

10-20-2016

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Recommended Citation

Rogers, Matthew J., "'Vidya games are for nerds like us': Identity Deployment in the GamerGate Controversy" (2016). *Master's Theses*. 1010.
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**“Vidya games are for nerds like us”: Identity Deployment in the
GamerGate Controversy**

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B.A., Saint Michael’s College, 2014

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

At the

University of Connecticut

2016

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2016

APPROVAL PAGE

Masters of Arts Thesis

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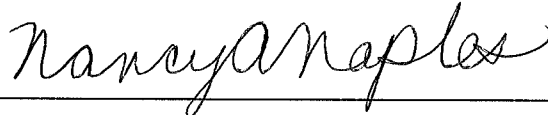
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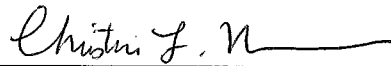
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Introduction

In February of 2014, video game developer Zoe Quinn released *Depression Quest*, a web browser game based on the subjective experience of depression. The game received several positive reviews from gaming journalists. On August 16th of the same year, Quinn's ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni published "the Zoe post" on his blog, in which he accused Quinn of having sex with a reviewer from the gaming website *Kotaku* in exchange for a favorable review. Users of the website 4chan quickly seized on these accusations. Quinn was harassed and one of her social media accounts was hacked. She was subsequently doxed—a practice of posting personally identifiable information online—and subjected to death and rape threats.

This harassment later coalesced into an online movement under the hashtag "#GamerGate". The hashtag was first used by actor Adam Baldwin when he tweeted a link to a pair of videos attacking Quinn. Quinn's detractors, including Baldwin, viewed the allegedly unethical behavior of Quinn and the game reporters as a scandal, thus "Gamergate." The hashtag quickly spread across various social media outlets, culminating in a sustained online movement ostensibly aimed at policing corruption in video game journalism (Chess and Shaw 2015). In spite of the fact that women represent a growing proportion of videogame consumers, #GamerGate is simply the latest event in a series of attacks on women in gaming. In 2007 game developer Kathy Sierra was subjected to death threats, and in 2012 feminist video blogger Anita Sarkeesian proposed a web series about sexist themes in video games that was met with an equally hostile response. However, these events represent only the most extreme instances of violence against women in videogames, and this violence frequently is the culmination of intense, but largely invisible, online organizing.

I use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1995; van Dijk 1997, 2001; Fairclough and Wodak 1997) of the chat log of an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) closely linked to the website 4chan in order to examine how these acts of violence come to be understood as legitimate responses to criticism. An IRC is essentially an instant messaging service, and the chat log is a record of all messages sent on this IRC over an 18 day period. In particular, drawing on the concept of identity deployment (Bernstein 1997), I examine how identities are mobilized by dominant and privileged groups to delegitimize critiques, justify hostility towards perceived threats, and reaffirm privilege.

The concept of identity deployment refers to the idea that identities can be deployed as a form of collective action (Bernstein 1997, 2008). Previous research on identity deployment has looked at the lesbian and gay rights movement (Bernstein 1997; Creed and Scully 2000; Dugan 2008), white racist groups (Schroer 2007), and the neo-burlesque movement (Peluso 2005) among other topics. This body of literature primarily examines how marginalized groups deploy identities in an effort to gain recognition and acceptance from society more broadly. I build on this literature by examining how a privileged social group collectively deploys identities to maintain culture and legitimize continuing privilege. I argue that this process is explicitly gendered; the IRC users draw on elements of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) as well as sexist tropes to stigmatize critics and legitimate their privileged position. In doing so, the IRC users draw on an unmarked, privileged identity, in contrast to the efforts of marginalized groups to gain recognition for new identities. The IRC users claim this unmarked identity not only through narratives of legitimacy, and entitlement, but also through narratives of feminist invasion and through their framing of the opposition. This research will address the following questions: how are identities mobilized to resist cultural change and

legitimize privilege? And what role do identities play in legitimizing extreme collective action such as violence?

I begin by discussing the current literature on identity deployment and my contribution to this literature. I then discuss the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and aggrieved entitlement, which are key elements of identity deployment in the GamerGate movement.

Literature

Identity Deployment

The political identity model (Bernstein 1997, 2002, 2005, 2008) argues that there are three analytic levels of identity in social movements that should not be conflated. First, *identity for empowerment* refers to the ways that social movements create collective identities and the sense that political action is achievable. For instance, Gotham's (1999) study of an anti-expressway movement illustrates how identities can empower communities. The members of this movement built an identity which stressed the importance of the local community. This shared identity helped foster links with civil rights groups and, ultimately, convince the authorities of the community's cohesion and value and stop the construction of the freeway.

Second, identity can be a goal of social movements. This analytic level is concerned with the ways that social movements challenge stigmatized identities and social categories, and pursue recognition for new identities. For example, identity is a goal of drag performers, who use their performances to temporarily deconstruct dominant categories of identities (Rupp and Taylor 2003). Identity is also a goal of the Hapa movement—a multiracial movement of people of part Asian descent—which seeks to gain recognition for a new Hapa identity (Bernstein and De La Cruz 2009).

Third, identities can be strategically deployed by social movements. This analytic level, also known as *identity deployment*, deals with the ways that social movements express collective identities such that the categories, values, and practices of individuals become subject to debate (Bernstein 2007; Bernstein and Olsen 2009). Identity deployment is a collective strategy, and as such the identities of individuals within a movement may or may not actually line up with the identities that are strategically deployed (Bernstein and Olsen 2009). I engage with this third analytic level to understand how identities are mobilized in the context of the GamerGate movement.

Using the lesbian and gay rights movement as a case study, Bernstein (1997) argued that social movements strategically employ identities, either celebrating differences from the majority or suppressing these differences, depending on the structure of the organization, access to the state, and types of opposition. Identities can be deployed through a number of mediums, including printed materials (Dugan 2008) and clothing (Creed and Scully 2000; Rupp and Taylor 2003). Identity deployment also helps to explain strategies used by neo-burlesque dancers to challenge dominant images of beauty (Peluso 2005), by feminist activists to shift organizational identities (Gilmore and Kaminski 2007), by nationalist movements to challenge dominant notions of citizenship (Beissinger 2002; Sorek 2008), and within industries to establish new professional identities (Rao et al. 2003).

According to the political identity model, identity deployment strategies operate on a continuum from education to critique. “Identity for education” strategies seek either to challenge the dominant culture’s perceptions of the minority or to gain legitimacy by focusing on uncontroversial themes. For instance, Schroer (2008) found that white racist groups used identity deployment tactics—facilitated by the internet—in an effort to dispel negative

stereotypes about their beliefs and attitudes. On the other hand, “identity for critique” strategies actively confront the values and practices of the dominant culture. For example, gay rights activists in 1970s New York consistently refused to dress in accordance with mainstream culture, using their identity to critique gender roles and norms (Bernstein 1997).

While identity deployment has primarily been considered in the context of marginalized groups deploying identities to educate or critique the majority group, the deployment of identities on the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) had very different goals. Identity deployment in this context was aimed at resisting cultural change and maintaining the status quo. They pursued this goal by creating internal narratives of legitimacy and entitlement to justify their behavior and also by mobilizing external identities—that is, assigning identities to Quinn and her supporters—to dehumanize and discredit their opposition. I argue that this deployment of identity falls outside of the education/critique continuum suggested by the political identity model. Other scholars have noted identity deployment strategies that move beyond the education/critique continuum (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Loeske and Cavendish 2001; Gotham 1999; Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; Swaminathan 2001; Pozner and Rao 2006). For instance, identity deployment strategies can be used to challenge and deconstruct existing categories of identities (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009; Rupp and Taylor 2003), promote activist mobilization and social change (Loeske and Cavendish 2001; Gotham 1999), decrease competition between specialist firms (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; Swaminathan 2001), and partition scarce resources within industries (Pozner and Rao 2006). Further, according to Bernstein (2002, 2008), whenever a movement deploys identities, the movement invites what she terms an “identity contest,” in which identities are deployed by various contentious groups facing off over an issue. In these identity contests, movements frame and reframe the identities of opponents as well as

those they sympathize with. These contests are significant, as an organization that is framed in a negative light can lose credibility, resources, or access to power-holders (Haines 2006).

However, research to date has not examined how privileged groups strategically deploy identities for the purposes of preserving culture and delegitimizing critiques. The GamerGate movement was driven by individuals who are not marginalized within the videogame community, and actually have been and continue to be privileged by the video game industry. Video games are largely produced with men as the target audience, and men still make up the bulk of video game producers and developers (Makuch 2014). By focusing on identity deployment as a strategy of dominant groups, I offer new insight into the concept of identity deployment more broadly. I also shed light on the role of identity in perpetuating inequality.

Masculinity

The users of the IRC draw heavily on elements of hegemonic masculinity. The theory of hegemonic masculinity was first articulated by Raewyn Connell in *Masculinities* (2005). Connell draws on Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony—which describes a system of power in which the dominant group maintains its influence through the production and manipulation of culture rather than physical coercion—in order to explain how systems of gendered power and inequality are produced and reproduced. This cultural production legitimizes and conceals hegemonic power, giving it the appearance of being both natural and immutable. The invisibility of hegemonic power contributes to its stability, although it can be disrupted by outside forces, or even disrupt itself (2005:37).

Connell's theory is predicated on the idea that there is not one monolithic masculinity, but multiple masculinities that vary across time, space, and social location. Hegemonic

masculinity, then, refers to the culturally dominant image of masculinity in a given time and place. This ideal is established in relationship to both femininity and other subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is normatively assumed to be middle class and heterosexual (Connell 2005: 143-163). However, hegemonic masculinity also varies across contexts. Performances of masculinity that are valued in, for example, the video game community, may not be equally valued in society at large. Hegemonic masculinity retains a number of recognizable features, but is likely to have context-specific emphases, such as computer proficiency in technology fields (Cooper 2000).

Because hegemonic masculinity is a taken-for-granted privileged identity, the users of the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) do not explicitly identify as hegemonically masculine. Rather, they draw implicitly on elements of hegemonic masculinity, such as rationality, dispassion, prowess, and violence. I argue that the users of the IRC draw on hegemonic masculinity even through their narratives of victimization. For example, they do not cast themselves as helpless victims of the system, but rather as “lone wolves” struggling against it.

Video games, as both an industry and pastime, have historically been dominated by men. Various scholars have established that although women represent an increasing share of the gaming audience, the “gamer” is still discursively understood as male (Valkyrie 2012; Wajcman 2004). The term “gamer” has its origins in 1980s toy marketing, when video games were first marketed specifically to boys. During this period, the majority of video consumers were male. With the rise of “geek” culture in the 1990s and 2000s, an increasing number of both men and women identify as gamers (Salter and Blodgett 2012) but women are still obliged to undertake a process of “degendering” in order to gain equal access to this male-identified space (Wajcman 2004). Wajcman (2004, 2009) argues that gaming, and technology more broadly, have

entrenched cultures of masculinity that requires women to shed major aspects of their gender identity to be accepted into these spaces. While women currently represent nearly half of all video game consumers, the video game industry—that is, the development and production of video games—remains largely male dominated (Chess and Shaw 2015). In 2014 women comprised only 22% of the industry, but 48% of video game players (Makuch 2014).

It is important to note that the nature of my data does not allow for inferences about actual bodily identity. However, performance of identity online takes place exclusively through discourse (Markham 2005). Thus, I contend that discursive representations of gender are significant regardless of the actual bodies behind the keyboards. Furthermore, although video games ostensibly offer a site where gender identities are flexible, gamers tend to maintain online gender identities consistent with their off-line identities (Daniels and LaLone 2012; Valkyrie 2012; Peck et al. 2011). Individuals on the IRC identify themselves with user names, which vary from the clearly masculine—PEANESS—to the more feminine—for example, cuteGamrgrll. For the purposes of this research I focus on the way these users perform gender through discourse. I argue that regardless of choice of username, the users of the IRC overwhelmingly perform masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is not without conceptual difficulties. One key issue is that hegemonic masculinity is all too frequently treated as a fixed masculine type characterized by aggression, independence, and dispassion (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:840). Indeed, the concept of multiple masculinities more broadly is commonly treated as a list of mutually exclusive categories. This trait based theory of masculinity then becomes a tautological justification for men's behavior. As Connell and Messerschmidt write, "Men's behavior is reified

in a concept of masculinity that then, in a circular argument, becomes the explanation (and the excuse) for the behavior” (2005:840).

I argue that hegemonic masculinity can be strategically deployed to achieve collective goals. Elements of hegemonic masculinity were invoked on the IRC through discourses such as rationality, prowess, and violence. In this case, the deployment of hegemonic masculinity plays a key role in the legitimization of violence and continuing privilege. In addition, I investigate how hegemonic masculine identities are deployed for the maintenance of culture and the preservation of the status quo. Conceptualizing hegemonic masculinity in this way is useful as it avoids reducing hegemonic masculinity to a static list of traits and locates hegemonic masculinity firmly in an enacted process, related to doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The GamerGate controversy is an ideal context for this research, as video games are increasingly a site of contested masculine dominance and resistance by a dominant group to the perceived intrusion of a feminine/feminist Other (Braithwaite 2013; Salter and Blodgett 2012). Tactics of cultural production and exclusion are coupled with very real instances of violence as the dominant group seeks to maintain its hegemonic position. I argue that the Gamergate controversy provides a rich site for understanding how identity functions as a mechanism of gendered dominance in contemporary society.

Aggrieved Entitlement

The angry anti-feminist sentiments expressed in the GamerGate controversy are by no means unique. Indeed, they bear a close resemblance to what Michael Kimmel calls *aggrieved entitlement* (Kimmel 2013; Kimmel and Kalish 2008). Kimmel (2013) argues that the era of unquestioned masculine privilege has ended. This leaves some men feeling both that they have been denied what is rightfully theirs and bitter towards those who have “taken” their privilege

away (Kimmel 2013). There are several extreme examples of men acting on aggrieved entitlement in recent history. In 2009, George Sodini opened fire on a women's aerobics class, leaving behind an online chronicle of his anger at women because they would not have sex with him. In 2014, Elliot Rodger went on a shooting spree in Isla Vista, California for similar reasons. Rodger complained bitterly in a YouTube video made shortly before the shooting that women would not sleep with him and that other men were having more sex than he was. These men felt that they were *entitled* to women's affection, and if they did not receive it, they felt equally entitled to take revenge.

I build on the concept of aggrieved entitlement by exploring how it is invoked to create a shared identity and narrative of victimization that is used to legitimate violence in the context of the GamerGate controversy. As with hegemonic masculinity, I argue that aggrieved entitlement is not fixed within individuals but rather can be strategically deployed in the pursuit of collective goals, such as the preservation of culture and maintenance of the status quo.

Data and Methodology

Introduction to the data

The individuals harassing Quinn publicly associated themselves with 4chan, an English language imageboard website. When 4chan was launched in 2003, it was primarily intended for the discussion and sharing of anime and manga images. The website has since expanded and now has discussion boards for dozens of topics. Each of these boards comprise a discussion of one topic, and consists of numerous threads, which are linear sequences of posts. A post consists of text, images, or a combination of the two, but contains no identifying information.

Early on in the controversy, 4chan users posted vitriolic content about Quinn on the main 4chan site. However, this content was banned by 4chan site moderators on the grounds that it violated 4chan's rules of conduct. 4chan users abandoned the 4chan main site in favor of an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) to avoid censorship by the moderators. This IRC was officially distinct from 4chan and moderated by sympathetic individuals. As such the users of the IRC were able to discuss Quinn without repercussions. Individuals on the IRC associated themselves with various 4chan boards, such as /v/ (4chan's board for video games) and /pol/ (/pol/itically incorrect, 4chan's board for discussing news and current events) and used words and phrases endemic to 4chan (such as the use of the word fag for group identification). While users of the IRC continued to argue against Quinn on 4chan and other social media outlets after the IRC began, the IRC was the primary site of coordination and organization of attacks against Quinn.

The data I use come from the chat log of the #BurgersandFries Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRCs are functionally equivalent to an instant messaging service, and allows users to exchange text based messages in real time. The channel name, Burgers and Fries, is a joke based on the five journalists Quinn was accused of sleeping with. Five Guys Burgers and Fries is a fast food restaurant. The chat log, then, is a record of every message sent on the Burgers and Fries chat room from August 18th, 2014, to September 6th of the same year. The chat log was kept by one user, OtherGentlemen. As such, the record captures all points when OtherGentleman was online and logged into the IRC. This accounts for the fact that August 20th, 2014, is missing from the log—OtherGentleman was not online that day. Each message in the log is dated and time

stamped¹. As such, any gaps in the record are immediately obvious—a gap in the record leaves a corresponding gap in the timeline of messages.

Quinn infiltrated this IRC and began tweeting excerpts of the log to demonstrate the malicious intent of the organizing. IRCs are anonymous and open access, and as such Quinn would have needed only to know the channel name, which was readily accessible, to access the IRC. 4chan users claimed that the excerpts she provided were taken out of context, and subsequently released the full record of the IRC in a document dump². The log consists of over 1,800 pages of text, which I analyzed in its entirety. The log begins on August 18th, 2014, and concludes on September 6th, 2014. This log is the most comprehensive record of the early GamerGate discussion and, further, is the most complete record of the organized attacks against Quinn available. A limitation of the data is that, due to the anonymity of the IRC, I cannot guarantee that any given speaker is not Quinn or one of her supporters. However, according to Quinn, her involvement in the IRC was limited to lurking, which refers to witnessing discussions without actively participating. Further, because the data is so extensive, I think it unlikely that Quinn or her supporters represent a substantial percentage of the discourse. Nevertheless, this is a limitation for the study.

I include the user names of all speakers in the IRC log. While these names do allow me to distinguish between speakers, they are not connected to any personal identifying information, and as such are completely anonymous.

¹ The messages include the date and time, down to tenths of a second.

² A document dump is a hostile response to a request for information, in which copious amounts of unorganized information are released at one time. The volume and nature of the information allows the person or group releasing the data to publicly comply with the request for information while simultaneously obscuring details within the document or documents.

Method

For my discourse analysis, I draw on the critical theory of discourse (Fairclough 1992, 1995; van Dijk 1997, 2001; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). This methodological framework emphasizes that power relations are discursive and that discourse does ideological work. Critical discourse theory also holds that discourse is historical and cannot be divorced from context (Fairclough and Wodak 1997), an emphasis shared by other theorists of discourse (Foucault 1978). Accordingly, I seek to understand discourse on the IRC in relationship to existing debates about masculinity and feminism in American society.

Most importantly, critical theory of discourse is concerned with the ways discursive structures “...enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society” (van Dijk 2001:353). I argue that the discourses engaged with on the IRC I study are directly related to broader anti-feminist discourses in society. So while my research is directly focused on a controversy within video games, I believe this case offers insight into the enactment of gendered violence more broadly. I also maintain that discourse is not simply “talk”, but instead has real-world consequences (Naples 1997, 2003).

For my coding process, I draw on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1965, 1967, 1968; Charmaz 1983, 1990, 1996). Because of my initial unfamiliarity with the research site I came in with no *a priori* explanations for what was going on. In qualitative grounded theory, codes emerge from interaction with the data, and accordingly I began with a round of line by line coding and memo writing to capture these emergent themes (Charmaz 1996). Through this process I derived a series of analytic categories and refined my research questions. I refined these analytic categories through subsequent rounds of focused coding and memo writing. I coded the data using NVivo software.

Constructing Narratives of Victimization and Feminist Invasion

Aug 21 19.35.50 DeusVult: I always wanted to make a story game based in a future where SJ³ is all there is, you would play the roll (sic) of a white cis man trying to survive...

Over the past 30 years, men's right's activists have built an anti-feminist narrative around the notion that men are under threat, bolstered recently by the internet (Kimmel 2013). Burgers and Fries users drew on this discourse, expressing outrage over what they perceived as a widespread effort—spearheaded by feminists, and the mainstream gaming media—to push them out of their traditional spaces and silence their displeasure. In addition to this narrative of a feminist invasion, the users of the Burgers and Fries IRC (Internet Relay Chat) characterized the influence of feminism as a conspiracy, enforced through active censorship. In this section, I discuss how narratives of victimization and feminist invasion were used to justify hostile behavior towards Quinn, her supporters, and feminists more broadly. I also argue that the IRC users construct these narratives in a manner consistent with hegemonic masculinity.

“How powerful are these people?”— Conspiracy and censorship

A key element in the narrative of victimization that the IRC users constructed was the concept of censorship and the pervasive idea that there was a conspiracy to protect Quinn and advance a feminist agenda within video games. These sentiments were most strongly expressed near the beginning of the controversy, when posts and threads attacking Quinn were being actively removed from 4chan and other social media sites by site moderators⁴.

Aug 18 18.33.30 anonymoose_ 4chan, the last bastion of free speech, has fallen

³ Social Justice

⁴ Because the IRC is officially distinct from 4chan and other social media sites, the IRC was not subject to the same censorship.

anonymoose_ asserts that 4chan, “the last bastion of free speech,” has bowed to the pressure of feminism and started censoring its users. In doing so, anonymoose_ also portrays the IRC as being a refuge for those users of 4chan who still wish to speak freely. However, the IRC users did not cast themselves as helpless victims of this conspiracy, but rather as warriors struggling against it. In particular, they cast themselves as struggling against the SJWs—Social Justice Warriors, a derogatory term those espousing ideals of equality in video games and society more broadly.

Aug 23 13.07.29 Agent_Cooper:

These leading women in the SJW clique are financial, sexual and emotional (sic) abusive in a society that allows it as a whole. It needs to stop, this agenda/conspiracy is an open secret and we have the tiniest slither to act on it.

“Slither” is a reference to a browser game in which the player controls a snake-like avatar which consumes colored pellets in order to grow. The object of the game is to grow the largest avatar on the server. Larger avatars are faster and more powerful—thus, having “the tiniest slither to act on it” means that they have the smallest and weakest vehicle for pursuing their goals. This reference also suggests the perceived power of the SJW agenda—those who oppose it are comparatively quite weak.

Conspiracy theories were rampant in the IRC and generally focused on the attempts of SJWs or the mainstream media to silence or demonize those who opposed Quinn and SJWs more broadly. Two particular incidents stand out. First, both Quinn and game developer Phil Fish—a supporter of Quinn—reported that they had been targeted by hackers during the course of the controversy. The IRC users did not believe this, and were largely convinced for several days that

the attacks had been false flag attacks—in other words, they believe that both Quinn and Fish had faked the hacks themselves and released useless or false personal information to turn the public against Quinn’s detractors, including the Burgers and Fries IRC.

Aug 22 00.58.25 maximumtacos:	biggest thing to hammer is THE ONLY THINGS THAT GET "HACKED" ARE THINGS THEY CONTROL 100%
...	
...	
Aug 22 00.58.33 maximumtacos:	AND NO ONE POSTED THIS SHIT ANYWHERE BUT ON *THEIR* OWN SHIT

For the IRC, the single biggest piece of evidence that that hack was false was first that the information that was accessed was accessible only to Quinn and Fish and second that the information, once accessed, was not widely disseminated. This led the Burgers and Fries users to conclude that the attacks could only have been carried out by Quinn and Fish. The IRC users were quick to believe that Quinn and Fish were actively and unjustly trying to demonize the IRC.

Second, on August 23rd, the IRC users seized on the idea that the name Zoe Quinn was an alias, and that her true name was Chelsea Van Valkenburg. This began as a way to prove that Quinn was privileged—and thus a hypocrite for espousing social justice views—because a \$1,000 name-based scholarship for the Van Valkenburg family exists.

Aug 23 09.25.08 Agent_Cooper:	"Any Van Valkenburg or one of the half a dozen variations on that name" can get \$1,000 to go to college anywhere. And even the illustrious Harvard University has several name-based scholarships"
Aug 23 09.27.03 HotPockets:	jesus fucking christ
Aug 23 09.27.13 Silver 2:	America's weird
...	

Aug 23 09.28.02 Agent_Cooper:	They have connections with Goldman Sachs
Aug 23 09.28.08 Alazred:	So it's literally the most privileged (sic) who are complaining about "oppression",eh. (sic)

However, the discussion quickly spread beyond the availability of a scholarship. The users of the IRC began to characterize the Van Valkenburg family as a powerful Jewish dynasty in the United States.

Aug 23 07.15.28 <W334800>	Chelsea VanValkenburg
Aug 23 07.15.31 <W334800>	>BURG
...	
Aug 23 07.15.54 <W334800>	zionists dude
Aug 23 07.15.56 <Agent_Cooper>	Dutch Jew kek

Proponents of this theory argued that the Van Valkenburg family maintained powerful contacts with banking and political institutions.

Aug 23 18.42.32 Agent_Cooper:	There are Van Valkenburgs presently have links with Goldman Sach and NY State DA's Office
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This was presented as an explanation for why no legal action had been taken against Quinn during the course of the controversy.

While constructing a narrative of victimization at the hands of the system may seem to run counter to the construction of a hegemonic masculine identity, I argue that the Burgers and Fries users actually create the narrative in such a way that it draws on hegemonic masculinity. Rather than portraying themselves as helpless victims of the system, they cast themselves as lone

wolves fighting against it. Thus the victimization is actually a rationale for violent retaliation, which is certainly consistent with hegemonic masculinity.

In this section, I discussed how the users of the IRC use narratives of victimization and censorship to both justify hostility towards Quinn and her supporters and to cast themselves as struggling against oppression. I will next discuss how the IRC users furthered this narrative of victimization by drawing on the idea that feminism and feminists were actively trying to push the IRC users, and men more broadly, out of their rightful place.

Feminist Invasion

Concerns over the rising power of feminism have become more prevalent with the growing influence of the internet (Kimmel 2013). This sentiment was prevalent on the Burgers and Fries IRC. There was a strong sentiment that the prevalence of SJWs on the internet was relatively new and becoming stronger with the passage of time.

Aug 18 22.30.22 PEANESS	everythin (sic) is politicized now and all
Aug 18 22.30.44 badumpata	SJW are going to gain ground more and more as years pass by
Aug 18 22.30.56 PEANESS	those types used to stick to their own blogs on the net

PEANESS asserts that SJWs “used to stick to their own blogs on the net,” which implies that now feminists have moved beyond their usual territory, which is echoed by badumpata’s statement that SJWs will continue to gain ground. Users frequently invoked the idea that feminist women were actively pushing men out of their traditional hobbies.

Aug 19 00.16.18 DeusVult	these types of women are systamicly (sic) destroying anything men come together over
...	

Aug 19 00.17.19 PEANESS

there are good women in tech, they just
aren't in the media

Aug 19 00.17.24 PEANESS

and there aren't very many of them

DeusVult states that “these types of women”—SJWs—are systematically destroying “anything men come together over.” PEANESS moderates the statement by noting that there are good—presumably non-feminist—women in tech, a statement which is quickly qualified further by the statement “there aren’t very many.” DeusVult’s statement in particular invokes a sense of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel 2013)—men are being pushed out of their rightful place by feminists and feminism. The users of the IRC drew on this collective narrative of aggrieved entitlement to justify attacks against Quinn. There was a strong sense that men were being robbed of their happiness by feminism.

Aug 26 08.13.39 PZT:

I hate SJWs so much because not only
have they robbed me of my escapism

...

Aug 26 08.13.52 PZT:

They've robbed me of the ability to have a
voice for myself

PZT refers to video games as his escapism, in the possessive sense. The fact that women and feminists are encroaching on that space threatens him, and makes him “hate SJWs.” PZT expresses a sense of entitlement to video games, and anger at those who supposedly took it away. The anger and concern over feminist invasion expanded beyond video games to society as a whole.

Aug 18 19.28.29 Atavistic: Problems do not exist in a vacuum. The complete co-opting of society by violent feminists who think they can get away with ANYTHING without reprecussions (sic), is a serious taint on American society. This issue must be allowed to be discussed, and the extraordinary censorship that has occurred further proves that this is indeed a serious issue.

Atavistic asserts that “problems don’t exist in a vacuum”—referring to Quinn’s allegedly unethical behavior—and argue that the real issue is the “complete co-opting of society by violent feminists who think they can get away with ANYTHING...” By stating that these feminists “think” they can get away with anything without repercussions, Atavistic implies that they are wrong. In turn, this suggests that the Burgers and Fries users are the ones to administer those repercussions. As with the conspiracy discourse, the narrative of feminist invasion and aggrieved entitlement functioned as a means to justify vitriolic attacks against Quinn.

Discourses of Legitimacy and Entitlement

While narratives of victimization and feminist invasion were key elements in justifying the IRC user’s hostility towards feminists and feminism, these discourses functioned in tandem with discourses of legitimacy and entitlement. Video games have historically been male-dominated, women now represent nearly half of all video game consumers. However, the users of the Burgers and Fries IRC were dismissive of female gamers, feminist critiques of the industry, and the significance of video game’s changing demographics. The IRC users deployed elements of hegemonic masculinity to create a discourse of legitimacy and entitlement. This discourse was used to justify their attacks against Quinn, their criticism of video game journalism, and their privileged position within the industry. The users of the IRC worked to establish that their criticisms did not stem from sexism but rather from legitimate grievances. The IRC users also cast themselves as fighting for a noble cause, referencing ideals of justice and transparency in gaming journalism. Additionally, discourses of computer competency and authentic concern for gaming were used to establish the Burgers and Fries users as real gamers, as compared to both SJWs and normies (anyone who does not frequent 4chan). By establishing themselves as experts, the IRC users seek to legitimize their critiques of gaming journalism and

justify their privileged position within the industry. Throughout these discourses, the users of the IRC draw on discourses of logic and rationality, which are consistent with elements of hegemonic masculinity.

In this section, I discuss how the IRC users drew on discourses of legitimacy and entitlement to cast themselves as not sexist and, moreover, as struggling for transparency and honest discussion. These narratives were intended to make their grievances more legitimate. I will also discuss how the IRC users cast themselves as the rightful occupants of the gaming industry through what I call the “real gamer” discourse. I argue that throughout these processes the IRC users draw on hegemonic masculinity.

“If you’re competent, I could care less what you are”: Denying accusations of sexism

The attacks against Quinn that sparked the GamerGate controversy were rapidly and widely labeled as misogynistic. The users on Burgers and Fries were just as quick to deny this charge, maintaining that Quinn’s gender had nothing to do with their dislike for her. They specifically distanced themselves from those they termed male rights activists (MRAs). The term MRA was used to encapsulate all individuals on the internet who the IRC users viewed as the real sexists. This discursive distancing allows the IRC users to establish themselves as the “good guys,” in comparison to the true sexists (Bridges 2014). The Burgers and Fries users did not necessarily deny that sexism existed in pockets on the internet, but they certainly did not view themselves or their own actions in those terms. Rather, the IRC users considered MRAs to be an obstacle to their ability to further the campaign against Quinn.

Aug 22 07.00.37 Balrog-was-here:	MRAs are killing our arguments
Aug 22 07.01.06 foTTS:	Yeah, they need to learn that we've hit the gold
Aug 22 07.01.20 foTTS:	and that the girl's the least of our concerns

Balrog-was-here complains that “MRAs are killing our arguments,” which simultaneously establishes that MRAs are not part of the IRC and casts the IRC’s objections to Quinn as fundamentally logical. That is, Balrog-was-here suggests that the IRC’s arguments would be accepted more widely if not for the MRAs. foTTS agrees, and argues that Quinn is “the least of our concerns”. Users of the IRC frequently insisted that the issue at hand was journalistic integrity and not Quinn. This emphasis furthers the narrative that sexism played no part in the attacks.

The Burgers and Fries users argued that complaints of misogyny in gaming were simply intended to deflect criticism of Quinn’s actions. Users commonly insisted that qualifications—and not gender, race, or sexuality—were the most important determinant of success in the gaming industry and technology more generally.

Aug 23 06.29 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries	I don't know, this is anecdotal, but in IT we're pretty good on talent and experience, My last boss was a black lesbian with a criminal record and experience in telecom systems.
Aug 23 06.30 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries	on top of that one of our most talented networking members was a women
Aug 23 06.30 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries	and an engineer a trans-sexual
Aug 23 06.30 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries	people who were hired because of their skillset.
Aug 23 06.30 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries	not because of some bullshit quota.

For the IRC users, diversity was a concept to ridicule, because for them it was synonymous with promoting people regardless of merit. According to this logic, they were not sexist, because they would happily accept qualified women in gaming. However, they did not perceive Quinn or essentially any other SJW as qualified. The IRC users constructed the SJW as irrational,

hypocritical and unskilled, and this discursive identity was used in turn to justify their exclusion from the video game industry. The users of the IRC were keen to present the issue as a personal one—Quinn had behaved unethically. They perceived claims of misogyny as an attempt to distract from Quinn’s alleged misconduct.

Aug 23 20.50.11 rd0952: wanna know one of the superpowers of feminism and sjws?

Aug 23 20.50.20 rd0952 the ability to take any attack on an individual
Aug 23 20.50.24 rd0952: and make it an attack on a gender

As far as the users on Burgers and Fries were concerned, sexism was not a systemic or pervasive issue, but rather the realm of isolated MRAs. Misogyny and sexism were seen as simply buzzwords employed by unskilled women attempting to garner an unearned place in the gaming industry.

Aug 24 00.28.04 foTTS: Diversity is better than sjw any day

Aug 24 00.28.08 ZoeTheBurgerFiend: Why does it NEED to be diverse?

Aug 24 00.28.25 DarkHiero: Because echochamber

Aug 24 00.28.26 Neur0mancer: hey look if you're trying to make the games industry more deverse (sic) then why the fuck are you only reporting on indi (sic) games of the people you are fucking?

Aug 24 00.28.35 ZoeTheBurgerFiend: I mean, if you're competent, I could care less what you are

ZoeTheBurgerFiend’s emphasis on competency is an extension of the collective narrative of rationality in the Burgers and Fries IRC. To them, an emphasis on diversity for its own sake is illogical and should be eschewed. This emphasis on rationality is consistent with elements of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005:164). By deploying this identity the IRC users seek to

simultaneously gain credibility by identifying with hegemonic masculinity and discredit their opposition as illogical.

“Doing god’s work”—Fighting for integrity and transparency

In addition to casting themselves as logical and rational rather than sexist, the IRC users also cast themselves as fighting for the ideals of transparency and integrity. While *physical* violence is most frequently associated with hegemonic masculinity, I argue that this discursive construction of struggle also draws on hegemonic masculinity. The Burgers and Fries users draw on this “warrior” identity to justify and legitimize their attacks on Quinn.

Aug 26 08.08.09 PZT:	goddamnit this shit has me so worked up I ended up staying up until 7 in the morning over this
Aug 26 08.08.15 Farlan:	TFYC ⁵ - I got to go see a nurse now. I punched the fridge really hard, and it won the fight. I'm sorry if you didn't realize I got this angry.
Aug 26 08.08.16 PZT:	I barely ate anything today because there was no time
Aug 26 08.08.26 PZT:	doing god's work guys
Aug 26 08.08.29 PZT:	keep on keeping on

Farlan discursively proves his devotion to the cause by invoking his use of bodily violence. PZT also draws on the physical body, stating “I barely ate anything today because there was no time.” Users of the IRC were actively engaged in spreading their message of rampant corruption in video games journalism beyond the IRC to the 4chan main site and other websites. This statement emphasizes the importance the IRC users ascribed to defeating Quinn. This importance

⁵ The Fine Young Capitalists (TFYC) is a self-described radical feminist group intended to organize production initiatives for under-represented labor in media. TFYC became involved in the GamerGate controversy when its design contest was criticized by Zoe Quinn. The group’s Indiegogo page was subsequently hacked and briefly shut down. 4chan users began supporting the contest with financial contributions to combat their negative media image.

is reinforced by PZT's statement that the IRC is "doing god's work." The goal of this struggle was to rid gaming of SJWs and feminism more broadly.

Aug 26 10.28.17 PaperDinosaur: We might not see a revolution, but we may see gaming feminism die off

Aug 26 10.28.23 PaperDinosaur: The fanatics have lost a lot of supporters

Aug 26 10.28.31 PaperDinosaur: the "gamers" have found common ground with feminists

The concept of revolution in video games, or at least doing away with feminism in video games was common in the IRC. PaperDinosaur argues that a complete revolutions is unlikely, but that "the fanatics"—SJWs—have lost a lot of support. The Burgers and Fries cast themselves as fighting to preserve video games against an assault from feminists and others who would ruin it. The IRC users also repeatedly attempted to couch their demands in terms that were both reasonable and defensible through the struggle narrative.

Aug 26 11.18.29 anonCo: ... We just want a peaceful explanation. We want transparency. We want justice.

Aug 26 11.18.44 Thidran: anonCo: Lulz.

Aug 26 11.18.56 anonCo: I know we'll never get it.

anonCo states that the goals of the IRC are transparency and justice, but concludes that they will never get either of those. Statements of this type served not only to make the goals of the Burgers and Fries IRC widely appealing and defensible but sets up their opposition as opposed to transparency, justice, and peaceful explanation. However, discourse of this type was not intended to convince individuals outside the IRC of the justice of their cause. Rather, this identity work was aimed inwards, justifying and reinforcing the correctness of the IRC's actions.

In this section so far, I have discussed two discourses through which the Burgers and Fries users attempted to establish the legitimacy of their grievances. They cast themselves as

logical and rational, in comparison to the true sexists elsewhere on the internet, and drew on a narrative of righteous struggle against corruption. I now turn to the discourse of the “real gamer,” through which the IRC users attempted to establish that they, and not Social Justice Warriors, were rightfully entitled to opinions on the video game industry.

Real Gamers

One of the key identities deployed by the Burgers and Fries users was that of the “real gamer.” In this narrative, the IRC users draw on themes of technological competency to legitimize their concerns for the industry and discredit their opposition.

Aug 18 21.15.55 vanu:	do real gamers even play this indie shit?
...	
Aug 18 21.16.13 vanu:	I have a feeling it's mostly gamur girlz who think the graphics are cute
Aug 18 21.16.17 Alzred:	Well, Japanese indies are pretty good.
Aug 18 21.16.23 vanu:	japanese games are top tier
Aug 18 21.16.26 vanu:	and challenging
Aug 18 21.16.28 Big_Boss:	no thing as "real gamers"
Aug 18 21.16.42 vanu:	ok, well, gamers with skill.

For instance, in the above quote vanu distinguishes between real gamers and gamur girlz—a disparaging term used to refer to girls who play video games—who are cast as having fundamentally different interests. It becomes clear that what vanu objects to is that the game is not challenging, but simply has “cute graphics.” When vanu disparages indie (independently developed) games, he qualifies this by stating that Japanese indie games are top tier due to their challenging nature. Perhaps most interesting is that Big_Boss then interjects to assert that there is no such thing as a real gamer, which vanu does not argue with. Instead, vanu recasts the statement as “gamers with skill.” vanu casts real, presumably male, gamers as skillful and, by extension, casts “gamur girlz” as unskilled. This emphasis on prowess is consistent with

hegemonic masculinity in technology-related fields (Cooper 2000). A key part of the real gamer narrative was computer competency more broadly. SJWs, White Knights, and normies—individuals who do not frequent 4chan—were all cast as ignorant and unskilled in the realm of computers.

Aug 22 02.52.42	SniperRico	i still don't know how the fuck you watch a hack as it's happening
Aug 22 02.52.56	NASA_Agent	it's simple, SniperRico
...		
Aug 22 02.53.03	NASA_Agent	you are the hacker
...		
Aug 22 02.53.31	SniperRico	i think they have some movie idea of hacking where the camera cuts to the good guys going "OH NO, WE'RE BEING HACKED" and the hero starts slapping his keyboard to "fight" the hacker real time
...		
Aug 22 02.53.45	maximumtacos	sniperrico these guys aren't real nerds

This excerpt refers to the hack of Phil Fish's—a supporter of Quinn's—computer on August 22nd, 2014, which the IRC users were convinced was fake. SniperRico mocks their opposition for not knowing how hacking works. maximumtacos statement that they are not “real nerds” effectively also means that the IRC users—who do, evidently, know how hacking works—are real nerds. This narrative legitimizes the IRC user's privilege within the gaming industry. Since they are the ones who are capable of discerning good games from bad ones, and real hacks from the false, they are entitled to their privileged position.

In addition to drawing on themes of skill, the IRC users also differentiated between their dislike of Quinn's game and their concern for the gaming industry as a whole.

Aug 18 17.33.16 PEANESS i had no idea people cared so much about 2d retro platformers with philisophical (sic) undertones

...
Aug 18 17.33.45 Xempa We don't care about the game, we care about the industry

PEANESS points out that the IRC's angry and vindictive reaction is not proportionate to the purported cause, namely the release of *Depression Quest*. The IRC users frequently disparaged *Depression Quest*, arguing that it should not even be considered a game. However, they denied that this was really at issue. Instead, the Burgers and Fries users maintained that the fact that this game had been made at all—let alone positively reviewed—was a blight on the industry and indicated that the industry was in decline, an attitude exemplified by Xempa's comment. The decline of the industry was ostensibly due to corruption in video game journalism, but the IRC users were almost as keen to blame “gamur gurlz” and the supposedly uneducated masses for the industry's decay.

Aug 25 05.19.02 BlackStereotype The reason they don't have any ethics when it comes to this is because none of them really have any respect for vidya as an "industry". To them it's just another of those "get rich quick online" scams. It makes them money, ethics has nothing to do with it.

Aug 25 05.19.12 BlackStereotype And retards who barely know how to use a mouse click on their articles and get them money.

BlackStereotype states that they—games journalists—are unethical because they have no respect for vidya—a 4chan shorthand for video games—as an industry. This issue is compounded, according to BlackStereotype, by the support these unethical journalists receive from “...retards who barely know how to use a mouse.” This implies that individuals who are competent in computers and video games do not support this second-rate gaming journalism.

This narrative serves to establish the Burgers and Fries users as the rightful consumers of this media, which in turn legitimizes both their grievances with gaming journalism and their critiques of *Depression Quest*. Further, while U.S. culture holds the image of the nerd somewhat ambivalently (Kendall 2000), mastery of technology is linked with hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson 1993; Cooper 2000). Burgers and Fries users deploy this element of hegemonic masculinity to enhance their credibility and discredit SJWs.

In this section I have discussed how the Burgers and Fries users drew on elements of hegemonic masculinity to create narratives of legitimacy for their grievances and entitlement to their privileged position within video games. I now turn to a discussion of how the users of the IRC deployed identities to demonize and discredit their opposition.

Social Justice Warriors and White Knights: Constructing the Other

Hegemonic masculinity is established in relationship to both femininity and subordinated masculinities. The Burgers and Fries users accomplished this through the use of attack frames for their opposition. In particular the Social Justice Warrior (SJW) and the White Knight were used to discredit and dehumanize their opposition. The identity of the SJW in particular also served to erase real-world social categories, obfuscating the fact that the categories of “SJW” and “woman” are functionally identical in IRC discourse. The White Knight identity was most frequently applied to men, but could apply to anyone who was seen to support Quinn or other known SJWs, such as feminist game critic Anita Sarkeesian. I first discuss the identity of the White Knight, which was deployed to feminize and discredit Quinn’s supporters. I then discuss the SJW identity deployed by the users of the IRC. I demonstrate that the SJW identity is implicitly linked to female bodies. I then discuss three of the primary discourses that comprise the SJW identity for the IRC users—self-interest and hypocrisy, the inability of SJWs to make

rational arguments, and the SJW penchant for faking their own victimization. Collectively these narratives cast anyone espousing ideals of social justice as fundamentally despicable individuals who deserved to be viciously attacked.

White Knights

The identity of the White Knight was applied to anyone who supported Quinn or the ideals of social justice. White Knight was a mocking term for men who defended women on the internet, and accordingly the vast majority of the individuals labeled as White Knights were men. These individuals were cast as highly feminine in the IRC. This feminization was accomplished through the use of fag discourse (Pascoe 2007) and the deployment of elements of hegemonic masculinity. Pascoe (2007) argues that the label “fag” is invoked in white masculinities as an abject identity (Butler 1993) to police gender transgressions. It is important to note that 4chan users employ the term “fag” frequently, and not every instance of this word represents an invocation of the fag discourse. For example:

Aug 25 01.11.37 TrainWreck:	Someone needs to get a lawfag to sue polygon now
...	
Aug 25 01.11.55 <DarkHiero>	The lawfags are working on it

Users of 4chan frequently append the word fag to other nouns and verbs to make descriptors. A lawfag, then, is a lawyer or someone competent in law. However, I do not consider this to be an instance of fag discourse. Fag in this context is not disparaging or intended to provoke. Indeed, because this usage of the word fag is tightly linked to 4chan, using “fag” in this context constitutes a direct claim of association. However, the fag is invoked in other contexts on the IRC.

Aug 18 22.03.18 mamdev	ok so i came here from the 4chan thread on /g/ and my basic understanding is that to my great surprise a gawker blog is run by whores
Aug 18 22.03.44 Roberts[OPEC]	the REAL issue is that 4chan mods are being faggots

In the early days of the IRC, mods (site moderators) were frequent targets of the fag discourse, primarily due to their perceived role in aiding the SJW agenda through censorship. Mods are authority figures on sites such as 4chan and reddit, with the power to delete threads or ban users, although they work on a volunteer basis. In the first few days of the controversy, mods were actively deleting posts and threads about Quinn on 4chan and other social media sites. Mods and White Knights more broadly were discussed in the same terms in the early days of the IRC. As the controversy continued, the IRC user's ire at the mods specifically faded. However, the censorship by the mods angered many users on the IRC. Still others were encouraged by the fact that attacks on Quinn continued despite the efforts of mods.

Aug 26 06.48.53 PZT	4chan finally started feeling like 4chan again
Aug 26 06.49.09 PZT	and not a bunch of beta pussy-whipped SJW apologist faglords who only sit by and idly complain

This user explicitly feminizes anyone who supports SJWs. According to PZT, not only are White Knights betas (a common pejorative on 4chan referring to weak men, as in the opposite of an alpha male), they are also pussy-whipped⁶, and faglords⁷. White Knights were also feminized by references to their supposed lack of opinions and tendency to blindly follow SJWs.

Sep 01 07.37.08 Roberts[OPEC]:	I think noddors is a better term for white knights
...	
Sep 01 07.37.22 Roberts[OPEC]:	Needs to be catchy
Sep 01 07.37.23 RogueStar:	SJWs dont (sic) even know what they preach. They are drones. Fuckem (sic)

⁶ The term "pussy whipped" refers to a man who is dominated by women, particularly out of a desire to have or continue having sex.

⁷ "Lord" is frequently appended to the word "fag" for emphasis—thus a "faglord" is a fag to the highest degree.

Sep 01 07.37.24 Roberts[OPEC]:	Quick
Sep 01 07.37.29 Tickle:	White knight is the classic term
...	
Sep 01 07.37.44 Roberts[OPEC]:	One word preferably like nigger

Roberts[OPEC] characterizes White Knights as “noddors,” implying that all they do is nod when SJWs make arguments. RogueStar casts SJWs as drones, which is interesting in conjunction with the idea of White Knights as simply nodding along. It casts the White Knights as simply the drones’ drones.

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in contrast to both femininity and other subordinated masculinities (Connell 2005). The IRC users construct the White Knight identity as a subordinated masculine identity against which they compare themselves. White Knights are cast as weak, having no opinions of their own and only agreeing with what others say. This is contrary to hegemonic masculinity, which is strong and virile.

While the White Knight identity was used by the Burgers and Fries users to feminize men who support the ideals of social justice, women were rarely, if ever, labeled as White Knights. Rather, women who supported diversity and inclusion in gaming were ubiquitously labeled Social Justice Warriors (SJWs). In the following section, I discuss how the SJW identity was mobilized by the IRC to discredit and demonize feminist critiques and critics of the video game industry.

Social Justice Warriors

Equating social justice and female bodies

While White Knights were feminized by the users of the Burgers and Fries IRC, SJWs were depicted as explicitly female. This characterization makes the boundary between the

categories SJW and woman decidedly blurry. SJWs were cast as women both explicitly and through attacks on their sexual practices.

Aug 22 11.02.55 BurntKimchi:	But SJWs white ugly girls
Aug 22 11.02.59 JTG:	yeah
Aug 22 11.03.04 JTG:	they wish they were
Aug 22 11.03.06 JTG:	uhh
Aug 22 11.03.10 JTG:	not white ugly girls

BurntKimchi and JTG both refer to SJWs as a whole as not only women, but ugly women. The ugliness of SJWs was a recurring theme in the IRC, and the users spent a great deal of time discussing and evaluating Quinn's attractiveness. This emphasis serves to further marginalize SJWs in their worldview.

There were occasional references to male SJWs, but, as with the white knights, male SJWs were cast as highly feminine.

Aug 23 08.01.00 Silver 2:	literaly (sic) 95% of the people who bitch about white privilege are white
Aug 23 08.01.18 Alazred:	Most SJW are white girls.
Aug 23 08.01.33 Alazred:	And all the rest are white boys.
Aug 23 08.01.35 Silver 2:	white girls and their white knight lapdogs
Aug 23 08.01.41 Agent_Cooper:	No shit SJW shit is first world.

Alazred says that SJWs are mostly white girls, and the rest are white boys. Silver|2 refines this statement, by saying "white girls and their white knight lapdogs." This characterization simultaneously reinforces women as the default category for the SJW and, drawing on masculine tropes of virility and power, emasculates White Knights by casting them as "lapdogs." More importantly, Silver|2's distinction reinforces the idea that there are not actually male SJWs. Rather, men who espouse social justice ideals are White Knights, nodding along with the real—female—SJWs.

While explicit references to gender were used to discuss SJWs, the most common form of gendering was accomplished through the use of gendered attacks on sexual practices.

Aug 18 17.30.52 cuteGamrgrll SJW's are free spirits, who use their ideals to snark away responsibility for their actions, they claim to be paragons, yet, they're amoral sluts.
Aug 18 17.30.57 cuteGamrgrll: or betas, one of the two.

cuteGamrgrll references two categories of SJW—amoral sluts who snark away responsibility for their actions and, almost as an afterthought, betas⁸. SJWs were ubiquitously cast as sluts. By using this explicitly gendered term to disparage SJWs, the IRC users establish the assumed sex of any given SJW as female. While it is possible for them to consider men as SJWs, the default assumption is that SJWs are women. cuteGamrgrll also casts SJWs as hypocrites, people who are fundamentally immoral and yet “claim to be paragons.” As I will discuss in the following section, this accusation of hypocrisy was widespread in the IRC.

Self-Interested and Hypocritical

One of the key attacks that the Burgers and Fries IRC users made against SJWs was to criticize their motives and intentions. They cast SJWs as fundamentally self-interested, claiming to desire equality and diversity but in reality seeking only praise and recognition. This self-interest by definition made them hypocritical.

Aug 23 06.23 KrustyKoala: "because that's not a visible effort" because where's the point in treating genders equally when you don't get patted on the back for it?
Aug 23 06.23 CuteKAwariiBurgerAndFries: I feel like HURTING these people, they're wildly irrational, I wouldn't

⁸ A common 4chan pejorative for weak men, as in the opposite of an alpha male

dream of hurting someone, but Jesus
Christ (sic).

Aug 23 06.23 CuteKAwairBurgerAndFries: Can they not see their hypocrisy? and
(sic) the gaps in their logic?

KrustyKoala's rhetorical question—"where's the point in treating genders equally when you don't get patted on the back for it?"—highlights the attitude shared by many users of the IRC. As far as they were concerned, SJWs were more concerned with being recognized for pursuing equality than with actually achieving equality. SJWs were cast as not actually interested in the goals they proclaimed to be.

Aug 25 01.14.54 letraditionman: true SJWs don't want to do anything
...
Aug 25 01.15.00 letraditionman: but bitch and whine to get their way

letraditionman expresses the idea that SJWs do not actually have any goals or ideals, but rather just want to get their way by complaining. This sentiment extended beyond SJWs to feminism more broadly, which was widely disparaged on the IRC.

Aug 24 01.02.10 naga_Samir: Really sad how if a woman disagrees with woman
misogyny is used to assault (sic) whichever one is
less "feminist"

naga_Samir's assertion that misogyny is used by women to attack less feminist women encapsulates the general attitude towards feminism on the IRC. Feminism was a hollow emphasis on equality meant in reality to take away men's freedom and joy and to fulfill selfish goals. By disparaging the goals of SJWs as fundamentally self-serving and false, the Burgers and Fries users justified their attacks against Quinn and feminism more broadly.

Waging a "war on words"—attacking the arguments of SJWs

In addition to the presumed motivations of SJWs, the IRC users also attacked the SJWs ability to argue their case. This occurred in two main ways. First, the Burgers and Fries users claimed that SJWs did not engage in actual debates, but rather a “war on language.” Second, the IRC users disparaged SJWs as fundamentally illogical and incapable of reasoned debate. Rationality is an important element of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005:164) and, as such, invoking the irrationality of the SJW draws on hegemonic masculinity. Attacking the arguments of SJWs as simply a “war on language” was intended to discredit feminists’ ability to engage in rational and meaningful debate.

Aug 23 01.35.33 foTTS: do you know about graham's hierarchy of disagreement?
Aug 23 01.35.44 foTTS: I think one of the bottom tiers involves "Tone Policing"
...
Aug 23 01.39.01 foTTS: SJW generally tends towards Tone Policing

foTTs draws on computer programmer Paul Graham’s hierarchy of disagreement, which ranks types of disagreements on a seven point scale from name calling—the lowest—to refuting the central point of an argument. foTTs criticizes the SJWs ability to make effective arguments and says that they relegate their criticisms to tone policing—derailing an argument by critiquing the delivery of a point rather than its substance. In a similar vein, SJWs were frequently criticized for relying only on buzzwords rather than making substantive arguments.

Aug 21 23.15.15 rd0952: i (sic) keep reading sjw posts and raging
Aug 21 23.15.25 rd0952: the more serious they get, the more I (sic) rage
Aug 21 23.15.37 rd0952: like they go in-depth wrong on everything
Aug 21 23.15.45 rd0952: and rely only on buzzwords
Aug 21 23.16.00 rd0952: if i (sic) see the word "problematic" one more time i'm
(sic) going to pull my fucking hair out

rd0952’s statement that “they go in-depth wrong on everything and rely only on buzzwords” criticizes not only what the SJWs have to say but also how they say it, essentially denying the substance of SJW’s arguments. The SJW cause more broadly was characterized as being adept at

deflecting all criticisms, legitimate or not.

Sep 02 23.08.29 sjrm:

That's one thing that pisses me off about their movement, they have an excuse to dismiss any critical person. "privilege", "misogyny", "internalised (sic) misogyny/racism", "stop tone policing me!"

sjrm draws on similar themes to rd0952, arguing that buzzwords function only to dismiss actual arguments. However, the form of the argument wasn't the only thing that was criticized. The users of the Burgers and Fries IRC also cast SJWs as fundamentally illogical.

Aug 18 21.23.38 Alzred: SJW relies on self righteous (sic) social power.

Aug 18 21.23.57 Alzred: They can't do logic and fair debate.

Aug 18 21.24.25 Alzred: Their main tool is "Call them MRA⁹ entitled virgins"

Alzred's assertion that they—SJWs—"can't do logic and fair debate" serves primarily to discredit SJWs and dismiss their arguments. However, it also sets up the users of the IRC as both logical and capable of fair debate. Alzred also dismisses the SJWs debating skills by saying their "main tool is to call them MRA entitled virgins," or, in other words, simply deflecting the debate without engaging with it.

Faking victimization

So far in this section I have discussed how the Burgers and Fries IRC users constructed the Social Justice Warrior identity as fundamentally hypocritical and self-serving, and how the users dismissed SJWs as irrational. The Burgers and Fries IRC users also cast SJWs as manufacturing their own victimization to gain attention. According to Burgers and Fries users, SJWs were aided in falsifying victimization by the media, who were widely considered corrupt and in the pocket of SJWs.

⁹ Male Rights Activist

Aug 21 17.59.07 sarahv:	The media reported it as 'dirty MRA sexist trolls attack brave female game designer just trying to do her job because they don't want women in the industry'
Aug 21 17.59.12 sarahv:	And everyone swallowed it that way
Aug 21 17.59.21 sarahv:	Again, exactly what happened with Anita
...	
Aug 21 17.59.36 sarahv:	It works 100% of the time

The Anita that sarahv references is Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist video game critic whose YouTube series “Tropes vs Women” sparked a wave of harassment in 2012. The users of the IRC insisted that reports of harassment, hacking, and doxing were at the very least highly exaggerated, but more probably false. Burgers and Fries users also insisted that if anyone was attacking Quinn or others, it was only a vocal minority.

Aug 21 17.24.44 Silver 2	was anyone here for the yesallmen thing? Same thing happened 99% of it was valid respectful arguments 1% was le epic trolls. guess what the SJWs put attention on?
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#yesallmen was a hashtag used by men to share stories of oppression. This hashtag arose in response to #yesallwomen, which was used to assert that all women suffered from the effects of sexism. #yesallmen was criticized on the grounds that it ignored or minimized the importance of misogyny in contemporary society. However, Silver|2 states that the #yesallmen campaign was “99% valid respectful arguments” and “1% le epic trolls.” This assertion denies that sexism could have motivated any of the tweets or discussion under #yesallmen, and discredits the sentiment behind the original hashtag. Silver|2 also suggests that the SJWs intentionally emphasized the trolling—which refers to individuals posting deliberately provocative material with the sole intent of provoking a reaction—in order to appear victimized.

In this section, I have discussed how the Burgers and Fries users marshal external identities to demonize and discredit their opposition. Drawing on elements of hegemonic masculinity, the IRC users deployed the identities of the White Knight and the SJW to cast their opposition as feminine, illogical, and self-interested. These narratives served to legitimize the IRC's critiques of feminism and their hostility towards Quinn.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the users of the Burgers and Fries IRC deploy identities to maintain privilege, justify violent retribution, and delegitimize critiques. The IRC users deploy identities in two concurrent processes. On the one hand, they engage in internally-oriented identity work in which they cast themselves as both entitled to their position within the gaming industry and as the true victims of GamerGate. The Burgers and Fries IRC users accomplish this through the "real gamer" discourse, as well as narratives of victimization and feminist invasion. The victimization discourses serve to legitimize the IRC's vitriolic attacks on Quinn, while the discourse of the "real gamer" legitimizes the IRC's dismissal of feminist critiques of the industry and their disdain for "mainstream" gaming journalism.

On the other, the Burgers and Fries users deploy the identities of the SJW and White Knight to discredit and dehumanize their opposition in what Bernstein (2002, 2008) calls an identity contest. The IRC users draw on fag discourse (Pascoe 2007) as well as sexist tropes to feminize and discredit male supporters of Quinn. They also cast the SJW identity as fundamentally hypocritical, self-interested, illogical, and attention-seeking. The use of the SJW identity also obfuscates the tight link between the SJW identity and women's bodies. The IRC users draw on elements of hegemonic masculinity in both their internally and externally oriented identity work.

With this research, I make two primary contributions. First, I contribute to the literature on identity deployment by examining how a privileged group deploys identity to maintain their position and justify the violent defense of this privilege. Second, I also explore identity deployment as a potential mechanism for the perpetuation of inequality. In particular, I draw on hegemonic masculinity as a situationally deployed identity as a key element in the perpetuation of inequality. I argue that privileged groups draw on recognizable features of hegemonic masculinity, such as rationality and dispassion, in situations where privilege is contested by other groups to maintain the status quo. I argue that this deployment of identity is not used to police gender transgressions per se, as the fag discourse (Pascoe 2007) is, but rather that identities can be deployed to police privilege more broadly. The deployment of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily tied to male bodies in the context of the internet. I contend that regardless of the physical bodies behind the keyboards, the Burgers and Fries IRC users all drew on gendered discourses to discredit challenges to privilege and the status quo.

Although my specific case is video games and the GamerGate controversy, I argue that similar dynamics are at work outside of the specific site. For example, future research could explore this process in the context of any number of male-dominated industries or fields, such as STEM, comedy, or law enforcement. I maintain that similar deployments of identity are at work in other situations where an established group faces contention for their position.

My data has some limitations. First, the data I use was released by a user of the IRC and it is conceivable that information has been omitted or that it has been tampered with. I believe that both of these issues are unlikely to affect the validity of the data. Each entry is preceded by a timestamp, which allows me to discern if sections of the log are missing. The most glaring omission is that August 20th is not included in the log. Since the user OtherGentleman kept the

log and evidently was not online for the entirety of August 20th, this date is missing from the available data. There is no evidence to suggest that this omission was deliberate or malicious. Because the log exceeds 1,800 pages of text, the sheer size of the document makes it unlikely that it was fabricated. Furthermore, the volume and nature of the data obscures evidence of planned attacks against Quinn or other wrongdoing from casual observers. Only by thoroughly exploring the large and poorly organized document does the extent of the Burgers and Fries IRC's malice become apparent.

A second limitation, mentioned previously, is that the anonymity of the data does not allow me to discern between posts that may have been made by Quinn or a supporter and posts made by true critics of Quinn. Quinn stated that her interaction on the IRC was limited to lurking—observing without interacting—which mitigates this issue. Furthermore, given the aforementioned volume of data, the probability of quoting Quinn or her supporters is relatively low. There were sporadic instances of individuals defending Quinn—for instance, the user poosenberg inundated the IRC with the phrase “leave her alone” for several minutes before being banned by the IRC moderator—but these incidents were isolated and usually resulted in the individual expressing support being banned from the IRC.

Future research should examine the role of race in creating collective narratives of legitimacy and entitlement. In addition to the evidence of rampant misogyny among the IRC users, racist and anti-Semitic discourses were highly prevalent. In addition, future research could apply the concept of identity deployment to privileged groups outside of video games to explore how these processes apply more broadly. A final avenue for future research would be to explore the Social Justice Warrior as an identity in other contexts. The term SJW is not inherently

demeaning, and other internet communities value the SJW identity. Further research is needed to tease out the intricacies of this identity.

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