing more diversity in the business structures and motivations of the game industry generally, with the indie community leading the way’ (Ruggill et al. 2017, p. 32). Still, it is important for game designers to avoid the trap of what Schiappa calls representational correctness, the belief that a representation can be: accurate, authentic and true of a social group: pure in liberatory possibilities; and innocent in avoiding offense or insult to the depicted social group (2008, p. 9). Further research could consider methods that game designers use to foster innovation and creativity in game and character design.

Of course, women still experience chauvinism in numerous spaces in game culture, whether online, in-game, or in the industry. With this in mind, future research could investigate not only personality reasons for online trolling and harassment221, but broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Paul’s (2018) work on video gaming’s meritocratic ideology is highly illuminating, for example. The rise in alt-right sentiment should be explored as a result of the lack of community and destabilisation of identity associated with networked society. Specifically, researchers could examine why gender is such a major feature – as Soderman points out on the dismissal of feminised casual games, ‘This is not just about gamer culture, but structural issues activated by capitalism and patriarchy’ (2017, p. 53). Future work could examine methods of deconstructing such structures and mitigating the feelings of disenfranchisement that come from virtual forms of engagement.

221 For work on links between harassment and trolling with the dark triad/tetrad, see Buckels, Trapnell and Paulhus (2014); Goodboy and Martin (2015); and Craker and March (2016).
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