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"It's a Nigger in Here! Kill the Nigger!"

User-Generated Media Campaigns Against Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in Digital Games

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ABSTRACT

Digital games scholars who study race, gender, and sexuality predominantly focus on representations – namely, the racist and sexist images and narratives found within games themselves. In this chapter, Lisa Nakamura explains that in the age of networked gaming, players often experience virulent types of discrimination not only through these representations but also at the hands of other players. In response, some players are expressing resistance to this discriminatory culture of gameplay (Nakamura, 2011a, 2011b). This chapter looks at born-digital media campaigns against racism, sexism, and homophobia such as blogs, YouTube videos, and other web-based media, examining how they document, archive, and critique instances of racism, sexism, and homophobia in live gameplay as well as within the texts of games themselves.

I've been a video game freak all my life. I play X-Box 360's Need for Speed: Carbon *(Electronic Arts, 2006),* Gears of War *(Microsoft Game Studios, 2006) and* Dead or Alive 4 *(Tecmo, 2006). They need* Tekken *(Namco) to come out on the 360. I got ideas for a racecar game and a motorcycle game. I got so many ideas, I guarantee you, people will love my ideas for games. I played* Halo *(Microsoft Game Studios, 2002). But when*

they came up with Halo 2 *(Microsoft Game Studios, 2004), it was more like for the online thing. I stopped 'cause my own team would kill me because they'd hear my voice and start calling me "nigger." "Nigger this, nigger that!" If you was right next to me at the arcade, you wouldn't say nothing. I don't ever tell them who I am, but I just forgive them for being ignorant.*

(Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, quoted in Halili, 2007)

Quinton "Rampage" Jackson is a celebrity. He was the 2007 UFC Light Heavyweight mixed martial arts champion and has parlayed his skill at this popular style of no-holds-barred fighting into a career as a television and film star, appearing as Mr. T in the 2010 film based on the beloved 1970s television show *The A Team*. He is also, like many African American males in the United States, an avid videogame fan, at least until he first logged onto networked gameplay in 2004. The Xbox first offered users the ability to play online with others using the Xbox Live network in 2002. Jackson had happily played *Halo*, Bungie Studios' popular first-person shooter (FPS) science fiction game, as a non-networked game on the Xbox, but his subsequent experiences with abusive and racist language during online play drove him away.

As Jackson explained in a video interview for *Dub Magazine*, "My first time playing *Halo*, I was playing, and I said something, and someone said 'it's a nigger in here! Kill the nigger!'" The racism that Jackson experienced while playing did not originate from the programmed experience of the game but, rather, from its players. It was not the game *Halo* that offended through negative representations of African Americans or other minorities; rather, it was other players, including his "own teammates."

Jackson's experiences point to a blind spot in the field of digital games studies, a field that has been analyzed mostly as a visual medium: the discursive content of player interaction within online games is a major aspect of a game's "content." Ratings systems for games established by evaluative bodies like the ESRB (Entertainment Software Ratings Board) only take the game content itself into account when establishing its potential harm to young players. If a game lacks overt racist, sexist, or homophobic content, it may pass muster with such ratings systems. However, as Quinton Jackson discovered, networked gaming has permitted game players to play a major role in users' experience of the game.

What Jackson encountered when participating in online, multi-user games was not stereotypical players written into game scripts, but interpersonal, aural stereotyping based on the speech patterns and inflections of players. As he described in his interview, voice communication in a remote multi-player environment produces powerful new forms of voice-activated racism. These extremely popular, networked and voice-activated games permit users to broadcast their voices in gameplay, enabling a new kind of mediated race, sex, and gender discrimination. Therefore, it is crucial that media studies develop methods to study these new forms of sociality emerging on gaming platforms. The temptation to read games as the ESRB does – as static texts like film and television shows that contain quantifiable amounts of prob-

lematic "content" – ignores the reality of their usage. The things that gamers say and type to each other while playing blockbuster, triple-A games like the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series are just as much a part of the game as its images, gameplay mechanics, and narrative. Indeed, the popularity of these networked games attests to users' attraction to games as places where you can talk – and all too often, trash talk – to each other.

Digital games scholars are well aware that games change and become more challenging to study when games are played on networks rather than alone or with friends in the same room, or even in shared public spaces like arcades. We must now develop ways of taking interpersonal interaction into account when studying them. In their 2009 study of profanity in videogames, Ivory, Williams, Martin, and Consalvo cautioned that networked play added a new and understudied dimension to the study of profanity in games, and merited additional studies. Their group analyzed several popular videogames representing a variety of age-rating categories defined by the ESRB, such as "E" for Everyone, "T" for Teen, and "M" for Mature. They found that one out of five games contained one of the "seven dirty words" which are regulated in network television, as well as "words that evoke strong emotion and offense (e.g., bitch)." Although no mention is made of racist language, the study cautioned that player-produced profanity may be a greater cause for concern in the age of networked gaming than profanity scripted into games themselves. "The increasing popularity of multiplayer games and optional multiplayer game modes featuring voice interaction between players suggests that future studies should also examine the prevalence of profanity in online voice chat sessions" (Ivory et al., 2009, p. 3).

Not all profanity or abusive language experienced or found in video gameplay is the same. Player-to-player voice communications via networked FPS games like the *Halo* series, Microsoft Xbox's original tentpole triple-A game title, are known for their profane and often abusive quality, described as "trash talk" by players and the industry alike. However, as evidenced by forum discussions on gaming websites, many gamers make a distinction between "trash talk" and discourse that crosses the line, such as use of the word "nigger." A professional black female gamer known as "BurnYourBra," a nationally ranked *Mortal Kombat* player, explained in an interview on a gaming website that "At tournaments players talk [crap] to each other. That's just the way tournaments are. People get hyped. Players get salty when they lose, which is fine. But there is a difference between trash talking and calling other players disrespectful names. For me, I've been called a dyke, a butch, a slut, a bitch [. . .] I was even called a black bitch to my face along with being called a lesbian, a gorilla, and a monkey" (Catalyst, 2011). Unlike Jackson, who was the target of voice-activated racism in an online networked videogame, BurnYourBra was "right next to" her abuser at a games tournament.

It is easy to see why this would be more likely to happen to a female gamer than to a male player like Jackson, who is known by the stage name "Rampage" for good reason. A boxer in real life, Jackson has been described as "the baddest man on the planet"; he is a huge, imposing athlete who physically resembles the hypermuscular,

intimidating warrior avatars in fighting videogames, far more so than most of their other players and fans. As he notes in his interview, he would be unlikely to be "trash talked" in a face-to-face gaming situation like a tournament. Yet in the networked and often anonymous space of online gaming, he became the victim of racist bullying by both his own teammates and strangers.

BurnYourBra's interview produced a lengthy comment stream on the Eventhubs. com website, many of which debated where the line between trash talking and racism should fall. Eventhubs.com, a popular gaming site "devoted to Capcom fighting games, especially the *Street Fighter* series," states that its main purpose is to "help build a better community, encouraging players of all talent levels to share information to make the scene more competitive and widespread" (Eventhubs.com, n.d.). Some contributors to the stream agreed that "trash talk" was inevitable, indeed an intrinsic part of the competitive culture of videogame tournaments, but that it was to be distinguished from racism. Others maintained that racism is best ignored and is of little consequence in a "postracial" world, leaving it to the receiver to "shake it off." A key paradox of race, gender, and game studies rose to the top: while profanity and abuse are "trash talk," a form of discursive waste, lacking meaningful content that contributes to the game, many identified it as a distinctive and inevitable aspect of videogame multi-player culture, and thus to be defended. As digital media theorists Galloway and Thacker (2007) write, "trash, in the most general sense, implies remnants of something used but later discarded [. . .] trash is the set of all things that has been cast out of previous sets" (p. 145). Once trash talk has been used to intimidate or bully another player, it is supposed to disappear, absolving its user of responsibility or even memory of the event. In other words, according to a particular understanding of game etiquette, players should view trash talk as a normal part of gameplay and should not be personally offended by it.

If trash talk does not deserve notice or interpretation, as some players maintain, it is because they insist that it lacks meaning beyond the limited confines of the game. Yet, like the omnipresent trash icon on the computer desktop, a fixture of personal computer use, trash talk is part of the media ecology of digital culture. Games scholars concerned about racism and sexism have tended to pay most of their attention to racist and sexist messages within games themselves.[1] However, it is clear that in the age of networked and professional gaming, players can experience the most virulent types of discrimination and hate speech at the hands of other players, through voice-activated telepresent and co-present forms of racial and sexual harassment. Thus, just like videogame cheating, in-game economies, and online gender identities – all of which have been the subject of important book-length monographs in game studies – the discursive environment of sexism, racism, and homophobia deserves critical attention because it is central to game culture (Castronova, 2005; Consalvo, 2007; Taylor, 2006).

Moreover, if trash talk and discriminatory player interaction are part of game culture's media ecology, so are the experiences and objections of players who do not believe that it should be dismissed as a normal, harmless aspect of gameplay. Neither

Jackson nor BurnYourBra is a well-known figure in videogame culture, and neither is known as a videogame activist. However, by sharing their experiences of racism within the culture of gaming, they are contributing toward a small but growing media campaign against videogame racism or trash talking. User-generated blogs that confront racism, sexism, and homophobia work against the impulse to forget or ignore racist trash talk by preserving and archiving it, using old and new media.

Players who have been victimized by trash talk and other forms of discriminatory player interaction are expressing a growing resistance to this culture (Nakamura, 2011a, 2011b). Born-digital media campaigns against racism, sexism, and homophobia (such as blogs, YouTube videos, and other web-based media) document, archive, and critique instances of offensive speech and behavior in live gameplay, as well as within the texts of games themselves. These media forums are fan-produced, and many identify themselves as "safe spaces" where these often unpopular critiques can be expressed. Such safe spaces are necessary, because critics of game cultures open themselves up to the ire of other fans when they call out racism, sexism, and homophobia, as the comment threads in BurnYourBra's interview attest. Examples of these forums include Fatuglyorslutty.com, Racialicious.com, The Border House, and The Hathor Legacy, which dedicate themselves to critiquing and publicizing problems with race, gender, and sexuality in game culture, while asserting the pleasure, aesthetic value, and social importance of games.

Videogames, and the experiences of those who play them, continue to take new forms, challenging the already difficult task of studying their complex dimensions. When Quinton Jackson found himself the victim of an online lynching in *Halo* in 2004, he was part of the first wave of users playing with networked strangers, a state of affairs that has become commonplace for gamers, and one that bears close watching by media scholars, psychologists, and critical race scholars. While users have been playing with strangers on networked computers since the early days of the Internet, console gamers are newer to the world of online gaming. Since 2009 the most popular games for platforms like the Xbox 360 and the PS3 have been networked military FPS games, with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* and its expansions leading the way. Given the growing popularity of these types of games, it is crucial that game scholars pay close attention and develop methods of studying online interaction in console gaming.

One place to look for guidance is research on massively multi-player online role-play games, or MMORPGs. For example, Douglas Thomas (2008) and Constance Steinkuehler (2006) have written groundbreaking essays on anti-Korean and anti-Chinese racism in MMORPGs such as *Diablo 2* and *Lineage 2*. The insights and methods employed in their work would enrich studies of television-based console gamers. Both studies take player interaction and player-generated media such as quizzes and forum posts into account when analyzing these games. Thomas's research focuses on a group of *Diablo 2* players who dubbed themselves "KPK," or "Korean Player Killers." Although Korea is not part of the text or narrative of *Diablo*, it becomes a meaningful and sometimes victimized racial identity in the content of

competition for game resources. Digital media studies of computer games have tended to be more adept at discussing player interaction because many of these games are networked on the Internet, and have been social for much longer. Console games are beginning to resemble these multi-user, Internet-based computer games.

Another place where game scholars can look for insights about discriminatory forms of interaction occurring in multi-user console games is in user forums emerging to address the problem. While games scholars have been slow to produce studies of this phenomenon, antiracist media campaigns by gamers are stepping into the breach. For example, The Border House blog describes itself as "Breaking Down Borders in Gaming": "It's a blog for those who are feminist, queer, disabled, people of color, transgender, poor, gay, lesbian, and others who belong to marginalized groups, as well as allies" (Border House, n.d.). In its policies about posting, it asks users to include "trigger warnings" about content that "involves sexual assault or violence towards women and other marginalized groups, which may distress or cause readers to be triggered" (Border House, n.d.).

Many gamers are resistant to critiquing racism, sexism, and homophobia within their favorite games. In her analysis of online player discussions about race and racism in *Grand Theft Auto*, Everett found a range of responses, "from blatant racism to racial tolerance or inclusion" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 158). To combat the problem of discrimination and overcome their fear of speaking up, players have created their own Internet forums and content. Player-driven media, such as posts of abusive in-game messages and gameplay, rely upon user-generated content to produce a compelling and often hilarious evidentiary archive of egregious sexism that many female gamers experience. For example, the website Fatuglyorslutty.com (named after the three most common adjectives online women gamers hear during gameplay) exhorts readers to

> save those awful messages you receive this weekend (and beyond) and send them in to submissions@fatuglyorslutty.com or through our submission form. You can also let us know via Twitter. And tell your friends to save their messages, too! What can you send us? We'll accept pictures / screenshots, audio files and video recordings. Whether it's from Xbox Live, PSN, Steam, WoW or any other game, we want to see it! ("Get ready for the weekend," 2011)

Fatuglyorslutty's submission page encourages users to report abuse to game moderators before posting at the site. However, it is clear the site itself addresses what the game industry cannot or will not address by publicizing sexist interactions on popular game platforms and exposing abusive gamers to public ridicule. In this, their strategy resembles Hollaback!, a "movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology" (Hollaback!, n.d.). Hollaback! encourages women to take pictures of sexual harassers and catcallers with their cellphones and to share them on their website, creating an archive for other users to access as well as a form of accountability. By collecting women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and

queer (LGBTQ) folks' stories and pictures in a safe and shareable way with mobile phone applications, Hollaback! is creating a crowdsourced initiative to combat street harassment. Hollaback! breaks the silence that has perpetuated sexual violence internationally, asserting that any and all gender-based violence is unacceptable, and creates a space where those who have experienced verbal abuse have an option – and, more importantly, a response.

Similarly, the Fatuglyorslutty site relies exclusively on crowdsourcing to produce a rich sampling of sexist, racist slurs sent from one gamer to another in the course of gameplay on game consoles, mobile devices, within PC games like *World of Warcraft*, and on every imaginable gaming device that permits strangers to contact other strangers.

The site's successful use of humor has helped it to garner positive attention in the gaming community, quite a feat given how unpopular and divisive the topic of sexism

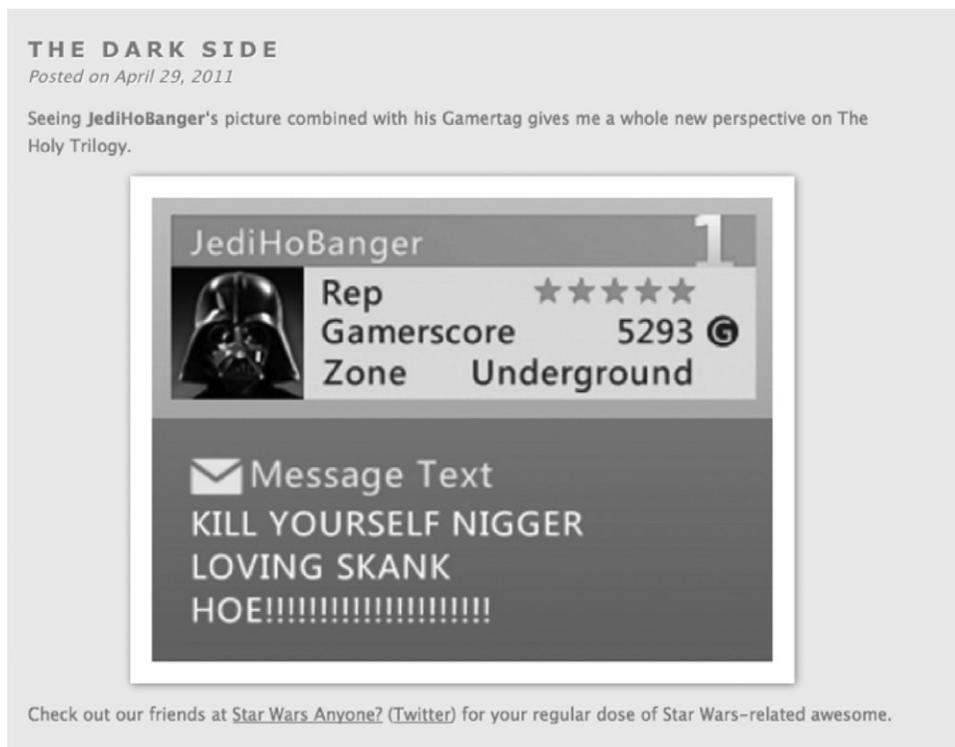**Figure 21.1** User-contributed screenshot from fatuglyorslutty.com. Retrieved May 1, 2011, from http://fatuglyorslutty.com/2011/05/01/with-a-side-of-seriously-disturbing/

THE DARK SIDE
Posted on April 29, 2011

Seeing **JediHoBanger's** picture combined with his Gamertag gives me a whole new perspective on The Holy Trilogy.

JediHoBanger   1

Rep   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Gamerscore   5293 Ⓖ
Zone   Underground

✉ Message Text
KILL YOURSELF NIGGER
LOVING SKANK
HOE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Check out our friends at Star Wars Anyone? (Twitter) for your regular dose of Star Wars–related awesome.

Figure 21.2   User-contributed screenshot from fatuglyorslutty.com. Retrieved May 1, 2011, from http://fatuglyorslutty.com/2011/04/

has been in recent years.[2] A writer for Kotaku, a popular and widely read gaming blog owned by Gawker Media, wrote the following in 2011:

> The casual racism, snarling sexism and random belligerence one encounters in online play, particularly in a first-person shooter over Xbox Live, is not at all a new phenomenon. It's sadly accepted as par for the course, in fact. But the three curators of "Fat, Ugly or Slutty," have chosen to archive it, not so much for a high-minded ideal, but to hold a mirror up to idiots worthy of ridicule. (Good, 2011)

Indeed, Fatuglyorslutty.com embodies Henry Jenkins's (2006) "critically optimistic" theories about the power of participatory media. In this case, interactive media themselves offer perhaps the most effective means of combatting other, more problematic interactive media experiences.

As the Kotaku post noted, racism, sexism, and homophobia are commonplace in networked console video gameplay. Though the Xbox 360, PS2/3, and Wii all have terms of service agreements regarding the use of profanity and hate speech in live gameplay, these regulations are enforced only through a system of victim-reported

"tickets" that are acted upon well after the fact. Users who engage in hate speech can be banned from the service but are able to log back on after the ban period has passed. The ineffectiveness of industry regulation of hate speech has created a need for victims of gamer abuse to create their own participatory outlets to engage a wider public and increase awareness of this serious issue.

Players who are challenging the normalization of trash talk and discriminatory forms of multi-user gameplay are often equally insistent in their enthusiasm for games, and are careful not to attack the games themselves or videogames in their entirety. In his interview with *Dub Magazine*, for example, Jackson refrains from faulting the content of the game itself; indeed, he professes his love for the game. Instead he blames other players, rather than game developers, with creating a racially hostile, uninhabitable space for people of color.

Given the popularity of multi-user online gaming and the complex dimensions of gameplay, the future of game studies must include attention to player experiences with each other as well as with games themselves. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss three new directions for future videogame research that I believe will help game studies to encompass a more ecological and critical perspective on player experience and interaction with games and with other gamers.

The Politics of Videogame Pleasure: Who Plays, Who Pays?

It has become unfashionable in critical circles to discuss pleasure in videogames, and more common to frame the debates in terms of "addiction." Yet games studies scholars are missing a critical dimension by avoiding the question of pleasure in playing videogames, for this is precisely why people play them, and why they are hard to study. The notion that pleasure has a *politics* is the basis for both feminist theory and theories of race and ethnicity. The pleasurable is both personal and political, and few media are as quintessentially personal as videogames. Often enjoyed privately or in the company of anonymous or known networked co-players, they are mass-mediated, interactive products that give everyone a different kind of "happy ending."

However, the political critique of videogame pleasure lags far behind. Such a critique requires acknowledging that much of the pleasure of videogames comes at the expense of women and people of color, both literally and figuratively, as women in Asian sweatshops manufacture the devices we use to enjoy games, as "urban" games represent Black and Latino men as thugs and criminals, and as women and people of color find themselves the victims of voice-activated discrimination in networked games. In the latter case, some argue that the problem is nil, because consoles permit users to disable voice communications. However, this constraint can harm collaborative gameplay, and is the equivalent of telling African Americans to cover their ears if words like "nigger" are shouted at them. (Moreover, suggesting that the problem

of discrimination can be solved in this way is indicative of a broader tendency to insist that there are simple technical solutions to complex social problems.) Others argue that the popularity of videogames among people of color is proof enough that discrimination is meaningless and ineffectual. To the contrary, the fact that people of color are eager consumers of videogames despite a climate of racism needs to be better understood, and certainly ought not to be invoked to validate the racial and gendered economy of game pleasure.

There is beginning to appear research and theory in games studies that more adequately addresses the complexity of these issues. Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter's *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* offers an excellent and integrated critique of race, gender, and labor within the new world gaming order (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009). The book provides a "short history of the video game from the perspective of immaterial labor," approaching games as neoliberal texts (p. 5). Gaming's production cultures, player cultures, and textual content reflect transnational power relations, according to these authors. Each individual on the circuit of culture has a distinctive form of labor to perform, whether it is playing, modding, hardware building, or laboring within virtual world games. The Global South consumes, produces, and is represented within digital games in a very different fashion from the Global North. As this work makes clear, a challenge for future games studies is to examine the transnational context in which videogames are produced, circulated, and experienced.

Overemphasis on the Hardcore Gamer

The vast majority of videogame criticism addresses "hardcore" games despite a profound shift in recent years toward "casual," mobile, and social games.[3] This is a critical gap that needs to be addressed for at least two reasons: a focus on high-learning-curve, non-interruptible, expensive "triple A" games ignores the reality of how digital games are played today and contributes toward the now-cherished identity of the gamer as a young White male who is part of geek culture. An effective and relevant games criticism will need to address non-hardcore games that constitute the majority of game hours spent.

Many videogame players and scholars tend to characterize digital games as superior to other forms of media – more interactive, more agentive, and more flexible in terms of the identities available to the user. Looking at hardcore videogames exclusively is problematic because it perpetuates the valorization of one group of users' experience over another. Women and children's engagements with games in particular will necessarily take a back seat in critical work if it continues with this narrow focus. The pleasures of casual games are underanalyzed and thus less visible, devaluing the experiences of a group of players who have often been ignored and devalued in media studies.

Ripe for research in this area are casual games developers such as Big Fish, whose products are marketed to and enjoyed primarily by middle-aged women. In fact, feminist media scholars would be wise to focus attention on casual games and their users, building on the work of scholars such as Janice Radway (1991), whose *Reading the Romance* legitimated the study of women's popular fiction texts. Radway's approach differed from that of traditional literary critics, for she studied the reader culture and forms of interaction that were enabled and invoked by the platform of romance novels. It is no accident that FPS games are prime platforms for racism, sexism, and homophobia, yet nor does the game content completely determine what occurs in players' interactions with the game and with one another. The complex and nuanced interaction between the culture produced by active audiences and the texts they interact with are important areas for future study. Feminist media scholars need to focus some attention on games if they wish to fully understand popular media use among women today.

Videogames are Both Textual and Communicative Artifacts

The news about race, gender, and sexuality in videogames can be depressing. Games depict minorities in stereotyped ways, often in fighting games, urban games, or military games.[4] The game industry itself is extremely male-dominated and not at all racially diverse. Communication affordances between players in networked digital games are often used to transmit sexual harassment and racist hate speech (Huntemann, 2010). It is this latter type of racism that is the least studied, perhaps because it requires methods of observation, ethnography, and analysis that are unfamiliar to many humanists who are trained in textual studies. While social scientists tend to focus on game player practices and cultures, literary and software scholars such as Lev Manovich, Ian Bogost, Nick Montfort, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin treat games as relatively autonomous visual, aural, and textual artifacts. Studying game player discourse presents a different set of methodological challenges from analyzing game content alone. For games are communicative artifacts: they are autonomous texts that are also platforms of social interaction. Game texts and game interaction are co-constitutive and need to be studied together.[5]

However, it is important to conduct these studies, for if gamers are themselves the source of some of the most virulent racist, sexist, and homophobic messages in videogames, they are also the source of some of the most ingenious and potent campaigns against them. As Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) write, "games not only cultivate the imagination of alternative social possibilities; they also present practical tools that may be useful for its actualization" (p. 213). Players create viciously racist environments and discursive climates within digital games. At the same time,

other players are using the Internet to campaign against racism, sexism, and homophobia by creating their own archives of hate speech, often using humor as a weapon to mobilize support and create a community. This community ranges from the player who protests discussions of racism and sexism in games as "overreacting," to those who mobilize the language of post-traumatic stress disorder when creating moderation policies for their fan blogs.

Conclusion

All games are social. Even single-player games have racial metacultures, or cultural artifacts and practices that are game-centered but occur outside of the context of the game, that are deeply woven into game experience (Nielsen, Smith, & Pajares Tosca, 2008). Game fans are extremely valuable resources for scholars because they are obsessive chroniclers of their own experiences, opinions, and information about games. As game scholar and evangelist Jane McGonigal notes, some of the largest and most extensive collective intelligence artifacts on the Internet are game-related: "there are [. . .] more than 65,000 WoW players who are registered contributors to WoWWiki, currently the world's second largest wiki after Wikipedia" (McGonigal, 2011).

These are vast depositories of user-generated knowledge and new content waiting for scholars to study them. And demographic studies like the excellent series produced by the Play On group at Stanford University have contributed much to our understanding of racial and gender identity choices among *World of Warcraft* players. In a study of male players entitled "Do Men Heal More When in Drag? Conflicting Identity Cues Between User and Avatar," Yee, Ducheneaut, Yao, and Nelson (2011) used behavioral data from more than 1,040 users in a virtual world, and discovered that men display more cooperative or supportive behavior in-game when playing as female avatars.

These studies contribute a great deal to our understanding of identity in digital games, and it is important that game scholarship continue to produce empirical studies of player behavior. But more nuanced analytical and interpretive work is needed to provide critical insights into player behavior and culture. Game fans have already produced much more detailed summaries, walkthroughs, typologies, and timelines on Wikipedia than scholars can hope to top. They are not always as ready to be critical about game cultures' blind spots and dirty laundry. The user-generated anti-harassment media campaigns like the ones I have described here are far less well read than game blogs like Gamasutra and Kotaku. Thus, our job as scholars must extend far beyond appreciation, measurement, categorization, and justification of games as legitimate art forms and key media industries. Media scholars must address games in a critical and historical fashion, identifying how they interpellate or hail users as fans, consumers, social actors, producers, and gendered, racialized, and national subjects.

According to a 2011 report by researchers at Northwestern University, there have always been differences between White and non-White youth when it comes to frequency of media use, and these have grown significantly in recent years:

> Historically, scholars have been aware of differences in the amount of time that White and minority children spend with media, especially TV. But last year's Generation M2 study indicated a large increase in the amount of time both Black and Hispanic youth are spending with media, to the point where they are consuming an average of 13 hours worth of media content a day (12:59 for Blacks and 13:00 for Hispanics), compared with about eight and a half hours (8:36) for White youth, a difference of about four and a half hours a day. In recent years, this gap in media use between White and Black youth has doubled. (Rideout, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2011)

Digital games represent a large chunk of the total time that minority youth are spending with games. "Among 8- to 18-year-olds, White youth spend less time playing video games in a typical day than other young people do (:56 for Whites, 1:25 for Blacks, 1:35 for Hispanics, and 1:37 for Asians)" (Rideout et al., 2011). Videogames are more than just another pastime: they are communicative platforms that are poorly understood by ratings agencies like the ESRB, either maligned or lauded by journalistic news media and pundits, and they are also public spaces where youth are negotiating their identities. The struggle for racial justice is occurring in gamespace as we speak. User-generated campaigns against in-game racism are one of many points of scholarly inquiry that can help us understand the purposes that hate speech serves for these communities of gamers who are increasingly "alone together," as Sherry Turkle observes (Turkle, 2011).

NOTES

1   While work such as Ivory et al. (2009) analyzes game content in order to trace the ways that game texts exclude the experiences of people of color and women, most studies of racism in videogames have focused on racial content and themes within game texts. Anna Everett (2009), David Leonard (2006), Jessica Langer (2008), Tanner Higgin (2009), David Golumbia (2009), and Alexander Galloway (2007) have written excellent essays on racism in videogame imagery, narratives, and game mechanics. Representations of Black people as evil zombies, drug dealers, and criminals perpetuate some of the worst images found in other media, while the exclusion of images of Blackness from fantasy games creates an artificial "Blackless fantasy," as Higgin puts it. Racist representation within games can be found in every genre. Simulation games like the immensely popular *Civilization* series depict non-Western culture as shot through with superstition, cruelty, and irrationality (see Galloway, 2007). *World of Warcraft*'s Tauren, Troll, and Blood and Night Elf player classes reprise classic racist imagery of Native Americans, Caribbeans, and Asians from previous media (see Langer, 2008). Interestingly, "casual" videogames that appeal to broad audiences like the 2009 "Game of the Year" *Plants Versus Zombies*, the classics *Tetris* and *Bejeweled*, the sidescroller *Braid*, and the beautiful *Passage* all lack this type of racial stereotyping.

2   The "dickwolves" discussion thread is an example of problems with sexism in the gaming community. Penny Arcade, a website that caters to gamers and sponsors a major games conference called PAX, published a cartoon entitled "the Sixth Slave" that used the word "rape" in a way that many readers found offensive. Feminist gamers and the Penny Arcade leadership waged a public flamewar over this use of sexist language, one that continued unresolved for several weeks. In 2011, many feminist gamers boycotted the PAX conference in protest at the organization's handling of this controversy.

3   See Juul (2009) for an excellent introduction to the shift from hardcore to casual games.

4   Everett and Watkins (2008) have termed these types of spaces "Racialized Pedagogical Zones" in order to highlight their role in teaching young gamers about the proper place for raced and criminalized bodies (pp. 141–166).

5   See Everett and Watkins (2008) for an excellent example of this type of work.

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