Tipping Points
Marginality, Misogyny and Videogames

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IT IS, ADMITTEDLY, AN ODD COUPLING OF WORDS to put "games" and "feminism" in a sentence together, but 2012 was a year that precisely reinforced the need for feminist activist work to mobilize and support women who both work in the industry and who at the same time view themselves as a part of and/or residing on the margins of gaming's predominantly masculinized culture (Alexander, 2012a; Coney, 2013). In this paper, we detail the conditions of precarity that women face as marginal subjects in the video games industry and as sexualized objects in the creative and cultural projects that the world's largest entertainment industry produces. We do so through the documentation of recent examples of violent, vitriolic, and hate-filled speech that has been targeted at women who have either spoken out from those margins, or who have been singled out as an object of ridicule from with within the industry's ranks. These examples demonstrate a form of extreme gender norm enforcement that has been challenged through feminist activist work in a number of locales in North America. We detail two activist projects in Canada that reveal how women remain precarious subjects even as they work to overcome their entrenched conditions through activist, women's-only groups. We conclude with an accounting of a governing social and political order that ontologically re-inscribes women and their potential and actual creative capital and labour as always and necessarily peripheral.

So why precarity and why are we invoking that as a starting point for our analysis of the policing of gender and sexuality norms when it comes to videogame makers and their players? Precarity, as Judith Butler (2009) points out, examines the lived conditions of populations who "suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (p. 2). In the case of videogames as a cultural industry, which has been and continues to be economically supported by governments worldwide[1], its population and those who consume its products are decidedly *not* those at risk of dying due to poor living conditions or starvation. However, this industry *has* produced subjects who are not only targets of violence and aggression, but who are afforded no institutional protection from those harms

through the law, and have only very recently received any protection through grassroots counter-movements (described below). We argue that positioning women as precarious subjects—and objects—in videogame culture, shifts the ground from the individual case of a single woman being harassed while speaking and playing in an online game, or when simply writing or blogging about games, to a structural level that ties in with social and cultural gender norms, as well as with political and legal structures that have yet to come 'online' to offer real protection from misogynistic hate speech. Butler argues that precarity is very much tied to gender norms, writing that:

> Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law, or more specifically the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home…. So these norms are not only instances of power; and they do not only reflect broader relations of power; they are one way that power operates. (p. 3)

On her view then, gender norms, and by extension their performance, or not, are inseparable from the circulation of larger power dynamics. With reference to videogame culture, the struggle over power and its maintenance can be seen to be happening at three levels simultaneously: first, at the level of the individual gameplayer, as women report being harassed regularly in online play and in the workforce; second, at the level of game culture as it is consumed and is reproduced in games and through its players in online and offline spaces; and, third at the level of the state which is both the 'state' in terms of that which makes and enforces laws against hate speech and harassment and the 'state' in terms of software and systems that could be used to 'police' individuals within games and/or within public online spaces like comments sections on blogs, Youtube, new websites, and the myriad of other kinds of anonymizing, unregulated virtual spaces in which "whosoever will" can communicate to a potentially global audience. The following sections will take each of these in turn, giving specific examples of the ways in which the policing of gender norms in public gaming spaces, in particular, produces women as precarious subjects. [2]

Tales of Online Harassment

Documentation of this kind of individual harassment has increasingly been made public by websites like "Fat, Ugly or Slutty" (http://www.fatuglyorslutty.com) or "Not in the Kitchen Anymore" (http://www.notinthekitchenanymore.com) which invite players to document the kinds of sexual and other harassment they are subject to by posting it online, in a kind of "shame the Johns" approach. These documentary practices make evident the ways women are regularly and systematically harassed while playing games, and demonstrate how often that harassment takes the form of violent verbal sexual assault. Power in this case is being wielded by (some) men who are actively working to make playing online not only uncomfortable for women, but outright hostile to them.

While the harassment and marginalization of women in the games industry might not be quite so obvious as vitriolic tirades about women's 'place' whether it be in form of "make me a sandwich, bitch" or "get back in the kitchen" or the forever objects and subjects of domination by male heterosexual desire "do me" or "are you pretty", women are still subject to it in those workplaces.

This was made resoundingly clear in the fall of 2012 when the twitter hashtag #1reasonwhy (there aren't more women in the games industry) went viral (Shapiro, 2012). Women tweeted about the sexism in the industry, about the misogyny they had experienced first hand, and about darker incidents of sexual harassment and assault at conferences (Hamilton, 2012). For example UrsulaV tweeted "Because our lead designer used to yell about there being 'a vagina in the room' and nobody called him on it, boss included. #1reasonwhy". Another, filemena tweeted "Because conventions, where designers are celebrated, are unsafe places for me. Really. I've been groped." And smgrisssom tweeted "#1reasonwhy: Because the original concept wasn't "fuckable".

While those, and thousands of other tweets like them invoked commentary by men who were very much in support of their female colleagues, it also ignited backlash tweets by men who dismissed the issue altogether, called for "more proof," or argued that women just need to "pull up their socks" and quit moaning. Representative of those kinds of comments were ones like Madmenyo who tweeted "**#1reasonwhy** Business is hard and needs strong people. Don't blame me or anyone else but deal with it if you want to be part of it." Or BernardChapin's "**#1reasonwhy** If women are too sensitive and self-absorbed to deal with criticism it's good they don't design video games." And it wasn't just through Twitter that these flagrantly derisive responses to harassment and misogyny were documented – the wider press caught on to the hashtag as did the blogosphere and there were stories by *The Guardian* (Hamilton, 2012), *The Huffington Post* (Isaacson, 2012), *Kotaku* (Totilo, 2012), *Reuters* (Nayak, 2013), *Forbes* (Pinchefsky, 2012), and *Time Newsfeed* (Locker, 2012), to name but a few. Here, the struggle over power and the reinforcement of gender norms were both public and contested, and at times simply re-invoked and re-produced the kind of gender violence (in this case linguistic) that provoked the viral responses in the first place. This is a classic example of the re-victimization that so easily results from an otherwise well-meaning re-citation of hate speech (Butler, 1997).

Policing Boundaries: Game Culture, Misogyny and Violence

We now turn to the more general case of videogames as cultural product and production through two viral and public cases of harassment. That videogames support and produce masculinities has long been evident in its products, marketing, advertising, and transmedia offshoots (films, television, machinima, blogs, forums), and its public pronouncements against female gamers.[3] That is not to say women are not playing games – they very much are – on phones, on Facebook, on personal gaming devices, online, and so on (ESA, 2012). Some very prominent women are also making games such as the developer of an extremely popular puzzle game set in space *Portal* (Kim Swift), one of the most acclaimed games of 2012 (executive developer of *Journey* Robin Hunicke), and the lead producer of the latest *Halo* game, *Halo 4* (Kiki Wolfkill). However, the din of the wider gamer culture more often than not drowns out those voices, and rather than rehearse the well-trodden ground that makes the case for games as imbedded-in and continually reinforcing hypermasculine culture, we will illustrate, through

examples, how that culture operates on a *structural* level, and the ways in which structural misogyny comes to be re-inscribed at the level of the individual. In retelling here the stories of two women who were subject to this kind of gender violence, we are purposefully *not* recounting each and every detail of harassment they were subject to in order to attempt *not* to re-subject them to that violence through the re-citing of their stories.

The first example is the case of a game industry 'insider' being subject to harassment because she confessed, in an interview, to wanting an option to skip combat in games. Jennifer Hepler is a game writer for Bioware, a game company in Edmonton, Canada that has produced titles like the *Mass Effect* series (which broke new ground in games by allowing players the option of a same sex romance), and the *Dragon's Age* series which Hepler worked directly on. In early 2012, a Reddit user posted to the /r/gaming section, an excerpt of an interview Hepler had with killerbetties (http://www.killerbetties.com) *six years earlier*, in which she was asked the question: "If you could tell developers of games to make sure to put one thing in games to appeal to a broader audience which includes women, what would that one thing be?" Hepler replied:

> A fast-forward button. Games almost always include a way to "button through" dialogue without paying attention, because they understand that some players don't enjoy listening to dialogue and they don't want to stop their fun. Yet they persist in practically coming into your living room and forcing you to play through the combats even if you're a player who only enjoys the dialogue. In a game with sufficient story to be interesting without the fighting, there is no reason on earth that you can't have a little button at the corner of the screen that you can click to skip to the end of the fighting. (Hepler, 2006)[4]

The posting of the excerpt which included an strategically unflattering picture of her, along with hate speech directed personally at Hepler, led to further harassment which included her Twitter account being flooded with crass, violent and sexualized comments and to the removal of the original post by the moderator of /r/gaming on Reddit---though that did not stop the outrage leveled at Hepler. The harassment continued over a number of weeks and included death threats (including phone calls to her home), threats of dismemberment, endless comments about her weight, and comment after comment that 'vaginas' did not belong making games (see Amini, 2012; Griffiths, 2012; Polo, 2012; and Zvan, 2012 for fuller accounts).[5]

On a structural level, Hepler's individual case reveals how precarious a position women occupy as game players and game makers – when they do not conform to being 'good' gamers (liking combat) or 'good' women (conventionally heterosexual and normatively attractive) they therefore deserve to be the object of ridicule and violent sexual harassment (she was labeled in many photos as "Hamburger Hepler" (MBA-Ms Bad Ass, 2012). We argue that its important to view what happened to Hepler as a structural problem, one that can have very little to do with her as an individual (even though, of course, harm was done to her on a very personal level) and is instead indicative of systemic socio-cultural ruptures that both support and excuse violent hate speech directed at women online.

The second example is one of a game culture outsider—feminist blogger Anita Sarkeesian (http://www.feministfrequency.com). Sarkeesian is a well-followed movie and television cultural critic blogger who attempts to show how reading films and other

advertising, such as LEGO's, from a feminist standpoint reveals deep inequalities all too often passed over by everyday media consumers. In May 2012, Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter (http://www.kickstarter.com) campaign to raise $6,000 to create a series of videos on "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games". Her idea was to take her previous work on tropes in television and film such as "the damsel in distress" and "the sexy sidekick" to critique female character roles in video games. By the time the campaign was closed, Sarkeesian's blog and Wikipedia page had been hacked with pornographic images and sexual and racial slurs added, she had received death and rape threats, and had been subjected to verbal abuse and hate speech. There was also a violent video game created with her 'starring' in it, cleverly titled, "Beat up Anita Sarkeesian game". Sarkeesian documented much of the harassment (http://www.feministfrequency.com) and the popular press picked up the story, which was taken up by both the national and international press (Alexander, 2012a; Carter, 2012; Casey, 2012; Cross, 2012; Kain, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Marcotte, 2012; Watercutter, 2012; Weber, 2012). In part her story was so popular because, unlike Hepler's story, which had only a slight redemptive narrative as its ending when the CEO of the company she worked for (Bioware) donated $1,000 to Bullying Canada,[6] Sarkeesian's Kickstarter campaign was wildly successful, yielding over $155,000 in financial support for her project[7]. Since then, Sarkeesian has been invited to speak at a number and variety of high profile events, including the TEDx Women's conference in Washington D.C. in December 2012 (http://tedxwomen.org/speakers/anita-sarkeesian-2/). Just a day after her talk aired, TEDx was forced to turn off the comments due to the "ongoing hate campaign" against Sarkeesian (Thibeault, 2012), and one that reportedly shocked the TEDx organizers because of its vehemence.

Structurally, Sarkeesian is, like most women, an outsider to gamer culture, as well as an "out" feminist blogger and cultural critic. That she labels herself a feminist makes her a kind of double target as not only a female but as one who, by her own admission as a feminist, becomes a woman who "hates men". While that is of course a radically incorrect definition of feminism, it is all too often repeated in public comments on and to Sarkeesian. And that is where it becomes difficult to hold on to a structural analysis, as it is the individual facts about the case and its obvious address to a singular personality that make each one appear unique.

However, in recounting the public harassment of Hepler and Sarkeesian, we need to understand and to demonstrate how these individual cases are epiphenomenal to a larger structural issue that enfranchises a 'malestream' of gamers (and others) to denigrate and abuse women who 'dare' to play and, worse yet, to make videogames. That is not to say that Hepler and Sarkeesian can be taken to represent *all* women—far from it—they are both (on the face of it) heterosexual, Hepler is a mother, and Sarkeesian is an attractive, photogenic young woman—characteristics that hardly position them outside mainstream gender norms. Indeed it is, interestingly, precisely the gender-typicalities of these two women that both spark and fuel the disciplinary apparatus of normalized misogyny. What is correlatively significant about these two stories, then, is that they reveal the ways in which the state does little or nothing to put a stop to death and rape threats, and hate and maligning speech. This is accomplished not so much by addressing these two wayward individuals but, by publically denouncing the ways that these two otherwise worthy women have broken the unwritten laws of gender, addressing more

paradigmatically, women 'in general' with what amounts under most criminal codes to slander. And yet, systems like Youtube that are fantastic at pulling content for copyright violations seem 'unable' (aka unwilling) to do anything to put a stop to these vile and violent speech acts—they remain online to continually re-assault their readers.

No Speech is "Free"

Part of the discourse that has been mobilized to oppose blocking hate speech at a systems level is that such a move violates "freedom of speech" legislation—in the U.S., a constitutional amendment that is cited *almost* as frequently as the "right to bear arms" (even in the face of massive innocent lives lost to that 'freedom'). What is continuously misapprehended about the right to 'free speech' is that it is and always has been subject to limitations. It is *not* within one's right to verbally harm someone, for example, through slander or libel or hate speech. John Stuart Mill (1859/2012) argued strongly against the suppression of opinion in *On Liberty*, and the presumption that that opinions were to be publically aired that they might be debated was key to his thinking on free speech. Mill's primary concern was about an individual's right to speak back against government – that is, not to have opinions suppressed because they disagreed with those in power. This is *very* different from someone claiming their 'right' to salacious and vitriolic hate speech—especially when that speech is directed against those structurally subordinated in positions of lesser power than the speaker.

Like governments that both defend and restrict 'free speech', Mill, too set limits against 'doing harm' to others through speech. And, in his value of 'open discussion' or the 'airing of opinions', Mill shared the presumption of his era that speaker and addressee were co-located in space and time, that the interlocutors shared a regional context, that they, in effect, knew one another, and that in this co-inhabitation, they publically stood by their opinions. That is precisely what is *not* the case with much of the online harassment we have cited above – typically the most crass and sexualized comments were posted anonymously or through fake email and Twitter accounts. So to be very clear: nowhere in the principle of free speech is it within one's rights to slander or malign publically and without proof another person, nor is it within one's right to make threatening phone calls, hack websites, threaten to kill or rape another person. None of these things are defensible by the principle of freedom of speech, indeed quite to the contrary, they are prohibited by it. That established, we now turn to the ways in which groups of women and their allies have mobilized at a grassroots level and have begun to reclaim their freedom to speak back.

Turning to Activism

The cases we have documented here represent, as we have argued, a structural problem—misogyny in the games industry and gamer culture—that is too-often misread in individual terms as an exceptional case. Documenting and then deconstructing degradation and oppression makes it possible to mobilizing against it, creating strategies to contest it, and to actively intervene and begin to change it[8] (Garfinkel, 1956). Some years ago, Chafetz (1990), a social science researcher, concluded from examining a range of cases that within an inequitable social system, the best opportunities to advance gender equity are when the system breaks, when 'business as

usual' goes awry, and we argue that is precisely what is happening now. In this section we detail two activist organizations located in Canada that are publically working to support female gamers, gameplayers and fledgling academics working within and on the margins of the games industry and culture: Feminists in Games (FiG) and Dames Making Games (DMG). This is, much like Sarkeesian's work, a form of public pedagogy, which is designed not in the interests of governments or profit, but in the cases of FiG and DMG, to provide avenues of support for women. We also, briefly, detail a few of the more prominent examples of resistance and working against public misogyny and violence, including one recent one that is system-wide.

Feminists in Games (http://www.feministsingames.com) is a group of academics (professors, graduate and undergraduate students) as well as women and men working in the games industry seeking to bring a feminist post-structural analysis to the ways games and gender and games are written on in the academy and popular press, as well as to the ways digital games are designed, produced, and marketed. In contrast to the "Women in Games" initiative (http://www.womeningames.com) that has eschewed an explicit political agenda and positioned itself more as gender inclusive networking group that holds events for both women and men working in the industry, with chapters in LA and Vancouver being most active, the focus of the Feminists in Games (FiG) initiative is to commit to gender equity in the games industry specifically and in game culture more broadly. That means a commitment to contesting the games industry's entrenched regimes of gender privilege and exclusion, and demanding gender equity in the academy as well, considering that, for example, over the past 5 years (2007-2012), of the 78 keynote speakers at prominent industry and academy conferences (Games Developers Conference, Digital Games Research Association Conference, E3, Foundations of Digital Games, among others) only 8 have been women.[9] It also means supporting students and other junior academics to come together to talk and to strategize about what an explicitly *feminist* agenda in games might look like and to begin to build that agenda from the ground up.

To that end, and following an inaugural workshop in May 2012 held in Toronto, Canada, FiG has seed funded feminist activist projects in Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and Germany. These projects include feminist oriented game design projects, local, grassroots, female-only game design workshops, and research projects designed to discover and to make more publically available information about the actual working conditions and career trajectories of women in the industry. At the time of writing this article, most of that work is in its early stages, but one organization that predated FiG and has since been supported by it, Dames Making Games, (http://www.dmg.com) is gaining real traction in Toronto.

The short but eventful history of Dames Making Games is described in a recent article by Fisher and Harvey (2013). DMG grew out of an explicit female-only game development project that received a lot of mainstream and Internet press coverage in 2011 and 2012 (Alexander, 2012b; Braga, 2011; Creighton, 2011; Woo, 2011), The Difference Engine Initiative (DEI). DMG's goals are more expansive than the original game incubation workshops that DEI held. As Fisher and Harvey (2013) indicate, their mandate is to support "women game developers and their allies through hosting casual socials, presentations and networking opportunities, training workshops and jams, and providing online support and outreach" (p. 35). And it has done just that, with local female only game jams that make use of university resources (space, software and hardware) that many female participants do not have the funds to access independently. Participants are further supported by the lending of space by another grassroots organization, Bento Miso (http://www.bentomiso.com), which hosts events and workshops for local game designers to meet and work together. The impact of these kinds of organizations is already being

felt across wider small-scale (indie) game design communities: "By embracing rather than resisting the dynamism and variation of needs within, the members of DMG are instrumental in rewriting what being indie in Toronto might look like and committed to actively creating opportunities and openings for difference to be engineered" (Fisher & Harvey, 2013, p. 38). In other words, grassroots organizations, including those that begin as explicitly dedicated to advancing and supporting women and other minorities, can and do have positive impact not only on those who participate in them, but on a larger 'rewriting' of the status quo for girls and women in games.

There are many other examples of individuals and groups who are actively working to counter the hegemonic hold of misogyny in the game culture and industry. For example, in response to the Sarkeesian harassment, Steph Guthrie, a Toronto blogger, feminist and Women in Politics, TO organizer, revealed the identity of the individual who had created the "Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian" game—a young male adult, Bendilin Spurr of Sault St. Marie, Ontario. She argued that there should be 'real world' accountability for actively supporting violence against women, stating: "I felt frustrated knowing that he leads a whole 'real life' where it might be unknown that he spends his spare time on the Internet doing things like making a video game about punching a woman in the face for having an opinion. What happens on the Internet has consequences off the Internet" (Lyonnais, 2012)[10]. This example is significant as Guthrie is pointing to one of the biggest issues in online harassment— that it is by and large anonymous, and that people continue to do it because there are no real world consequences for their actions.

Another approach is to better educate game developers and gameplayers. *Extra Credits* is a webseries that is supported by and runs on Penny Arcade TV (http://www.extracredits.com). It covers all things to do with games, tackling issues within the industry and within game development through the series. In April of 2012, James Portnow from the Extra Credits team created a video to tackle harassment issues in games. In that video he advocated that responsibility be taken by Microsoft for misogynist, racist and sexist hate speech in games, arguing that at a systems level, those speech acts could readily be blocked and/or regulated, either by users self-reporting. The important argument Portnow made is that there could be technical solutions to the problem that, while it might not stop the behavior outright, would certainly not consent to it by tacitly letting it continue.

And finally, as we detailed earlier in the article, one (always admittedly risky) way to 'talk back' is to re-broadcast that hate speech and to retell stories of harassment as blogs like Fat, Ugly or Slutty do so well. Another meaningful form of documentation that is being used is Storify, an online story creation tool that allows users to pull from social media to tell their stories (www.storify.com). Steph Guthrie used it to detail the reasons for her outing Sarkeesian's harasser and to show the kinds of comments that were leveled at her for doing so (http://storify.com/WiTOpoli/why-is-this-conversation-necessary-ben-spurr), and by others to document the tweets to the #1reasonwhy hashtag (http://storify.com/kegill/1reasonwhy-women-avoid-the-tech-industry) and (http://storify.com/mcdaldno/1-reason-why), among many others. What each of these examples illustrates is a form of activism, some of it revelatory, uncovering the seamy underbelly of the gaming, and some of it working to create change socially, culturally and structurally.[11]

The challenge that we face as feminists, activists and community organizations is of *inventing equity*, and that means telling stories of women who do *not* fit the established gender scripts. In some sense, we haven't yet accomplished that ourselves—the women who are at the center of the stories we rehearsed in this article fit all too readily into heteronormative gender

categories. As Butler (2009) puts it, they are notable precisely because they already 'count' as noteworthy subjects—they are 'recognizable' as female, whether as a mother or as an attractive young woman, and both 'comply' with gender norms. And it is from that position of 'recognizable subject' that Butler (2009) ties performativity to precarity:

> So it is, I would suggest, on the basis of this question, who counts as a subject and who does not, that performativity becomes linked with precarity. The performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life, who can be read or understood as a living being, and who lives, or tries to live, on the far side of established modes of intelligibility. (p. 4)

These characters aren't ones that are 'on the far side of established modes of intelligibility', nor do their individual subjectivities, their embodied 'personalities' challenge openly or otherwise established gender stereotypes, but as 'legitimated' speaking subjects they have both in their respectively different ways deployed that agency to open up the misogynist world of videogames to gamers and non-gamers, and from that enfranchised speaking position they have, *as others less centrally located cannot yet do,* powerfully challenged the masculinist status quo.

From there to here: Concluding thoughts

What we have tried to demonstrate is how grassroots activists (individuals and groups) have begun to push back effectively against the misogyny and violence that game culture and the industry have for too long supported. This work has begun to shake loose the reign of ludological libertarianism (Jenson & de Castell, 2011) that uncritically pronounces hate speech as "just fun and games" and has drawn attention to the need for political, social, technological and economic responsibility in the future. The fact that even our best-intentioned practices are themselves implicated and enmeshed in the very 'gender orders' that need overturning, make gender reform very much work against the grain, even in our most progressive organizations. For activism demands not just stellar individuals and isolated success stories, but the concerted collective work of ordinary people, for which a community, some kind of 'critical mass', remains for women, an absolute necessity if in both industry and academy, we are to change the conditions of our work and our know-how.

That means, we argue, bringing both critique and politics into our discussions. One way at this might be imparting on a new feminist trajectory, one that we are referring to as feminist forensics—a public hearing on where responsibility resides for the formation and preservation of gender-based disadvantage and exclusion, including a principled practice of evidence-based accounting (Jenson & de Castell, 2011). It entails discerning and disclosing responsibility, public accountability and intervention. For us, that means also turning our focus to our own academic practices, and revealing where and how they work to reinforce precisely what we have here been trying to dismantle.[12] And, in turn, not being content simply to amass descriptions of how dreadful things are and finding or devising explanations of existing states of affairs, but to discern the validity bases for such explanations and to interrogate the ways things are, so as to effectively improve what have been for far too long persistent and resilient structures that

position women as precarious subjects of gender-based disadvantage, subordination and exclusion—and to and overturn them, now.

Notes

[1] In Canada, for example, Ontario offsets labor costs of games companies by 40% and in Quebec, by up to 37.5% (see Chung, 2010). In the UK, video game companies are able to receive up to a 25% tax break on expenditures related to producing games (Stuart, 2012; Corriea, 2013) and in the EU, France has negotiated to keep tax breaks of up to 20% in place for the industry until 2017 (Colombani & Pina, 2012).

[2] What we pass over here is a discussion of representation of male and female characters in games, as that has been rehearsed elsewhere, and produces obvious outcomes like female characters are almost universally hypersexualized and simultaneously under-represented (Ivory, 2006; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009).

[3] *The New York Times* ran a front page story in August 2012 entitled "In Virtual Play Harassment is all too Real", documenting the ongoing harassment of women in gamer culture (O'Leary, 2012).

[4] The full transcript of the interview is available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20101118135928/http://killerbetties.com/killer_women_jennifer_hepler. Last accessed January 14, 2013.

[5] An archive of some of the more egregious Tweets and comments can be found at: http://freethoughtblogs.com/almostdiamonds/2012/02/21/mencallmethings-dragons-age-edition/. Last accessed January 14, 2013.

[6] See http://social.bioware.com/forum/1/topic/260/index/9381043/1.

[7] See http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games.

[8] "Any communicative work between persons, whereby the public identity of an actor is transformed into something looked on as lower in the local scheme of social types, will be called a status degradation ceremony" (Garfinkel, 1956, p. 420).

[9] Interestingly, there is also a grass roots activist effort that has been forming in online communities following an article in *The Atlantic* by Rebecca J. Rosen, who called for a pledge to the end of all male panels at technology conferences (Rosen 2013a). After her call to "men" to pledge to end all male panels, she wrote a follow-up piece that further explained her arguments for seeking out more female panelists as she received not only a lot of criticism for the original piece, but she too was subjected to hate speech for suggesting that technology panels should include women (Rosen 2013b). This 'pledge' system rhizomatically led to the creation of a website that promotes female speakers in games and design, "Women Talk Design" (http://www.womentalkdesign.com).

[10] The story is documented in full detail here: http://storify.com/WiTOpoli/why-is-this-conversation-necessary-ben-spurr.

[11] As a response to the #1reasonwhy there aren't more women in the games industry, a new hashtag was created "#1ReasonMentors and #1reasontobe, in the first case to encourage networking and mentorship for women and in the second to capture reasons that women were in the industry. While neither hashtag received the number of tweets that #1reasonwhy did, both were a way of exerting some control over how things might be different (http://kotaku.com/1reasontobe/).

[12] A recent example of this was in an academic article on feminists debates and gaming in which Mia Consalvo (2012) rehearses some of the same stories we have here, arguing that these stories should challenge "feminist" media studies scholars to "demonstrate the usefulness of research" (n.p.). Unfortunately, she seems to forget that one of the first principles of feminist practice is to also sign-post the work that has and is being done and there is plenty that brings feminist critique to the study of games. She does not cite a single academic article on the subject, not to mention any by female academics. Feminist practice, indeed.

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