

Deviant Bodies Resisting Online:  
Examining the Intersecting Realities of Women of Color in Xbox Live

by

Kishonna Gray

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2011 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Lisa Anderson, Chair  
Pauline Cheong  
Merlyna Lim

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2011

## ABSTRACT

Employing qualitative methods and drawing from an intersectional framework which focuses on the multiple identities we all embody, this dissertation focuses on oppressions and resistance strategies employed by women of color in Xbox live, an online gaming community. Ethnographic observations and narrative interviewing reveal that women of color, as deviants within the space, face intersecting oppressions in gaming as in life outside the gaming world. They are linguistically profiled within the space based off of how they sound. They have responded with various strategies to combat the discrimination they experience. Some segregate themselves from the larger gaming population and many refuse to purchase games that depict women in a hyper-sexualized manner or that present people of color stereotypically. For others, the solution is to "sit-in" on games and disrupt game flow by 'player-killing' or engage in other 'griefing' activities. I analyze this behavior in the context of Black feminist consciousness and resistance and uncover that these methods are similar to women who employ resistance strategies for survival within the real world.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and son.

Kayland, you stood by me through my entire academic career. Your love, devoted guidance, and unwavering support have allowed me to think, feel, and challenge myself through my toughest times. Your support made me feel I could accomplish anything. This is for you.

Anteaus, my heart, my soul: I feel I have missed the first months of your life to complete this dissertation. Please forgive me. But know that I am doing this for you. Your life has renewed my life. I am forever grateful and thankful for you. Mama loves you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this piece of work possible. All your names would be on the cover of this dissertation if there was space.

First and foremost, I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Anderson. I was fortunate to have a chair that gave me the freedom to explore different topics as opposed to just settling. I am in love with my research and I have you to thank for that. I must also extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Pauline Cheong and Dr. Merlyna Lim, my committee members. The long conversations we had helped me sort out the technical details of my work (I know sometimes I made no sense).

To my graduate directors, Dr. Nancy Jurik, Dr. Pat Lauderdale, and Dr. Madelaine Adelman: without your tireless energy, extreme patience, flexibility, and support, I would not have made it through this. Also, thanks for the funding when I needed it the most!

To Dr. Majorie Zatz: I have no idea how you find the time to do all that you do (but you do). I just want to thank you for always making yourself available when we graduate students needed you. I know we get *worse* sometimes!

A special thanks to Miss Nancy Winn – the woman who knows it all! I know we do not make your job easy for you (and we actually make it harder), but you are always available for us and never get bothered when we just walk in your office (even when you are obviously busy). It is like you expect us all the time. Thank you so much for your hard work and for just being you. I love you and will miss you dearly.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Gray Cavender, for his guidance and for providing me with ample opportunity to conduct research. I would also like to thank Dr. Doris Provine for the mentorship she provided. Our brainstorming sessions produced some of the coolest teaching strategies. And a special thanks to Dr. Vera Lopez for all the advice and tips on how to survive graduate school – I made it!

To Dr. Helen Quan and Dr. Mary Romero: You expressed on many occasions how tedious this journey can be for women of color. But our resilient nature has proven that no task is too much for us. I will always be indebted to you.

And a special thanks to all the other faculty of JSI: Dr. David Altheide, Dr. Wendy Cheng, Dr. Alan Gomez, Dr. Vanna Gonzales, Dr. LaDawn Haglund, Dr. John Johnson, and Dr. Charles Lee. Just know that each of you influenced me in some way.

I must also thank my mentor and advisor, Dr. Peter Kraska - I would not be here if it was not for you. Before you, I had no idea what graduate school was! I will never be able to thank you enough. And to Dr. Garrison, you have stood by me through it all. I will never be able to express just how special you are to me. And to the other faculty and staff of the Department of Criminal Justice at ECU, I love you and thank you for getting me here.

And a special thanks to the McNair Scholars Program at Eastern Kentucky University and at Arizona State University for the academic support and for believing that I could reach my potential.

To my cohort, we are few in number now, but we are finally here. I love you guys: Nick, Gabriella, Ed, Suen, Wendy...Forgive me if I missed someone.

To my office mates, Sher and Tim, I appreciate your love, support, and friendship. Without it, I would not have succeeded and kept my sanity at the same time! Also to Reshawna, my twin! Our journey will be written about one day. Maybe even a straight to DVD movie! To Lacy, the funniest woman I know! Keep the HVIC busy for me. Denisse, I am going to miss that laugh! Thanks for your friendship! To Chris, er Dr. Holman, thanks for the many hugs! I needed them. And Sarah, thanks for taking the time to read and edit my work (in the midst of all your madness). And to all the other graduate students, remember you are more than a community, you are a family. Take care of one another while mama Shonna is gone!

I also want to thank the Gray and Denson families for their continued love and support. We finally coming home!

Last and most importantly, to the awesome women inside Xbox live. Thanks for welcoming me into your communities. This is all for you!

For anyone I missed, know it was not intentional. You will always be in my heart if not on paper.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Theoretical Frameworks .....	11
Limitations .....	12
Delimitations .....	13
Organization of the Study .....	14
2 THEORETICAL CONTEXT .....	16
Feminist Standpoint Theory .....	16
Intersectionality .....	18
Linguistic Profiling .....	21
Social Resistance .....	23
Black Feminist Theory .....	25
Narrative and Ideology .....	34
Hegemony and Ideology .....	37
3 VIDEO GAMES AS IDEOLOGICAL PROJECTS .....	40
Default Gamer .....	40
Racial and Gendered Depictions .....	43
Taxonomy of Gamers .....	53
Griefing and Flaming .....	54

	Page
CHAPTER	
Online Disinhibition .....	56
Explaining Xbox and Xbox live.....	59
4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	66
Feminist Methodology.....	67
Ethnographic Methodology .....	71
Virtual Ethnography .....	75
Research Design .....	83
Participants and Procedures.....	84
Research Environment.....	84
Narrative Interviews .....	86
Sample.....	88
5 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY.....	91
The Study Participants.....	91
Table 1: Male Participants.....	92
The Process Leading to Racism .....	93
Women, Linguistic Profiling, and Intersecting Oppressions.....	95
Participant Demographic Summary .....	64
Table 2: Female Participants .....	95
Female Clans in Xbox live .....	96
Women Resisting Online.....	102

CHAPTER	Page
6	DEVIANT BODIES: THE PRESENCE OF THE 'OTHER' IN
	ONLINE GAMING ..... 107
	Defining Deviance ..... 107
	Blackness as Deviance..... 109
	Deviant Bodies, Racism, and Xbox live ..... 110
	Linguistic Profiling ..... 115
	Normalizing Racism ..... 117
7	DEVIANT BODIES RESISTING ONLINE ..... 119
	Identity Confirmation in Xbox live ..... 121
	Racial and Gender Passing ..... 122
	Black Women as a Heterogenous Group ..... 124
	Intersecting Oppressions and Xbox live ..... 128
	Black Women Resisting in Xbox live..... 132
	Long Term Strategies or Short Term Gains..... 134
8	REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 136
	Recurring Themes..... 136
	Recommedations for Future Research ..... 139
	Reflections and Summary..... 141
	REFERENCES ..... 144

	Page
CHAPTER	
APPENDIX	
A    XBOX LIVE CHAT AND OBSERVATION LOG .....	158
B    INFORMATIONAL LETTER .....	160
C    INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	162
D    FULL DATA EXCERPTS .....	167
E    IRB APPROVAL .....	176
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	178

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

My journey begins the same as it always has, in the comfort of night with the sounds of light whirring and warmth emitting gently in my direction. It's almost soothing, white noise to a baby's ear. I continue along and enter the world of Sera. I'm not alone. There are others who have embarked on this journey with me. We group ourselves together so we don't have to continue as individuals and become a collective, a team. We are just a group of people gathered for one cause, to save the world.

We organize ourselves for safety and many begin to talk strategy. The number one goal: stay alive! Several in the group begin talking and it's obvious one has emerged as our leader. I listen attentively and pay attention to the directions given. My first task, guard a particular area and prevent our foe from nabbing a certain weapon. My efforts were not successful. This led to the demise of my entire team, and I was disappointed I could not put up more of a fight to defeat the enemy. Fortunately for us, this magical world allows us to come back to life and giving us another chance to avenge our deaths.

We begin in another location and once again I am given instructions to help serve the team. This time, I am tasked with the safety of the leader. So I follow him and provide support. He runs naively into the opponent and I follow him as a good teammate would. It is a trick. We are flanked and killed, and I am blamed for this failure once again although our team emerges victorious.

The leader begins talking rather harshly to me and is upset that I am not engaging with the team or responding to his questions. So as to not aggravate him further, I insert my microphone and begin talking. I start off by apologizing for my failures and pledge to do better. However, this conversation shifts away from my poor performance within battle to attacks against me as a person.

“Oh you guys hear this? That’s why you suck. You’re a fucking girl! What the fuck are you doing in my room?” Even after this initial attack, I am still apologetic hoping that the attacks will soon end (at this point, I am used to the name calling). However, the attacks get worse.

“Wait wait wait. You’re not just any girl. You’re black. Get this black bitch off my team. Did you spend all your welfare check buying this game? Why aren’t you doing what you love? Get back to your crack pipe with your crack babies.” The insults continue with a barrage of colorful stereotypical comments aimed at me as an African-American woman. The beautiful world I begin discussing is not so beautiful all the time. The journey, although mostly fun and enjoyable, frequently becomes a place full of hatred and intolerance. This journey I am referring to is the online gaming experience associated with Xbox live – a console video game.

Although this is one of the most extreme displays of racially sexist speech I experienced personally, other marginalized gamers experience similar acts of racism, sexism, and other inequalities everyday inside the virtual walls of Xbox live. With this project, I hope to examine these inequalities and position these acts within the boundaries of the body which serves as host to our multiple

identities. To date, inequalities within Xbox live have been ignored and overlooked to the point that these acts have become normalized within the space. Microsoft Xbox has even publically proclaimed that racism and sexism are not a problem within the gaming space. With this exploratory project, I hope to provide descriptive insight into the realities of women and people of color and reveal the nature of oppression within Xbox live. Importantly, this project will explore the methods employed by women of color to resist the oppressive structures created by hegemonic whiteness and masculinity within the space.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The basic premise of this research is that online spaces have been constructed as white, masculine power structures having hegemonic control with the ability to reproduce dominant ideology. Xbox live, an online gaming community supported by a video game console, is one such community; in this study, it will be examined for its potential to deploy this ideology. While evidence of these oppressive structures has been established, Microsoft has yet to admit there is a problem within the space creating isolation for many marginalized bodies within the space. Additionally, literature on Xbox live is non-existent and literature highlighting inequalities within online gaming communities is scant.

To reveal the lack of consensus on the issue of inequality in online spaces, ponder the following statements which reveal the varying perspectives:

*...Microsoft has a zero tolerance policy for any racist remarks made by users of its online system. "We shoot to eliminate it completely...numerically speaking racism has not been a major issue on their network..." (Totilo, 2005)*

November 21, 2005 - MTV Interview conducted with Aaron Greenberg, group marketing manager for Xbox Live

*I call it 'digital demonization', and we have seen it time and again targeting innocents because of their faith, their race, their ethnicity, their sexual orientation. Here at the United Nations, we understand the power of words. Words can hurt or they can heal. They can rupture or they can repair. For young people, electronic harassment and cyber hate can have a searing impact (Ki-moon, 2009).*

June 16, 2009 – Remarks given by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Cyber Hate at a United Nations Seminar

*I just feel like on the Internet, in this situation, anything is possible...I don't know who these people are. They claim to be the KKK, and I have a really big problem with that. They're calling my children monkeys, that they're going to hang them, they're going to kill them, they're going to kill me. It's crazy, and it's out of control. Nobody is trying to do anything about this. My husband has contacted Microsoft for many years, and I don't understand why the FBI is not all over this (Keyboard Klansman, 2008).*

January 2008 – Nydia, a guest on Dr. Phil, remarks about her son's Xbox Live experience

*I don't mean to make light of his troubles, as I surely do not condone this type of behavior, but seriously, anyone who has played on Xbox Live has probably heard the n-word multiple times. While it certainly is offensive, I don't think anyone out there is actively hunting people through Xbox Live in order to find out where they live and attack them. Most people who use racial slurs on Live are idiot kids who think it's cool because, well — they're idiot kids. Going on Dr. Phil's show just gives Terry's favorite pastime an even worse reputation than it deserves (Landis, 2008).*

January 9, 2008 – Article written by Dan Landis in response to the Dr. Phil show

*E'er day. It never fails. As soon as dey hear how I sound, dey start callin' me nigga.*

August 24, 2010 - Interview conducted with *silentassassin321* (Xbox live gamer for 5 years)

The above comments reveal just how problematic understanding discrimination within virtual spaces can be. Some view it as freedom of speech; some view it as acts of hate, and others view it as kids being kids. But overall it seems that most

of the people who view the problem the most harmful are the one's who actually experience the discrimination. As United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon outlines in his remarks, new media spaces have brought enormous good to our world transforming our lives. But on the information superhighway, there are a few dark alleys that reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate hate (Ki-moon, 2009). One of those dark alleys on the Information superhighway is the Xbox Live virtual gaming space.

In November 2005, the month which marked the anniversary of Xbox live, Microsoft representatives proudly proclaimed that racism was not a major issue on their network. They further outlined the upgrades implemented to the Xbox 360 system that would safeguard gamers and reduce verbal abuse (Totilo, 2005). The last quote above paints a different picture regarding the abuse present within this virtual gaming space. Using the term verbal abuse actually negates the severity of what minority gamers within this space experience: intersecting oppressions related to their ascribed identities.

Suler & Philips (1998) places the blame of this type of deviant behavior on the infrastructure of many digital spaces. Specifically, chat communities are built upon certain types of software that allows for the interactive environment in which users can engage. However, those who misbehave essentially exploit the environment by utilizing sounds, visual imagery, and text abilities to harass others. In voice based communities such as Xbox live, there is no need to modify the infrastructure of the space to harass others (although the structure allows for it); all you have to do is speak creating an environment that fosters linguistic

profiling. Given that most digital technologies resemble real world spaces, it is easier for offline inequalities to manifest online; as Nakamura (2002) suggests, gender, class, and race hierarchies have been carried onto the internet. So even though a user may be able to leave the body behind when entering cyberspace, the real body still lingers – creating a racialized or gendered cybertype, and our ‘fluid selves are no less subject to cultural hegemonies, rules of conduct and regulating cultural norms than are solid ones’ (Nakamura, 2002, p. 325). Beth Kolko reinforces Nakamura’s argument where she suggests that there is an inherent desire to ignore race and ethnicity in virtual worlds. She notes that the default ethnicity on most MUD’s is set to White creating a default whiteness for virtual worlds (2000, p. 216), replicating real world spaces where unmarked whiteness is the cultural norm. Additionally, MMORPG’s<sup>1</sup> such as EverQuest II and World of Warcraft have actually seen the disappearance and omission of blackness from these kinds of virtual fantasy worlds.

EverQuest, a MMORPG that features a Black race of playable characters, succeeded in incorporating Black bodies into game play. However, the Erudites, the Black race, were from a segregated continent that was smaller, less appealing than the White continent, and far less populated, exotically placing the Black race. When EverQuest II was released, the Erudite (Black) race had evolved into a ‘skeletal, Caucasoid’ that was ‘vaguely extraterrestrial’ (Higgin, 2009, p. 14).

---

<sup>1</sup> MMORPG is an acronym standing for a massively multiplayer online role playing game which is a genre of game where a large number of players interact with one another within a virtual gaming community.

Met with little dissent or objection, this change was seen as an acceptable ejection of blackness compensated by the injection of brown coloring options for the other traditionally White races such as the Human and Barbarian. This ostensibly represents a form of progress in finally acknowledging Humans as being more than just White. Consequently, the new ability for players to color races brown rather than enforcing a default Black race has resulted in an even more pervasive whiteness (Higgin, 2009, p. 14).

This hegemonic change re-privileged whiteness, as the narrative deployed was the devaluing of one race over another. Although many people claim that race shouldn't matter, to black and brown bodies, when you are constantly omitted or erased, it does.

This omission of Black characters from the discourse devalues the potential of video games to provide productive racial experiences because they reinforce dominant notions of Blacks as incapable of being functional members of society. These games, although masquerading as progressively engaged through a strategy of colorblindness, function as hegemonic fantasy by filtering the racial imagery that threatens the safety and political coherence of White dominance (Higgin, 2009, p. 6).

So when viral video imagery such as Leeroy Jenkins is popularized by mainstream media, this lack of representation in MMORPG's is even more pronounced given the absence of blackness.

Leeroy Jenkins was a video created to promote guild play in World of Warcraft. The character Leeroy was an attempt to show what not to do during gameplay. Leeroy did not take the game seriously, he did not collaborate with his teammates, and he basically led to his team's demise. This is a traditional racialized cybertype, as Nakamura explains, deploying traditional stereotypes of Blacks as the inferior other further legitimizing whiteness. The fact that World of Warcraft has a small number of Black avatars shows that blackness seems to be

allowed in sporadically, in small doses, and in a manner that fulfills the desires of the dominant, White other (Higgin, 2009). For players and game designers, the deployment of this type of narrative confirms that ‘blackness is not an appropriate discourse of heroic fantasy’ (Higgin, 2009, p. 3).

Kolko found it surprising that in a space that dramatized other aspects of identity such as gender and class, ethnicity was shockingly absent from most MMO’s. Debunking utopic assumptions of virtual space, Kolko argues that the internet is far from liberatory but rather a space that continues a ‘cultural map of assumed whiteness’ (2000, p. 225). Kolko rightly points out that when there is an attempt to make race and ethnicity present, it is met with resistance. So when bloggers began commenting on Leeroy Jenkins, any mention of racially stereotypical imagery enflamed many users within the space. In response, one user replied that Leeroy was merely a character within a game without a race. Comments such as these confirm what people of color already know – in virtual reality, everyone finally gets to be White.

The White dominance of gamespace has been recast as a racially progressive movement that ejects race in favor of a default, universal whiteness and has been ceded, in part, by a theoretical tendency to embrace passing and anonymity in cyberspace. When politically charged issues surface that reveal the embedded stereotypes at work amid an ostensibly colorblind environment, they are quickly de-raced and cataloged as aberrations rather than analyzed as symptomatic of more systemic trends (Higgin, 2009, pp. 7-8).

As Leonard also found within discourses on Grand Theft Auto, there is a complete lack of interest in discussing racist content in these racialized games.

Blackness in MMORPG's is 'intentionally obscured to erase any troubling political connotations' (Higgin, 2009, p. 12).

In subsequent actions, Leeroy Jenkins was 'immortalized' with a World of Warcraft Trading Card; however, 'Leeroy's brown skin has been whitened' (Higgin, 2009, p. 7). Although this action may have been in response to a potential racist outlash, all it did was continue the legitimization of whiteness and deletion of blackness within this community. Ironically, the world of the MMORPG depends on the history of blackness, as Higgin explains, in that the conflict between the races in World of Warcraft's fantasy world 'bears similarities to imperialism and colonialism' (p. 12) and Asian players in World of Warcraft serve as example to this point given that their bodies have been reduced to mere laborers. In addition to this labor label, Asian players are seen as taking advantage of the economic opportunities present within the virtual world. Specifically, Chinese and Koreans have been referred to as 'farmers' who produce and sell virtual goods for real world money. These products include weapons, garments, avatars, and other virtual bodies (Nakamura, 2009, p. 130).

...the construction of Chinese identity in MMO's as abject, undesirable, and socially contaminated racializes the culture of online games, a culture that scholars such as Castronova (2005) have claimed are unique (and valuable) because they are exempt from "real world" problems such as racism, classism, "looksism" and other types of social inequality (Nakamura, 2009, p. 130).

Gamers within World of Warcraft have lashed out racially towards these players. Interestingly, Brookey found that the default gamer may have negative feelings towards these Chinese farmers but the gamers don't necessarily view their

feelings as racial discrimination (as cited in Nakamura, 2009). This example of the racialization of labor within the game is similar to hegemonic discussions of Asian labor within popular media and culture.

This hegemony of play, as Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce (2007) term, perpetuates the exclusion of communities as is seen in the offline world, a manifestation of real world inequalities. Importantly, this deployment of ‘white supremacy instills in many whites the expectation of always being the center of attention’ (Fernandez, 2003, p. 36).

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Little has been written about women and people of color inside virtual gaming communities so uncovering and documenting their experiences guides the focus of this research with a specific focus on women of color. Given the resilient nature of women of color, I am also interested in examining how women of color respond to the negative experiences in virtual gaming spaces. I am specifically guided by the following research questions: 1) How and in what ways have console video games as dominant narratives created and maintained hegemonic ideology in online gaming spaces? 2) How significant is the voice in fostering linguistic profiling and creating an inequitable space for marginalized bodies? 3) How have women of color as a marginalized population within this online gaming community responded to these dominant narratives and social inequalities present within the space? I hypothesize that women of color experience multiple oppressions within this virtual gaming community based merely on how they

sound and will respond in a manner that reflects resistance and survival tactics displayed in the real world.

Although women of color only reflect a minority of the gaming population, their numbers are not scarce enough for them to be ignored. A report issued in 2009 found that females constituted 28% of all videogame players (Beller, 2009) (Xbox has not released demographic information for its community). By focusing on women's experiences inside video gaming, this study builds on the literature about women in video gaming without just focusing on hypersexualized depictions (Downs & Smith, 2009; Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007). Methods employed to examine the realities of women in video games are rather limited given that they only interrogate women on video game covers or video game magazines (Dill & Thill, 2007). This study will provide critical attention to not only video game content but critical attention to video game spaces as well.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

At the macro level, I am informed by Black Feminist standpoint theory using an intersectional lens. Feminist standpoint theory privileges the lives of women of color allowing for the generation of knowledge from their standpoint. This project begins with the lives of women as opposed to the dominant group's perspective. Intersectional theory is also important to highlight the significance of multiple identities on the lives of women. Intersectional theory focuses on the interaction between and among multiple identities as well as how the experiences of women of color are impacted by these varying positions. Scholars such as

Patricia Hill Collins (1998) stress the danger of focusing just on one identity because our identities interact to inform one another.

An additional framework which directly speaks to the cause of inequalities within the space is linguistic profiling. The Xbox live space allows for real time, voice communication which is at the center of many acts of hate. Similar to racial profiling, John Baugh suggests that when a voice on the phone sounds African or Mexican American, racial discrimination might follow.

Social resistance theory and Black feminist consciousness provide the needed framework in understanding how women of color respond within Xbox live. Social resistance theory is a part of social movement theory and it focuses on collective behavior resulting from individualized anger and hostility (Katsiaficas, 1989). It was assumed that this behavior was irrational although the focus shifted during the 60's realizing that the behavior was more rational even though anger may be at the origin. Related to women of color in Xbox live, it is necessary to understand how women form collective groups to contest their negative experiences. Importantly, Black feminist consciousness serves as a needed framework in understanding how women of color empower themselves and their community and resist hegemonic structures for survival. This resilient nature of women is reflected in not just the real world but it is manifesting in virtual worlds as well.

## LIMITATIONS

Limitations are defined by Rudestam & Newton (2001) as “restrictions in the study over which you have no control” (p. 90). Consequently, there were

limitations to this study. Looking specifically at internet connectivity, there were times when I was unable to get online, the issue being either my connection or the Xbox system performing maintenance. Additionally, the virtual community was a space in which I had no control. At times the server would time out and end the gaming session, gamers may be booted from the room, or a host of other unknown factors may impede our gaming experience.

Additionally, the sample size within this study is rather small. This is largely due to my inability to randomly sample the Xbox live population – the members are unknown to the general public. I had to rely on soliciting for participants and snowball sampling. Given that females of color probably constitute a small portion of the gaming population further diminished my chances at getting a larger sample. So sample size is relative given the number of women within the community being studied is unknown. Since this research is exploratory, the sample size is not significant given a baseline of the experiences of women in online gaming communities is needed. Furthermore, this research only examined the lives of African-American and Latina women as the researcher was not able to solicit women of other ethnicities.

#### DELIMITATIONS

Delimitations, which are purposefully imposed limitations on the research design (Rudestam & Newton, 2001), impacted this study. First, women of color were the focus of this study as opposed to White women or males. Given the intersecting nature of the lives of women of color, it was important to see how their identities influence their experiences. Although women of color are not a

homogenous population, historically, their experiences are drastically different from their male and White female counterparts, hence the focus on identity. This study also only employed qualitative methods. Although a survey may have garnered a larger sample and provided a more general understanding of the space, the nature of the study was sensitive urging for a more intimate and personal method to gather data.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

In summary, Chapter 1 provided the context for the entire study outlining the problem, purpose, and significance of the study as well as the research questions guiding the direction of the study. The fact that the culture of Xbox live is centered on dominant whiteness and masculinity impeding the full inclusion of women of color into the community was the focus of this study. Of particular interest was the resistance strategies employed by women of color to combat this hegemonic ideology. This chapter also introduced the theoretical stances taken by the researcher in this study highlighting the importance of feminist standpoint theory, intersectional theory, resistance, and Black feminist consciousness. This chapter also discussed limitations and delimitations within the research design.

Chapter 2 introduces and explains the four theoretical stances taken by the researcher. The first consists of a comprehensive explanation of feminist standpoint theory which situates the lives of women at the forefront of research privileging their voices and experiences. The second theme, intersectionality, recognizes the influences of ascribed identities on women's positive and negative experiences. The third theme, linguistic profiling highlights what occurs within

the space, racial, gendered, and other discrimination based on how you sound. Lastly, social resistance theory and Black feminist consciousness are coupled to situate the responses of women of color within the community. Further, narrative is used throughout the entire study to fully capture the content within video games and to analyze the experiences of women of color.

Chapter 3 introduces key research that informs the direction of this study. The literature presented will incorporate a discussion of not only online gaming communities, but also video games in which the women within the study frequently criticized. This review of literature is inclusive of whiteness and masculinity as hegemonic ideologies deployed within the gaming world.

In Chapter 4, a detailed description of the methodology for this research study will be presented. It will include an overview of the design, process used to collect data, and a discussion on how the data will be analyzed. Chapters 5 will outline descriptive information of my participants and illustrate the data found, and chapters 6 and 7 will present further results and analysis of the findings in the study. Chapter 8 will offer conclusions and implications for future research.

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The presence of the female or racialized other is the site of much controversy in Xbox live. For example, women have reported incidences of sexism, and African-Americans have reported incidences of racism. However, little has been documented on the experiences of women of color. Historically, the experiences of women of color are significantly different from their male or White female counterparts and often times negatively amplified by the intersection of their ascribed identities. With this project, I will examine how console video games perpetuate ideological constructions of masculinity and whiteness and explore how women of color have navigated this online community by creating their own space to thwart the hegemonic structures and engage with others like them. In order to achieve this goal, I must not only employ a feminist methodology, but also a feminist theoretical framework in which to situate the experiences of these women in this community. Additionally, I will examine social resistance theory to highlight how women of color have resisted these structures and created their own communities. Lastly, to understand the role that video games have in the reconstruction of whiteness and masculinity, narrative will be used to sufficiently provide coverage of the issues marginalized gamers have reported within this space.

### FEMINIST STANDPOINT AND INTERSECTIONAL THEORY

Broadly, feminist standpoint theory guides the direction of this project. Feminist standpoint theory allows for the generation of real knowledge while at

the same time socially situating it to reflect the reality of women and people of color. Further, standpoint theory allows for the possibility of generating knowledge from the viewpoint of marginalized people.

...beginning in those determinant, objective locations in any social order will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives. Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order (Harding, 1993, p. 56).

As Harding continues, women's lives and experiences provide the grounds for this knowledge.

Haraway (1999) interprets standpoint theory from a physical standpoint exploring the embodied nature of knowledge. By arguing that knowledge is connected to the physical body characterized by an individual's unique experiences, she describes "partial, locatable, critical knowledge's" capable of revealing authentic "partial perspectives" (p. 178). By using the term "situated knowledges" (p. 178), Haraway argues,

...for a politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity (p. 181).

Standpoint epistemologies were instructive in this study because the individual approach examined the experience of women of color allowing them to describe and construct their own reality within the space, and I made no attempt to lump their experiences in the collective. Standpoint epistemologies, by their nature, instinctively incorporate ideas of space and place due to the emphasis on position,

location, and situated realities. Feminist standpoint theory does not stand alone in situating the experiences of women of color. I am also informed by intersectional theory; the multiple identities that my participants ascribe has led to much of the discrimination and exclusion they face.

Since the earliest feminist movements, Black women have urged for an intersectional approach in addressing the oppressions that impede the lives of all women, and Black feminist thought emerged with debates surrounding the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Black women's position on key issues associated with suffrage created divides with Black male and White female leaders, a trend which would continue throughout subsequent social movements. Black women were actively engaged in dismantling the institution of slavery as well as resisting sexism at the hands of Black men and racially gendered sexism at the hands of White master's (Taylor, 1998, p. 235).

At the annual convention of the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) in 1869, Frederick Douglass argued that issues pertaining to race were more salient than gender (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003) (an approach that many Black leaders would articulate during the second wave). Douglass felt that incorporating Black women into the "Negro" debate would reduce the chances of securing the ballot for Black men. His argument was rather compelling as he outlined the inhumane and atrocious conditions that pervaded the lives of Black men – both free and slave. However, his stance would create an imbalance leading to the continual domination of the Black male over the Black female (p. 75).

Prior to Douglass' oration, Sojourner Truth in 1851 argued on behalf of Black women and poor women who were marginalized by the suffragist movement. In her now famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman", Truth articulated her position as a Black woman who had never been able to enjoy and take advantage of the benefits associated with womanhood – white womanhood. Further, Truth empathetically stated that as long as Black women were enslaved, they would always be denied access to full motherhood (afforded to white women), never be protected from exploitation, and not be able to take advantage of feminine qualities (Taylor, 1998, p. 236).

Early during the suffrage movement, Black and White women supported one another's issues. However, they soon parted ideological ways with the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments in that they realized that Negro males were going to be afforded legal suffrage before them. As Black feminist scholars would articulate years later, White women wanted the exclusive power over the right to vote – not realizing that this would grant the White race total supremacy and domination (Taylor 1998). Harriet Tubman was another feminist visionary who expressed demand for Black women to be afforded all the rights and privileges associated with White womanhood (Hall, Garrett-Akinsanya, & Hucles, 2007, p. 284). Further, Maria Stewart, through her speeches, which were some of the earliest recorded for African American women, opposed the religious view of women as inferior as well as religion's justification of slavery and sexism (as cited in Hall et al, 2007, p. 284).

Much of what we learned about Black women during the early suffrage movement emerged when feminist writers of the second wave began writing about these early struggles. Black feminists wrote extensively about the tactics and strategies of Black women to resist sexism and racism. Audre Lorde (1981), through her experiences in the second wave, rearticulated the amplification of oppressions due to intersecting identities. She comments that “there’s always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself – whether its Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc – because that’s the piece they need to key in to...to dismiss everything else” (p. 717). Her statement exemplifies human nature’s tendency to make sense of the social world by categorizing others automatically to gain information with little effort. But this process leads to the ignoring of multiple social categories in which we all embody. By employing an intersectional approach in which to view not only women of color but also other marginalized communities, we gain a better understanding of the interaction between one’s many social identities and the influences of different social structures on the construction of these identities (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) employed an intersectional approach in her examination of the legal consequences of violence against women of color in the United States. She employed the term to explain the ways that race and gender, among other ascribed identities, “interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s...experiences” (p. 1244). Further, in trying to understand the experiences of Black women, it is only possible to look at the dualism of racism and sexism as trying to separate these experiences fails to capture the full

dimensions of these experiences. Additionally, Collins (1998) stresses the dangers of examining identifiers such as gender, race, and class as “distinctive social hierarchies” (p. 63), but rather looking intersectionally to see how each identifier informs and constructs the other. As it relates to the women I interviewed for this project, they embody multiple identities and have experienced discriminatory acts based on these ascribed identifiers. To combat these oppressive structures within Xbox live, many women and people of color have created their own gaming spaces to resist these hegemonic structures of dominance. Using a micro level analysis of linguistic profiling, social movement theory as well as Black Feminist resistance strategies, I can examine specifically what causes the inequalities within the space, as well as how many women of color employ social activist tactics in Xbox live to combat these oppressive structures present in this digital space.

### LINGUISTIC PROFILING

When on the phone with a stranger, many Americans can guess that person’s ethnic background and gender from the first hello (or many attempt to guess). But what can often occur as John Baugh found, is that many people make racist judgments about the person on the other end who may have a unique dialect. Baugh explains that racial profiling is based upon visual cues “that result in the confirmation or speculation of the racial background of an individual, or individuals (2003, p. 158).” On the other hand, linguistic profiling “is based upon auditory cues that may include racial identification, but which can also be used to identify other linguistic subgroups within a given speech community” (p. 158).

Scholars have long studied linguistic stereotypes finding discrimination based on accents and dialects against speakers of various ethnic backgrounds. What is seen in the American context is that voice discrimination and linguistic profiling is used as an effective means to filter out individuals who may not want to do business with. For instance, the executive director of the National Fair Housing Alliance noted that insurance companies, mortgage companies, and other financial institutions may refuse to extend services to you if you sound Black or Mexican. Now this discrimination is more subtle as they won't come out and say it to you directly, but rather they will not return your phone call or respond to written correspondence (Baugh, 2003). Sadly, this type of discrimination is hard to prosecute in court because it occurs over the phone or the profile was based off of some written correspondence.

Identifying one's racial identity based on speech captured the public's attention during the trial of O.J. Simpson. Simpson's attorney, Mr. Cochran objected to the thought that someone could ascertain your racial identity based off of how you sound. Additionally, a case in Kentucky employed linguistic profiling to convict an African American appellant who was overheard by a White police officer (Baugh, 2003). This case affirmed the legality of racial identification based on speech by a lay witness (p. 156).

Within the virtual world, Joinson (2001) suggests that the anonymous spaces of the internet compel users to disclose personal information about themselves knowing that the party on the other end will never find out the true identity. However, in virtual communities where voice can be heard, much of our

personal information automatically is emitted into virtuality. Voice based communities are unique from their text counterparts. Text based communities rely on users to type information or upload textual information. In voice based communities, information is revealed automatically when someone speaks. In the current study, the virtual community under investigation is a voice and text based community with many users employing the voice option to communicate. Although some users may have the ability to alter the voice, the console does not automatically come with this feature. So your real world voice can be heard by the citizens of this community. As many women and people of color explain, this mere technological advance creates the most havoc in their virtual lives – racial and gendered hatred based of how they sound.

#### SOCIAL RESISTANCE AND BLACK FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

The sociological field of social movements is inclusive of vast literature on crowd behavior, social strain, culture, emotions, etc. I am more interested in micro level analyses of identity in activism as opposed to the large scale movements. Because the concentration of this project focuses more on identity based oppressions and the resistance strategies employed as a result, I do not need to go into great detail about the macro themes associated with social movement theory. Rather, my aim is to highlight the experiences and activist tactics of my participants within the contexts of identity and inequality.

Social movement theory has its roots in collective behavior with an early example being Gustave Le Bon's description of crowd behavior. Le Bon argues that collective behavior in crowds arrives with individualized anger and hostility

that spreads contagiously through groups of people (as cited in Katsiaficas, 1989). The 1960's brought a paradigm shift from crowds to social movements arguing that collective behavior in movements is rational rather than pathological or irrational as previous theorists assumed. Smelser (1963) suggests that collective behavior should be interpreted as social rather than psychological moving away from the irrational group behavior shadow cast by Le Bon and others during the late nineteenth century.

The 1960's counterculture was further influential on social movement theorizing as it put a primarily positive spin on the collective behavior that occurs in acts of social resistance. Similar to Smelser, these theorists focused on the rational behavior of activism, and resource mobilization theory arose from this era. Resource mobilization theory depicts activists as rational actors who use sources available to them for their advantage (Marx & McAdam 1994). This important theory is reflective of the methods employed by many individuals within this dissertation and the resources used to assist their tactics will be explained in subsequent chapters.

Most importantly from social movement theory is the discussion on social resistance and activism from the individual experience. For instance, second-wave feminist writer Joan Scott (1992) places importance not just on the role that identity plays within social movements, but the sense of participation within the actual movement from an embodied perspective. Social movements only become possible through the sheer number of bodies participating within the movement – what those bodies physically embody, although important, is secondary.

Collective identity is produced through this individual experience. Further, she does not claim “legitimacy on the authority of experience,” but rather a focus on the “processes of identity production...discursive nature of experience and on the politics of construction” (p. 37). Although sociologists place great weight on the aspect of social movements, my focus will be on social resistance among individuals who form the collective. My interviewees began their experiences in solitary terms and found one another through the experience of gaming – oftentimes, negative experience of gaming. They formed groups and began resisting collectively. So the term social resistance is a term I feel more comfortable using as opposed to social movements. Importantly, although I am studying women of color, it cannot be assumed that these individuals are a homogenous group interpreting their experiences in similar manners. I argue that there is not one coherent movement actively mobilizing within Xbox live but a collective of individual movements. My purpose with this project is to connect or differentiate their experiences all the while privileging the activists and their experiences over the organized movement.

This approach is directly applicable to understanding the experiences and realities of women of color within this online gaming community – from their standpoint. Because video gaming has been constructed as an adolescent, white, male activity, the experiences of women and people of color are often overlooked. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains, being a member of an oppressed group places one in a position to see the world differently. However,

...their lack of control over the apparatuses of society that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult (Collins, 2000, p. 185).

The above quote reflects a core tenet of Black Feminist Theory: that creating and controlling definitions of oneself is imperative for empowerment. The oppressed have a unique standpoint since they as individuals share particular social locations, such as gender, race, and/or class. Further, these individuals share their meaningful experiences with one another generating knowledge about the social world from their points of view (Harnois, 2010). Despite this knowledge generation, oppressed populations lack the control needed to reframe and reconceptualize their realities. However, a particular advantage presents itself with the diffusion of information technologies, providing particular advantages to women and people of color. One of the advantages is the ability to create virtual spaces and maintain control of those spaces. These spaces have the potential to foster the development of a group standpoint negating the impact of dominant ideology.

Specifically looking at women in technology, Everett (2009) writes extensively about not focusing on what hinders women's progress in technology, but rather on what women have already accomplished within technology and what needs to be done to ensure more can take part:

Rather than decry the disproportionate rate of computer technology diffusion within the black diasporic community, everyday African American women found an ingenious remedy, or tactic of cultural intervention, via the Internet (p. 57).

Although her example was directed towards the creative methods employed by women during the Million Woman's March, many women of color within Xbox live have adopted methods similar to those outlined by Everett by empowering themselves to create and define who they are within this online community.

The preparation involved with the Million Woman March was one of the earliest attempts by women to empower themselves using digital technologies. Even though women used the internet and other digital technologies regularly, this early attempt was the result of media not supporting Black communities in publicizing events. The event was organized around the idea of reinventing Black families and communities with their Black male counterparts. Further they articulated for the continuation of Black political and economic justice and fundamental social change (Everett, 2009).

Black women certainly aided in the diminishing of the digital divide leading up to October 25, 1997 in the organizing and planning of the Million Woman March on Philadelphia. During the preparation stages, mainstream media was not at all interested in advertising or supporting this event. Further, when the event transpired, there were only brief snippets of coverage provided by CNN or C-SPAN. Media critics began questioning the lack of media motivation – revealing to the world what was obvious to the Black community. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* just two years earlier in discussing media coverage of the Million Man March questioned if the coverage of the event would have been more extensive and comprehensive if it had erupted in violence (as cited in Everett 2009, p. 50). Orderly Black bodies interrupt the traditional frames created

by mainstream media outlets – riots, criminal acts, poor, etc. The media is accustomed to stereotypical images of Black women that are controlled by dominant ideology.

The media's lack of support for this event challenged a prevailing notion held of Blacks, specifically Black women, regarding information technologies – computer literacy and the digital divide. Black women were often flaunted as poster children for the digital divide highlighting their lack of access to computers and lack of knowledge of the internet (Hoffman, Novak, & Schlosser, 2000). Television and print media had been long sources for white communities in organizing while the Black community relied on local efforts on the ground to mobilize. And it was apparent that these tools would not be made available for them once again. As Audre Lorde (2007) famously declared, the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house. And the media reinforced this concept.

Despite the lack of advertising and support by major media outlets, these Black women were able to successfully organize by employing the internet to coordinate their efforts. These “low-tech, low-profile, urban women had compelled the racially biased mainstream media to cover in fact (the event's success) what they ignored in theory (its very possibility) (Everett, 2009, p. 52).” The media's purposeful avoidance is not surprising as Blacks have grown accustomed to this treatment. But the media also proved that they were in no way prepared to afford women (let alone Black women) their rightful place “in the annals of technological advancement” as would a patriarchal structure (p. 52). These women were able to accomplish this feat by merging new and old

technologies to ensure inclusivity of unwired women. First, they created a national website and urged regional and local women to copy the site to meet their own needs. Further, women who did not have access to the internet would not have to worry about receiving updated information pertaining to the event. It was often ignored that women constituted a significant portion of clerical positions during the early 1990's that regularly used computers and other office technologies (England, 1993). Many Black women simply made copies of the websites using Xerox machines for the unwired. Early scholars prematurely measured the technological divide based on home computer use never realizing that women were wired at work all day. So, these Black women moved beyond "technology consumers and laborers" into "technology innovators and producers" (Everett, 2009, p. 58). What began as an online effort soon moved to the streets and ultimately to the mainstream media. Even though this case is dated and not specifically related to virtual communities, it is imperative to discuss as it provides a necessary theme in creating a Black feminist consciousness in digital spaces – resisting dominant ideology and empowering oneself. These two themes are a part of Collins' four characteristics necessary for Black feminist consciousness: 1) self-definition and self-evaluation; 2) resisting the interlocking nature of oppression, 3) embracing intellectual thought and political activism; and 4) valuing the importance of culture (as cited in Taylor, 1998).

Defining oneself and one's community is imperative in the lives of Black women. By creating their own definitions associated with being a wife, career woman, mother, and daughter, they recognize the need to no longer subject

themselves to the representations so often disseminated through the media: the stereotypical images of mummies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas (Collins, 2000, p. 69). This theme has a pervading focal point in Black feminist thought as these images are controlled by dominant, patriarchal structures, so resisting this is imperative. Further, the purpose of these images is to make intersecting inequalities appear to be normal parts of Black life.

The second part of Collins' theory is the intersecting reality of Black women. As she argues, being Black and female in the United States continues to expose African-American women to certain common experiences (Collins, 2000). So continuing the struggle of confronting and dismantling structures of domination in terms of race, class, and gender is still a focal point of Black feminists (Taylor, 1998). Specifically looking at gender, "white Eurocentric and Western [feminism], has sought to establish itself as the only legitimate" feminism (Amos & Parmar, 2005, p. 44). White mainstream feminist perspectives often fail to address the experiences of women of color and privilege the white middle-class viewpoint. For instance, second wave feminism was invigorated by Betty Friedan's groundbreaking book, The Feminine Mystique in which she discussed the "problem that has no name (hooks, 2009, p. 31)." With this text, Friedan challenged the traditional notions of womanhood and patriarchy urging for women's reentry into the workforce. Friedan was aware of the social construction that bound women in patriarchal establishments as she conducted interviews with housewives about their shared experiences of emptiness, boredom, and isolation (as cited in Hymowitz & Weissman, 1978, p. 342).

Feminists of color responded to this call and highlighted the classed and raced privilege in which Friedan was speaking. hooks (2009) points out that Friedan was speaking to and for “college-educated, white women who were compelled by sexist conditioning to remain in the home (p. 32).” Even though Friedan challenged the traditional notions of white, middle-class, womanhood, she completely ignored the concerns affecting women of color and poor white women.

The second wave of the feminist movement was proving to be a repeat of the First wave: a reinforcement of white supremacy, the refusal to address class and racial hierarchies, and the failure to bond women of all races and ethnicities (hooks, 2009, p. 33). The adoption of a bourgeois feminist ideology led Black women to create their own space as they were told that the movement was white women’s, and that Black women were only a part because they (white women) allowed it (p. 40). Even though second wave feminist were addressing the inequalities that existed in sexist power structures (Humm, 1990), they still ignored racism and elitism which would prohibit the full inclusion of Black feminists (The Combahee River Collective, 2009, p. 4). Because of this exclusion, many Black feminist created separate organizations such as the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective (CRC) to address the intersecting oppressions facing all women.

Prior to organizing in the early 70’s, Black women were continuing the struggle with their male counterparts. Black women had to continuously express where their loyalties lied – either with the fight against racism or sexism.

Similarly, Chicana feminists experienced the same conflict as they were asked to vow loyalty to the culture as opposed to being asked to embrace their racialized, gendered realities (Roth, 2004; Nieto Gomez, 1997). Even more oppressive to second wave Chicana feminists, a statement was issued during the 1969 Denver Chicano Youth Liberation which stated that Chicana women did not want to be liberated (Roth, 2004). They immediately challenged this idea and began organizing formally on behalf of themselves to discuss issues of machismo, gender roles in the family, reproductive rights, controlling images (la mujer mala), and economic and labor issues (Roth, 2004, p. 150-151).

One of the most vital differences established to differentiate Black women and White women surrounded the family and sexuality. Early constructions of White women were that they were to nurture their families, whereas emotionally strong Mammies could have no families of their own, just as they could have no sexuality (Weber, 2009, p. 98). Once again, controlling the images created and defined by the dominant is necessary because the images have the power to dismantle Black feminist strides in resisting these images.

Collins' third characteristic is for Black women to simultaneously address intellectual thought in the spirit of political activism. I hesitate referring to this theme as the collaboration between theory and practice as there has been considerable debate in the Black community over "talking" with no "action". bell hooks outlines this controversial binary in her article "Theory as Liberatory Practice." In this article, she discusses a lengthy conversation she had with a group of predominately Black women. When the conversation concluded, a

woman commented that she was not interested in theory and rhetoric but she was more interested in action – doing something (hooks, 1991, pp. 5-6). For bell hooks and many other Black feminists, a rift exists between Black academics and Black community activists. In many Black settings, hooks furthers, intellectuals and theory have been dismissed. So to not create problems with the community, many scholars have simply remained silent in fear of supporting and defending theory building. On the other hand, Black feminist scholars are threatened with the reality of not being theoretical enough in academic settings. So the third theme seems to be one that needs to be engaged carefully while recognizing the importance of both theory and practice - one cannot exist without the other.

The fourth characteristic stresses the importance of culture - “Black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination” (Taylor, 1998, p. 235). This theme reminds us as Black women of the necessity to understand the power relations that dominate and pervade our daily lives.

Under racism, sexism, class exploitation, heterosexism, and similar systems of oppression, elite groups use their power to uphold privilege through the economic political or ideological domination of Blacks, women, poor people, and LGBT people. This perspective sees power relations as a zero-sum game – one in which less powerful people gain power when it is redistributed to them from more powerful groups (Collins, 2006, p. 21).

Waiting for the powerful to allocate equal access to subordinate groups often leads to resistance which can mean taking the power often by force, revolt, or revolution (Collins, 2006). Many women within my study have opted for revolutionary tactics while others simply avoid spaces in which they may become

victims. As women of color, we have to understand the historical basis of our lived experiences and identify meaningful solutions to combat and resist continued discrimination, oppression, and inequality. One of the first steps necessary in identifying these solutions is to devote more scholarship and research on women of color as the foci of study, making them visible.

Hegemonic imagery has created a false ideology in understanding women of color. This imagery of the woman of color manifests itself in digital spaces as these images are to be upheld – from the dominant groups view. In digital spaces, this dominant group is still the white male (Everett, 2009; McQuivey, 2001). So when Black women encounter males in the space, the passive woman reflected in constructions of white womanhood should prevail. And if males do not encounter the asexual mammy, they immediately refer to the other construction of Black womanhood framing us as Sapphires who are not passive, yielding, or supportive (Collins, 2000). Before I explain how hegemonic structures have the power to control imagery and ideology, I will move into a discussion on the narrative frameworks associated with video games. These games are an important piece of the puzzle in understanding the ideological structures being deployed within gaming spaces.

## IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE

By exploring the literature on cultural representations in console video games, I will examine how the dominant narratives deployed in these games have led to the continued construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness as privilege. By using narrative research as a means to study the

content of these video games, I am able to establish the link between narrative and hegemonic ideology.

Narrative has recently gained the attention of social scientists as an analytical framework (Denzin, 2006). Mishler (1995) and other scholars feel its strength lies not as a sole discipline but rather an area of inquiry that is inclusive of a variety of approaches. Broadly, narrative research can be understood as “any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials” creating a model that can be used for the “analysis of a wide spectrum of narratives, from literary works to diaries and written autobiographies, conversations, or oral life stories...” (Lieblich, Rubal-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998, p. 2-3). Craib views narratives as stories, believing narrative research can be defined in a way that applies to any and everything a researcher may want to study (as cited in Denzin, 2006). For the purposes of this research, narrative will be applied to an analysis of the literature on top selling console video games and the cultural representations deployed therein. My focus is not on the larger debate surrounding game play versus narrative, but rather on what is actually being deployed through the storyline and imagery of these video games creating the narrative. As Jesper Juul (2002) argues, games can be compared to traditional narrative media and compares the experience of playing a computer game to an actor’s performance in a film or play. This imitation of film and cinema has increased in video games with advanced technologies allowing these capabilities. But more importantly, many modern video games operate from a first or third person viewpoint and require the audience member (gamer) to control the progression of the story (although there

is no control over the pre-constructed narrative). This direct immersion into gameplay makes focusing on what the audience is consuming even more compelling. Steven Poole (2000) identified the strong emotional resonance that gamers have with the interactivity of gameplay. Brand & Knight (2003) confirmed this emotional connection to gameplay in their study of video games finding that as the storyline for a game gets stronger, the less a player can influence it, actually increasing their emotional attachment. Understanding the structure of narrative will move towards an understanding of the power they have to deploy particular ideologies.

Importantly, there are three structural features of narratives: event structure, evaluative system, and explanatory system (Linde, 1986). An important tool in narrative analysis is the examination of events that are selected for narration as well as those omitted. According to Linde (1986), the evaluative structure creates the reality and normalizes “the way things are” and “the way things ought to be” (p. 187). So narrative is linked closely to ideology specifically about what is included and what is omitted. As Storey (1996) claims, all narratives contain an ideological project. This is an important feature of narratives especially since they have the ability to “bridge the gap between daily social interaction and large-scale social structures” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 198). However, what often occurs is that narratives often “hide the operation of power relations” masking the relationship between subjection and coercion (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, & Treacher, 2000, p. 8). Mishler (1995) views this area of narrative research as the “politics of narrative,” and through this

dissertation, I will examine the link between narrative and ideology by examining the narratives of several console video games as has been discussed in the literature.

Scholars have identified the “hegemonic potential of narrative by illustrating how narratives can contribute to the reproduction of existing structures of meaning and power” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 213). Ewick & Silbey identify three important functions of narrative: 1) a means of social control, 2) a hegemonic process “enhanced by the narratives’ ability to colonize consciousness (p. 213); and 3) a contributor “to hegemony to the extent that they conceal the social organization of their production and plausibility” (p. 214). Because narratives depict specific individuals, cultures, locations, etc, they make sense of the world and become more powerful as they are constantly deployed and repeated (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). And ideology is a tool that is used to complete this task.

According to Collins (2000), ideology refers to the collective of ideas that reflect the interests of a group of people. What has occurred in the United States context is that race and sex have infiltrated in such a way that these ideologies have been mainstreamed and have found themselves embedded in digital media and video gaming. One of the most pervasive ideological constructions of Black women specifically has been stereotypical imagery perpetuated by the dominant groups. Collins explains that the purpose of these images is to make intersecting inequalities appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life. These normalized images continue to justify the oppression of African American

women (Collins, 2000). One would think that debunking and challenging these images would be an easy feat, but these images have been generalized to the point of normalcy by the dominant group who holds the authority to define values within society and continue to proliferate, where images to counter these cannot compete (Collins, 2000).

Hegemony is a useful tool in understanding the process involved in maintaining this type of power. Hegemony according to Gramsci refers to an ideology, most often understood as ‘common sense’ or ‘natural’ that constitutes a form of cleverly masked, taken-for-granted domination (as cited in Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999, p. 341). Hegemony can be understood as the process by which those who support the dominant ideology in a culture are able to continually reproduce that ideology in cultural institutions. Hegemony is not granted through coercive force but rather by consent from subordinate groups. According to Gramsci, “the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (as quoted in Arrighi & Silver, 1999, p. 26).” Furthermore, domination relies on coercion while hegemony relies on the dominant group positioning itself as the leader with society’s overall interest in mind. As Clegg states, hegemony thus ‘involves the successful mobilization and reproduction of the active consent of dominated groups’ (as quoted in Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 423) and “constitutes an invisible prison of intersecting gazes to those who have little power to negotiate or even voice alternate stories defining and shaping their existence (as quoted in Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 423).”

Leonard (2003) reveals how Gramsci's concept of hegemony can be understood in the world of gaming. By using Gramsci, we see how ruling groups aim to maintain a popular system of ideas and practices in which he called 'common sense' which is used to gain consent for rule.

Video games, in disseminating stereotypes, in offering bodies and spaces of color as sites of play, and in affirming dominant ideas about poverty, unemployment, crime, and war, contribute to the consolidation of white supremacist power. Ultimately, the images and ideologies offered through games elicit individual consent for structural policies, thereby legitimizing White hegemony (p. 6).

In this narrative sense, video games "as socially organized phenomena" are implicated "in both the production of social meanings and the power relations expressed by and sustaining those meanings" (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 200).

From this sense, video games have the ability to articulate and reproduce existing ideologies and hegemonic relations of power and inequality (p. 212). By analyzing the literature on cultural representations in video games using a narrative framework, I will examine this process in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### VIDEO GAMES AS IDEOLOGICAL PROJECTS

The purpose of this literature review is to situate popular console video games as well as the online spaces which many gamers now occupy within a narrative frame of ideological projects deploying hegemonic notions of whiteness and masculinity. For instance, video games often depict women and people of color stereotypically and almost always have a white male protagonist. The narratives deployed within these video games generate the value of certain events, people, relationships, and/or actions. Importantly, these narrative schemas should not be viewed as records of fact or how things are/were; the creators of these narrative works have made sense of their experiences and perceptions and created digital realities based on these perceptions (Van Manen, 1988). Online gaming spaces, although not extensively covered in the literature, provide an arena for the propagation of social inequalities and discriminatory acts with the presence of the non-white, non-male other. Beginning with a review of the literature on cultural representations in console video games and then moving into a discussion of the online gaming spaces, I will examine how video games as narrative structures deploy whiteness and masculinity. Although the specific online community that will be examined in this dissertation is Xbox live, scholarship on console gaming communities is limited. So this review will cover online gaming spaces referred to as MMO's, MMOG's, and MMORPG's<sup>2</sup>, for comparison.

---

<sup>2</sup> MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online, MMOG – Massively Multiplayer Online Game are additional acronyms describing virtual gaming spaces.

It has been stated that we have entered a post-racial, post feminist society, suggesting that we have moved beyond notions of race, gender, and sexuality based discrimination (Joseph, 2009, p. 238). Cyberspace is deemed an even more utopic space being dubbed the “new frontier” waiting to be settled by opportunistic travelers of the virtual world. Brookey warns us about viewing this space as the new American frontier recalling the oppression and domination that emerged from opening up the original, physical frontier. Racial minorities served as the labor forced needed to open up that frontier but rarely were able to enjoy the benefits of their labor (Brookey, 2009, p. 101). This view translates into the console gaming space as well when you take a look at who the gaming industry targets. McQuivey suggests that as games are developed, they continually aim to fulfill the perceived desires of the young, middle-class male who is supposedly the market’s target consumer (McQuivey, 2001, p. 197). Disturbingly absent from discussions on video game markets is the fact that young Black and Latino youth assisted in propelling the video gaming industry into the million-dollar industry by spending time and money in arcades (Everett, 2009). This could be due to the power structure of the gaming industry being a predominately white, and secondarily Asian, male-dominated elite (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2007). The hegemonic elite has excluded and alienated minority players who in numerical terms actually constitute a majority (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2007). This majority consists of female gamers, people of different racial and cultural backgrounds, and gamers of varying ages. This also includes gamers who utilize multiple platforms in which to game – mobile phones, hand held devices,

console games, computer games, gaming applications, etc. Everett (2009) also confirms from her work on video game cover art, those invested in the gaming industry, including popular media, not only depict the typical gamer as male but also as white (p. 111).

Many alternative media outlets have also noticed this myth associated with women and people of color not being gamers. For instance, A.B. Frasier, co-founder of the Koalition, a video game website catering to urban and hip-hop communities, elaborates on the myth specifically relating to blacks playing within gaming communities:

...when you have the video game media not show so much color then of course something like “black people don’t play video games” gets spat out from a idiots mouth. The major media doesn’t have any personalities that shows gaming from an urban perspective, therefore we don’t exist in many peoples eyes... You can call me a nigger, porch monkey or whatever, but I’m still a gamer (Frasier, 2009).

He points out an important part of the problem – it’s who the industry chooses to target. So not only have video games been created with the power to deploy stereotypical imagery and hegemonic ideologies, online gaming spaces have adopted these same exclusionary practices.

Employing Omi & Winant’s conception of racial project, many popular video games fit within this theoretical frame in which “racialized ideas, bodies, and structures are constructed, mediated, and presented through a safe medium” (Leonard, 2003, p. 3). Omi & Winant believe that

“...a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to

reorganize and redistribute resources along particular lines” (p. 56).

This understanding of a racial project means that video games have the ability to interpret, represent, and explain female sexuality, inner city life, Black athleticism, etc in that they provide cues to racialized and gendered realities (Leonard, 2003). As Leonard further explains, “video games are not just games, or sites of stereotypes, but a space to engage American discourses, ideologies, and racial dynamics” (Leonard, 2003, p. 3).

The Children Now organization has quantified gender and racial depictions within console video games. The researchers found that video game spaces are mostly White and male and when women and people of color are present, they are depicted in stereotypical manners. For instance, 80% of all African-American characters are depicted as athletic competitors in sports-oriented games and are much more likely to display aggressive behaviors such as trash talking and pushing than their white counterparts (as cited in Leonard, 2003). In sports games such as NBA Street, Street Hoops, and NFL Street, they are situated in ghetto, urban locations and set to hip-hop soundtracks “thereby staging a convergence of discourses on athleticism, blackness, and commodified ghetto cool” (Chan, 2005, p. 27). These examples of blackness, hyperphysicality, hypermasculinity, and hypersexuality have long been ideologically linked to Black masculinity as early scholars noted (Davis, 1983).

Outside of the sports genre, racial depictions in video games are even more pronounced. For instance, True Crime is an action-adventure series that has

featured an Asian-American and African-American lead character. In the first installment of True Crime, lead character Nick Kang is an officer with the Los Angeles Police Department and is essentially a bad cop. The game's stereotypical imagery is deployed most vividly in Kang's Orientalism in that it is highly "fetishized and demonized" (Chan, 2005, p. 29). Additionally, the Asian culture of Los Angeles is 'othered' providing a virtual tour of Chinatown - from the hegemonic standpoint. In the second installment, African American lead character Marcus Reed starts off stereotypically as a gang member but ultimately becomes a cop in the New York Police Department. However, he soon turns rogue as the game requires him to avenge the death of the man who saved him from the streets. Violence is normalized in Reed's life as the only option within the Black community – from street violence (gangs) to state sanctioned violence (police).

The popular Grand Theft Auto series has been heavily discussed by not only game scholars, but also by politicians and mainstream media. However, Leonard (2003) rightly points out that critical discussions associated with stereotypical racial imagery have been overshadowed by discussions of violence and images of women. Although both are important to discuss given youth are consumers of this media, the absence of race from these conversations is disturbing.

Just to provide a description of the racial landscape of Grand Theft Auto III, almost all of the innocent citizens in the fictional Liberty City are white, and "the police are white and paragons of virtue" (Leonard, 2003, p. 3).

You, as the only white character, are sent to Liberty City to lead and/or control the other...you accept jobs ranging from driving the “girls” (all of whom are prostitutes) to assassinating rival gang members (all people of color). Your enemies in Liberty City consist of a number of gangs: the Triads (Chinese); Yazuka (Japanese); Diablos (“Hispanic street gang”); South Side Hoods (blacks); the Columbian Cartel; and the Yardies (Jamaican) (Leonard, 2003, p. 3).

Grand Theft Auto, as a racial project, “legitimizes white supremacy and patriarchy and privileges whiteness and maleness” (p. 3). In this sense, white hegemony is legitimized through the process of othering and ‘pixelated minstrelsy’ by depicting racial minorities singularly (Chan, 2005). The danger of this ‘single story’, as author Chimamanda Adichie (2009) explains is not that they are inaccurate, but rather, this narrow account is the only one visible situating them as the only possible narrative.

A subsequent installment of Grand Theft Auto was located in the fictional city of San Andreas and resembles 1990’s South Central, Los Angeles. Similar to the previous installment of GTA, discussions surrounding this game immediately centered on violent inner city life. Few scholars note the extreme depictions of Blackness and hypermasculinity in lead character CJ. For instance, CJ must constantly work out to avoid getting fat as he must maintain his muscular, masculine physique and uphold the ‘gangsta’ lifestyle (Barrett, 2006, p. 96). Just as the sports genre focuses on the hypermasculine, hyperphysical body of the Black male, these same images are present within other genres. This extreme focus on the Black body removes the association between Blackness and intellect

affirming the hegemonic narratives attached to the Black body. As Paul Gilroy states,

...associating blackness with intelligence, reason and the activities of the mind challenges the basic assumptions of raciology [. . .] whereas giving ‘‘The Negro’’ the gift of the devalued body does not, even if that body is to be admired (as cited in Barrett, 2006, p. 97).

As Barrett (2006) explains, CJ becomes a Black body being controlled by an external force not being able to represent himself. Although this is the purpose of video games, to be in control, it reinforces hegemonic representations of ‘‘black bodies as disposable...constructed as non-persons’’ (p. 98). So it becomes an extension of the criminal Black male deployed in other media outlets.

An additional theme present in San Andreas is the reality in which you – CJ begins the game. He lives in a ‘‘pseudo-shantytown...under a bridge;’’ his ‘‘friends are all unemployed, parentless gangbangers,’’ (p. 101) and the violence in his life is immediate, automatic, and ever present. By not providing any explanation of these events, it reifies Black inner city life totally ignoring structural inequalities forces at work that have assisted in creating this reality.

Issues such as three-strikes laws, the vast and disproportionate increase in the imprisonment of African Americans since the early 1980s, the impact of neoliberal economic and social ‘reform,’ or the collapsing of public concerns into private interests are completely ignored. In place of a consideration of larger social causes, one is left to imagine that either this violent, unemployable, pathological behavior is the permanent, natural state of African Americans, or that somehow CJ and his friends have found themselves in this situation as a result of their own individual failings (Barrett, 2006, p. 101).

Additionally, by situating people of color in these marginalized communities and whites in affluent suburbs, video games have once again succeeded in affirming the hegemonic status quo. This singular narrative continues the same mediated story so often deployed about Blacks in America.

This hegemonic imagery is present in fighting genres as well. For instance, *Street Fighter*, a popular series, has always featured stereotypical characters associated with particular countries. For instance, Blanka is a hulk-looking beast from Brazil, Guile is a hyper masculine American G.I., E. Honda is a sumo wrestler from Japan, El Fuerte is a Mexican character in search of spicy food, and Zangief is a Russian wrestler just to name a few (Ware, 2010).

Although *Street Fighter* is a Japanese game, race and culture are still stereotyped and deployed in a 'comical and exaggerated' manner (p. 55). Importantly, in creating their own depictions of Asianness, "there is no "primitiveness" in these characters of the sort that is usually indicative of Orientalism - Edward Said's process by which white Western discourse produces Eastern subjects as "savage" and "exotic" (p. 57). The American characters are hypermasculine and represent the Stallone, Van Damme, Schwarzenegger types of characters. Similar to American video games, the elite power structures create and deploy constructed images that perpetuate hegemonic structures of whiteness and masculinity. This is made obvious in *Street Fighter*'s representation of Second and Third world characters. As Ware (2010) explains, this 'Monstrous Other' is not associated with the Us (Asian East) or You (American West). In this sense, Japanese game

designers have constructed and sustained white Western thinking of the default racial setting.

Much of the reassertion of Japanese homogeneity shares a distinctly white Western ideology... This selling of the Other (necessarily Monstrous in Street Fighter, due to the exaggerated nature of the genre) creates an Other that is neither East Asian nor White Western; as game objects that are both playable (thus, controllable) and destructible (thus, marginalized) (Ware, 2010, p. 68).

Previously mentioning Blanka and Zangief, other “Monstrous Other” characters include: Dhalsim the Indian yogi, T. Hawk the Native American tribal chief, Dee Jay the Jamaican musician, Balrog the African-American boxer, Sagat the Thai kickboxer, M. Bison the thirdworld despot, and Akuma the otherworldly martial arts master (Ware, 2010, p. 69). Visually, these characters are drastically different, being abnormally tall, big, and many appearing almost animal like as in the case of Blanka, the Brazilian beast. The term “pixilated minstrelsy” (Chan, 2005) is appropriate in understanding the deployment of race and racialization in these genres in that race, racial imagery, and identity depicted in this manner lead to the deployment of hegemonic whiteness and masculinity. As Leonard (2003) explains,

Race matters in the construction and deployment of stereotypes, and it matters in legitimizing widely accepted racial cues and assumptions both in the workplace and in leisure pursuits. In short, race matters in video games because many of them affirm the status quo, giving consent to racial inequality and the unequal distribution of resources and privileges (pp. 1-2).

It is no accident that these games are being created with this stereotypical imagery. Games are created based on the biases and opinions of their creators

although video game developers contend no offense is intended. They suggest that their games are “simply parodies or a reflection of a sort of “browning” of popular culture that transcends race and sells to all in a marketplace captivated by hip-hop styles, themes, and attitudes (Marriott, 2004). This exploitation of Asianness, Blackness and hip-hop, women, etc still creates the single narrative of ‘other’ life because there are few, if any, other images deployed in video games. On the other hand, whiteness is often depicted in an opposing manner with multiple narratives. This hegemonic vision of masculinity and whiteness only exists in relation to other forms of masculinity and femininity allowing for the dominant – white male - to construct himself in a certain way, hence the continued othering of women and people of color in video games (Bucholz, 1999, p. 445).

The popular third-person shooter, *Gears of War*, exemplifies the aforementioned othering of women and people of color. Aside from the hyperphysicality, hypermasculinity, and hypersexuality depictions of men of color within the game, this game celebrates masculinity and virtually excludes femininity. For instance, the only female character, Anya Stroud,

...is a lieutenant -- but you'd never know it, since the petite blond spends the game getting in and out of helicopters, narrowly escaping danger (off-screen, of course), and staying out of the real action while advising male soldiers over her headset. She must have been a heavily armored COG at some point, in order to move through the ranks -- but if that's the case, where are all of the other female COGs (Myers, 2010)?

Although the third installment of *Gears of War* is adding Anya as a playable character, she is not stereotypical as one would assume. Her body measurements

are average. Other games such as *Bulletstorm* were not as female friendly. This deployment of hypersexualized femininity is necessary to comprehend the construction of hypermasculinity – creating the other.

A more dangerous theme prominent in how women are depicted in video games is centered on their sexual victimization. Children Now found that 90% of African-American women within console video games were victims of violence compared to 45% of white women (as cited in Leonard, 2003, p. 2) and many women's sole function within video games is to perform sexual acts. A video game that highlights both of these examples is *Grand Theft Auto*. To provide an overview, female characters of color within *GTA* are prostitutes. They serve a functional purpose to the lead character in that they can improve overall health extending your life. A sexual encounter with a prostitute raises your health. However, this is a paid service and once the encounter is complete, you have the option of killing her to get your money back (Leonard, 2003, p. 4). Unfortunately, much of the scholarship related to women and video games is associated with the visualization of women on magazine and video game covers. These hypersexualized depictions are reflective of the male gaze of the female body. As Mulvey articulated in her landmark article, this production of the male gaze situates the female body as the bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (as cited in Kennedy, 2002). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1998) argues, the racialized female body is practically silenced when she is written into the narrative by hegemonic structures and remains powerless to speak for herself.

Although these studies are not reflective of actual game content, they are useful in understanding how women are incorporated into mainstream games. For instance, in their examination of video game covers, Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess (2007) found that males were portrayed four times more frequently than their female counterparts and females were depicted in a hypersexualized manner. In video game magazine articles, Miller & Summer's (2007) similarly found that males were more likely to be shown as heroes while females were more likely to be portrayed in support roles. Dill & Thill (2007) also found that males were shown as more aggressive and females were shown more sexualized.

Returning to actual examples that discuss women's roles in video games, Lara Croft is an interesting case that simultaneously affirms and rejects hegemonic notions of whiteness and masculinity. Lara Croft's original character was a South American woman named Laura Cruz (McLaughlin, 2008). However, this name was not UK friendly enough and the change was made to whiten her character (the storyline was also altered to incorporate a British origin). This omission of race affirms whiteness as the default inside gaming spaces (although originally, she rejected whiteness). Additionally, she rejects hegemonic notions of masculinity by recreating the typical narrative of the male hero. Traditionally, the hero is male and females constitute supporting roles (Kennedy, 2002). However, her sexuality and disproportionate breasts were used to market her in addition to her physical abilities. In their content analysis of introductory films of video games, Jansz & Martis (2007) observed that breast and buttocks were prominent features and seemed significant in marketing a video game. Using

Mulvey's (1992) discussion on women in film narratives, Kennedy (2002)

explains,

...that the female body operates as an eroticized object of the male gaze and the fetishistic and scopophilic pleasures which this provides for the male viewer. The... "active" or "strong" female characters signify a potential threat to the masculine order (as cited in Kennedy, 2002, para. 8).

Downs & Smith (2009) identified this trend in their study of video game characters finding that women were more likely to show partial nudity, have unrealistic body images (large breast/small waist), and wear sexually revealing clothing. Beasley & Standley (2002) also found this sex bias in how males were featured compared to females. Despite the increase in lead female characters in video games (Jansz & Martis, 2007), they are still depicted in stereotypical manners.

Other scholarship on women in video games looks at gamer perceptions of women within games. For instance, Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins (2007) outline how adolescents view gender stereotypes within games, finding that males view stereotypes as more acceptable than females within the study (Brenick, et al, 2007). This finding is not shocking given the abundance of imagery that is deployed about the 'other' within games. These assumptions and biases of the female other are heavily situated in the narratives of the games. Another study surveyed teens confirming stereotypes of game characters as aggressive (males) and sexualized (females) (Dill & Thill, 2007). Even more disturbing, Dill, Brown, & Collins (2008) found that long term exposure to video game violence was correlated with greater tolerance of sexual harassment and

greater rape myth acceptance, once again affirming male domination. So in the construction of these narratives, race and gender are able to be deployed in any manner chosen by the hegemonic storyteller. In these cases, they are stereotypical, singular, summaries of women and people of color. Video game literature often criticizes this negative view of video game content and instead urges highlighting the positive aspects of games. Both approaches are necessary although scholarship has not been critical enough in challenging Eurocentric and masculine biases so often present within video games.

### GAMER INTERACTIONS AND IDEOLOGY

In order to understand the social conditions that exist within online games, it is imperative to understand the space itself. Using gamers' interpretations, results from my participant observation, and drawing off of existing literature that examines online games, I will provide a conceptual framework to understand this space. But before examining the actual gaming space, it is necessary to categorically situate gamers who inhabit these spaces. So by employing Bartle's Taxonomy of Users, we can gain a better understanding of users in online games.

Richard Bartle was one of the earliest scholars to provide a systematic overview of types of users within MUD's. The taxonomy arose from a message board posting asking what users wanted out of a MUD (Bartle, 1996). The responses varied but consisted of what they liked, what they didn't like, and what they wanted improved. By examining the content of their responses, Bartle grouped these players into four categories creating the earliest taxonomy of gamers within online spaces. Bartle identified that most users enjoyed four

aspects of MUD's: achievements gained within games, exploring the virtual world and experimenting with it, using communication features to socialize, and/or causing distress to other players (achiever, explorer, socializer, killer) (Bartle, 1996). Players may adopt multiple categories simultaneously and may change categories depending on type of game, mood, or playing style. Although this taxonomy has been expanded upon, it is still useful to see the basic motivations of gamers within online spaces. Within the current study, gamers do exhibit all player styles and much of it depends on game, genre, mood, etc. But the player style that concerns this project the most is killer. These players derive enjoyment by imposing themselves on others most often by player killing. As Bartle found, the more distress killers cause, the greater the killer's joy (Bartle, 1996). This form of griefing has been expanded upon in the literature.

Griefing has been defined as the intentional harassment of players (Warner & Raiter, 2005; Smith, 2004; Lin & Sun, 2005; Foo & Koivisto, 2004; Myers, 2007), or as a 'source of deep mental anguish, annoyance or frustration' (as cited in Foo & Koivisto, 2004). Griefters are players who derive their enjoyment not from playing the game but from causing other gamers to become distracted during game play (as cited in Foo & Koivisto, 2004). In a MMORPG's in Taiwan, grief players are referred to as 'white-eyed' and are considered deviants in gaming societies because they violate the codes, rules, and etiquette of the communities (Lin & Sun, 2005).

To provide an example of griefing in World of Warcraft, a popular MMORPG, there is a spell that is powerful enough to kill lower level characters

almost instantly; when these players return to their towns, they spread this spell like a virus to new areas (Warner & Raiter, 2005). This intentional infection is a griefing tactic which players who learn to modify the space take advantage. Another example from World of Warcraft that is actually seen in other games is camping. Camping refers to killing a player's character immediately when they spawn back to life. Organized efforts of griefing can actually become more powerful as more players get involved seriously detracting from the enjoyment of the game.

From cyberspace research, we have the concept of "flaming." Flaming is similar to griefing. It refers to negative antisocial behaviors, including the expression of hostility, the use of profanity, and the venting of strong emotions (Thompson, 2003, p. 331). The only definition from the vast literature on flaming that comes close to what is experienced within Xbox live comes from Dorwick who defines flaming as the spontaneous creation of homophobic, racist, and misogynist language during electronic communication (cited in Thompson, 2003, p. 331). Suler & Phillips (1998) examine the overt presence of this type of speech in online spaces. Anonymity on the internet disinhibits people compelling some to say and do things that they wouldn't otherwise do. This disinhibition can work in two ways – benign and toxic. Users who display benign disinhibition show unusual acts of kindness and generosity (Suler J. , 2004). On the other hand, toxic disinhibition occurs when users employ "rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, and even threats" (Suler J. , 2004, p. 321). There are six factors that interact to lead to online disinhibition: 1) dissociative anonymity, 2) invisibility;

3) asynchronicity; 4) solipsistic introjections; 5) dissociative imagination; and 6) minimization of status and authority. I will briefly discuss each one below.

Dissociative anonymity refers to the ability to hide your identity in online spaces. Anonymity is a principle factor leading to the disinhibition effect because users can separate their online actions from their real world selves. Whatever they say and or do can't be linked to them in the real world. Some individuals may even justify their actions by convincing themselves that they aren't connected to the online persona at all.

Online environments also allow users the opportunity to be invisible as they move in and out of web sites, message boards, and sometimes chat rooms. This invisibility gives users the courage to say and do things they may not normally do.

People don't have to worry about how they look or sound when they type a message. They don't have to worry about how others look or sound in response to what they say. Seeing a frown, a shaking head, a sigh, a bored expression, and many other subtle and not so subtle signs of disapproval or indifference can inhibit what people are willing to express (Suler J. , 2004, p. 322).

In some online spaces, your identity may be known but being "physically invisible amplifies the disinhibition effect" (Suler J. , 2004, p. 322). Avoiding eye contact and face to face interaction can sometimes lead to disinhibition.

Asynchronicity is one factor that does not directly apply to this online community. Asynchronicity implies that communication does not occur in real time in online spaces. This is sometimes true in email and message boards where it can take minutes, hours, days or months for a reply. As Suler (2004) explains,

not having to deal with someone's immediate reaction disinhibits people.

However, one communication option in Xbox live that most users employ is real time chat – synchronous communication; however, invisibility and anonymity still leads users to engage in toxic disinhibition.

Solipsistic introjection implies that the lack of face to face cues or textual communication can “alter self-boundaries” (Suler J. , 2004, p. 323). What this means is that a user within an online space will create a character based off of the online cues present within the online space. The person may create a visual image and create a voice of the other person oftentimes filling in blanks of the other person with false information or information from their own life.

Essentially the other person becomes a player in your imagination or fantasy world. Suler (2004) suggests that cyberspace may become a stage where we are merely players in other people's worlds.

Dissociative imagination is the disconnect that occurs when we view the online world as a make-believe space. Some cyberspace users separate their online lives from their offline selves suggesting that their online life is a game where the rules don't apply to real life (Suler J., 2004).

Once they turn off the computer and return to their daily routine, they believe they can leave behind that game and their game-identity. They relinquish their responsibility for what happens in a make-believe play world that has nothing to do with reality (Suler J., 2004, p. 323).

This occurs more easily in fantasy game environments where an imaginary character is played by a user. Also this factor may not be as prevalent in a real

time voiced based community such as Xbox live. But without direct testing of these factors, this cannot be confirmed.

The last factor, minimization of status and authority, reflects the reality of many online spaces – the absence of a suitable guardian supervising the space. As Suler (2004) explains, authority figures usually “express their status and power in their dress, body language, and in the trappings of their environmental settings” (p. 324). The absence of the traditional cues reduces the impact of authority in digital spaces. Even when authority figures are known to users, the lack of physical presence and cues continues to diminish their power within the space. This is true for Xbox live. Authorities appear usually when a complaint is filed – and this does not occur every instance. Suler (2004) furthers that people are disinhibited with the absence of an authority figure leading them to speak out and misbehave.

By posing the question, does greater anonymity result in greater deviance, Suler & Phillips (1998) answer ‘yes’ suggesting that this increased anonymity allows a person to release their deviant side. The racism and sexism that many gamers experience within Xbox live is more than the harassment described by grieving and should not be replaced by the term flaming. The fact that racism and sexism have a historical context deems it more serious and it needs to be researched and studied separate from other antisocial behaviors.

Since this project does not directly engage the offending gamers within the Xbox live space, there is no way to gauge the motivation of gamers who perform discriminatory acts within the space. In other words, I can’t know for sure if

offending gamers are actually racist and/or sexist, but given the relative anonymity within the space, they act out in a manner that is racist and sexist. Importantly, the explanations offered on grieving and flaming does not seem to fully encapsulate what is witnessed in Xbox live. The gamers who commit acts of racism and sexism are not viewed as deviant within the space. There is not a massive effort to restrict these individuals or punish them in any way, even with the feedback system in place. The victims of these acts are the deviant space invaders attempting to move to the center of the white male's gaming universe. This aspect will be explored in Chapter 5. But before proceeding, further insight must be gained in order to understand the Xbox live community.

#### XBOX 360 AND XBOX LIVE

Xbox and Xbox 360 are video game consoles created by Microsoft (the original Xbox is no longer in production). Xbox Live is the online community associated with the 360 console which allows gamers to play with one another in virtual space. Regarding the hardware of the system, it is a next generation gaming console, and Microsoft engineers published an article outlining the science and architecture behind it. The article was very scientific in nature but a few features of next-generation consoles include the implementation of high definition images, improved screen ratios, and the incorporation of high tech computer graphics and processors (Andrews & Baker, 2006).

In order to become a member of Xbox Live, gamers have the option of purchasing a Gold Membership (\$59.99) or select the free membership which does not allow for full access to Xbox live (Bakalar, 2010). After the type of

membership is selected, the player decides on a gamertag (or just uses the gamertag that existed prior to becoming a member). The gamertag is a player's username within Xbox Live. The tag can be up to 15 characters in length (Description of Xbox 360 gamer profiles, 2009). Images are also associated with gamers and their gamertags. These images can be user uploaded, downloaded from the online market called the marketplace<sup>3</sup>, or can be an image of the avatar created within the space<sup>4</sup>. The avatar within the Xbox live context is a visual representation of the gamer and does not enter console video game play although mini games have been created specifically for the avatar. Avatars can sometimes embody the player's offline presence in this gaming space, although some people opt for an avatar bearing no resemblance to the self. Literature on the avatar is largely dependent on type of game that is being played, but Yee (2004) explains that the avatar is simply a projection or idealization of the gamers own identity, an experimentation of a new identity, or a pawn. In many computer games, avatars are animal representations, and in other games, the avatar is pre-created and the user simply selects the graphic representation of their choice (Webb, 2001). As was previously mentioned, many pre-created avatars are heavily stereotyped along the lines of race and ethnicity. As Webb (2001) explains, the avatar usually appears "as ethnically white with mundane aspects of masculinity and femininity being vividly marked out (p. 563)."

---

<sup>3</sup> The Marketplace is the virtual home page of the Xbox. This space allows users to download content, stream movies, purchase games, purchase Microsoft Points (in-game monetary unit), and alter the avatar among other things.

<sup>4</sup> Avatars were only recently added to Xbox Live in November 2008 with the launching of the New Xbox Experience

The role of the avatar also depends on type of game. For instance, in computer games, the avatar is usually the controlled player that can navigate multiple places within the space. In Webb's (2001) study on the cybercommunity Virtual Places, avatars have the ability to

...tour the virtual environment, visit chat rooms, electronic shopping malls, personalized websites and game environments. They talk and gesture to each other in either open public or private rooms. At any one time there are approximately 650 rooms being occupied by participants in Virtual Places. The personalized avatars are under the control of an individual user. Control is through the mouse, which enables the user to point at things and issue commands. Talking is accomplished by typing at the keyboard (p. 564).

So in many computer games, the avatar generates controversy within gaming spaces but this has yet to be seen within console video gaming although the default avatar is a white male with the ability to change gender and customize the skin to any color.

Microsoft Xbox has implemented several upgrades to the system to reduce the abuse experienced in the game. One upgrade in particular, gamer zones, was introduced which would only allow players to interact with other gamers that match their playing style (Xbox Live, 2009). When a gamer creates a profile, they select a gamer zone: Recreation, Family, Pro, and Underground. Gamers select these zones based on the description given when creating the profile. 'Recreation' is for casual gamers. 'Family' is for gamers who prefer a family safe zone. 'Pro' is for competitive gamers who enjoy a challenge, and 'Underground' is for gaming where anything goes as long as it does not violate the Xbox Live Terms of Use (Xbox Live, 2009). In practice, these gamer zones don't mean

much as they don't affect gameplay or the matching of players in online games (Xbox Live, 2009).

Xbox also utilizes a feedback system which allows gamers to file complaints about others through the system. This is another upgrade where the results haven't matched the intended purpose. It seems that these upgrades implemented by the Xbox Live system in 2005 have yet to prove sufficient enough to thwart social inequalities within the space.

There were further upgrades to Xbox Live implemented in November 2008. This upgrade was called the "New Xbox Experience" which featured the addition of Netflix (instant movie streaming), the forced creation of avatars (a visual representation of a gamer described above), and the introduction of the party chat system (the party chat allows for up to eight gamers to enter a private chat room) (Geddes, 2008). The party system has actually proven useful for gamers who experience discrimination in this space; however, what occurs in the party system is actually segregation. Gamers can avoid players they choose to. This creates a problem in addressing meaningful solutions to verbal abuse within this space. Gearing up for the 2010 holiday season, Microsoft Xbox 360 released its interactive version of the Wii called Kinect. There was immediate controversy, as the Kinect had trouble recognizing darker skinned users affecting avatar selection in the new medium (Chubb, 2010). Although bloggers and Microsoft representatives assured users that this was an issue easily fixed by an update, this points to the problem within these gaming spaces – the default programmer, tester, and user are almost always assumed White.

Console multiplayer gaming requires the continual purchase of Xbox games with Xbox Live capabilities or the downloading of games from the marketplace. Most games created now are Xbox Live compatible. Most games have a campaign component where gamers will complete missions and achievements to finish the game, and the majority of games created now have multiplayer options.

Xbox Live is an interesting case compared to its competitor Sony Playstation in that it charges members for access and still has an impressive number of users. In January 2009, Xbox Live boasted 17 million members (Thorsen, 2009). As of February 2010, Xbox live had reached 23 million users (Whitten, 2010). Paid membership is not the only feature that sets Microsoft Xbox 360 apart from Playstation; internet connectivity propelled Xbox 360 ahead of Playstation 2. Playstation 2 (PS2) users have to purchase an adapter to be able to play online whereas the Xbox 360 comes with online capabilities – all a gamer needs is internet access and an Ethernet cable. Also, PS2's online service is run through third party services and is not unified like the Xbox system. Sony improved its online capabilities with the release of the PS3. There is now a unified gaming network – the Playstation Network (Playstation 3 System Features, 2009). The service is still free which Xbox Live gamers view as problematic because the system becomes overwhelmed by the number of users. The Playstation Network system can't always handle the number of users which had reached 20 million by February 2009 (Miller, 2009) and 50 million by June 2010 (Asia Playstation.com, 2010). Even though Sony's Playstation Network

seems to have more users on their online network, it is impressive that Microsoft Xbox 360 garners such high user rate considering it charges for service.

Returning to the Xbox live gaming space, when a user inserts the game into the system, he or she has the option to enter the multiplayer space. Most gamers, from my participant observations browse their Friends list to see who is playing. Typically, gamers will enter the room with someone they know. This fulfills one of the four player styles from Bartle's Taxonomy – socializing (Bartle, 1996). Regarding achievements, Xbox games have a point system, and gamers have to fulfill predefined goals to increase their points. The goals are called achievements within the system and most games have some type of achievement built in to level your character up. The type of game played dictates the extent of the exploring. Role-playing games allow for more exploring than do shooter gamers. Gamers do, however, exploit architecture of maps in many games by 'glitching' to go outside the playable space.

By nature of the gaming space, gamers interact using the voice based chat creating the social environment. The only work involved is putting on the headset and speaking. There is no need to remove oneself from the game to type a message as is seen in many computer games. Lastly, the main goal in the multiplayer space is to kill other players. In friendly fire games, this can become problematic as teammates often kill one another to cause distress. This kind of anti-social behavior is known as griefing as was previously explained.

An important feature of Xbox live is its communication abilities. There are messaging options as well as multiple levels of private and public chat. Many

users of this gaming space express that the use of a headset and voice capabilities is a 'step forward in game development (Wadley, Gibbs, Hew, & Graham, 2003, p. 40). Comparing computer gaming, many prefer the hands free feature as opposed to the text based model in many computer video games. Most players utilize the voice chat, but as was witnessed in the participation observations, the presence of voice is the origin of conflict within this space. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the process that leads to conflict within Xbox live focusing mostly on racism and it is linked to the voice. But before that discussion ensues, it is imperative to understand the methods employed to document and analyze the experiences of marginalized gamers within this community.

## Chapter 4

### METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this study was to understand, describe, and examine the experiences of women of color within an online gaming community specifically focusing on the impacts of hegemonic whiteness and masculinity. This framework led to the formation of the following research questions: 1) How and in what ways have console video games as dominant narratives created and maintained hegemonic ideology in Xbox live? 2) How have women of color as a marginalized population within this online gaming community responded to these dominant narratives and social inequalities present within the space? I was able to answer these questions by employing the components of virtual ethnography, a method that is compatible with critical feminist perspectives. It is hoped that a collective awareness of the social inequalities facing women and people of color within online gaming spaces is achieved. It is further hoped that the information gained from this community will not only empower marginalized communities but stress to stakeholders of online communities that their spaces are far from liberatory and democratic – more attention needs to be paid to the experiences of marginalized communities. So by first justifying the use of feminist methodology and ethnography and then moving into the actual design of the study, I will show how the coupling of these methods best served this oppressed community to gauge an understanding of their intersecting experiences and responses within the space using Black feminist consciousness. Additionally, narrative was used as a means to analyze the data collected within this study.

## FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Harding defines methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (as cited in Jordan, 1996, p. 146). Because early methods in studying women were exploitative, feminist scholars sought means to fully incorporate women as foci of study. However, early approaches simply added women and stirred as Harding (1995) identified. This approach poses harm to women by attempting to rectify gender inequalities, but essentially perpetuates gendered stereotypes of women. Noddings (2001) also uncovered the danger of just ‘adding women and stirring’ in her analysis of educational curriculum. The inclusion of women by traditional standards were ‘ludicrous’ (p. 29) as being inclusive of women’s contributions were made after the fact and not meaningful. Traditional research methods have been plagued with similar issues in incorporating women as objects of study. Feminist scholars rectify this issue by employing methods that adequately addressed the status and experience of women. By advocating for approaches that contextualize the everyday lives of women, feminist methods can undue the harm of positivist approaches (Stacey, 1988).

Bhobal (1995) provides a useful definition of positivism in that it “describes social reality as objectively constructed and believes there is one true ‘real’ reality” (p. 155). This traditional approach has been criticized as masculinist (Connell, 2001; Oakley, 1999; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991) and racially elitist as Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi (2008) illustrate:

White logic, then, refers to a context in which White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts. White logic assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-whites to perpetual subjectivity...White logic operates to foster a “debilitating alienation” (Oliver 2004) among the racially oppressed, as they are thrown “into a world of preexisting meanings as [people] incapable of meaning making (pp. 17-18).

So by adopting methods that attempt to negate the impact of sexism and racism, feminist researchers have given voice to women and people of color that have been largely assumed. As Barbara Du Bois asserts, actual experience and language of women is the guiding focus in executing social science research (as cited in Stacey, 1988, p. 22).

Fonow & Cook (1991) discuss how feminist methodologies emerged. Because of the absence of critical reflection into the lives of women, traditional empiricist methods were not capable of fully capturing the lives of women. By incorporating a feminist methodology, the experiences of women from their actual standpoint could emerge and provide an alternative means of studying social life (as cited in Jordan, 1996). Black feminist methodology is also guided by this framework in that they make sense of the experiences of Black women from their point of view (Chase, 2005).

Black feminists describe the ‘outsider within position’ that inhibits traditional researchers from fully encapsulating the lives of marginalized women. As Collins describes, the outsider within position acknowledges that women of color hold particular perspectives on self, family, and society (as cited in Jordan, 1996). The problem arises when Black women’s lives are studied by those who

are not from their same social status and position. Collins describes this person as a stranger who doesn't share the basic assumptions of the group. Because of this outsider position, the stranger essentially becomes "the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group" (as cited in Jordan, 1996, p. 147). And as Schuetz (1944) informs, traditional research methods assume much about the lives of women and people of color:

To him the cultural patterns of the approached group do not have the authority of a tested system of recipes...because he does not partake in the vivid historical tradition by which it has been formed (p. 502).

Because of this danger posed, critical feminist scholars developed methods to thwart this problem.

As Allen (2002) outlines, there are several perspectives that inform the direction of Black feminist research: 1) to emancipate black women, 2) to challenge essentialist notions of black womanhood, 3) to study a variety of black women, 4) to study domination and oppression, 5) to discover black women's skills and strategies, and 6) to generate practical wisdom. Using this qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative one reduces the bias of essentializing the experiences of women, specifically marginalized women. Allen (2002) further explains that the bias inherent in quantitative methods fails to consider the unique status of being both Black and woman.

Thus, it renders black women invisible rather than as distinct persons who experience and resist multiple jeopardy or interlocking oppressions based on their race, their gender, and

intersections of these and other aspects of identity. Moreover, it neglects to recognize differences among Black women (p. 23).

Feminist methodologies provide us with a framework to understand women without the harm of questioning or making assumptions of their lived experiences. Further reducing this harm is being a member of the marginalized population being studied. As Zinn (1979) explains, this insider status affords researchers the ability to ask specific questions from this perspective that will move towards understanding their narratives (without the interruption of questioning). But it is imperative to keep in mind that there is no one way to study women as DeVault notes although she recognizes that feminist methods do share similar traits: 1) to excavate the materiality of women's lives; 2) to minimize the harm on women's lives in the research process; and 3) to support research leading to change beneficial to the lives of women (as cited in Quan, 2005, p. 45).

The knowledge that women hold as a result of being women is another reason feminist scholars advocate for methods illuminating the female experience. Feminist epistemologists challenge the masculinist adoption of the universal set of knowledge. This adoption has negated many realities for women and people of color (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Stanley provides a useful definition of epistemology and it directly informs why a feminist epistemology is necessary. She defines it as "a theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as who can be a 'knower,' what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge..." (as cited in Bhopal, 1995, p. 154). The socially situated knowledge that women hold only counts as opinion when held to the standards of

masculinist perspectives. But as Haraway acknowledges, it is entirely possible to have “simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects ...” (as cited in Harding, 1993, p. 50). So feminist scholarship can generate real knowledge at the same time socially situating it to reflect the reality of women and people of color. Further, standpoint theory allows for the possibility of generating knowledge from the viewpoint of marginalized people.

...beginning in those determinant, objective locations in any social order will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives. Starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives but also of men’s lives and of the whole social order (Harding, 1993, p. 56).

As Harding continues, women’s lives and experiences provide the grounds for this knowledge (p. 56). And as Judith Stacey (1988) notes – “hands on, face to face” research is compatible with feminist principles” (p. 21).

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

In order to make sense of the cultural practices in the context of life inside Xbox live, I employed an ethnographic methodology. This proved most useful in that ethnography provides a descriptive account of cultural practices grounded in data gathered while conducted field work. Ethnography emerged out of cultural anthropology, and scholars from other fields have since adopted and adapted the method to engage in other theoretical frameworks. Since I am an interdisciplinary scholar, my use of ethnography will be situated within multiple theoretical settings. One such setting is feminist thought.

Ethnographic methods have proven useful for feminist scholars in generating knowledge about women that have reduced the masculinist or otherwise privileged stance.

Ethnography has been identified as a specific epistemology which is appropriate for feminist concerns, including rapport and identification based upon reciprocity as personal involvement, which are feminist attempts to reconcile some of the contradictions that exist in using traditional methods with women (Bhopal, 1995, p. 154).

Ethnographic research methods provide respect and power to participants by allowing them to become full collaborators in feminist research (Stacey, 1988, p. 22). This is imperative for feminist methods in that it allows the community being studied to be empowered, a trait not seen in traditional research methodologies. This method places the researcher and participants in a collaborative relationship as Stacey (1988) describes, reducing the power structures of researcher and researched. As will be detailed, ethnography is a method that, when utilized ethically, can reduce these power structures.

Robert Prus (1996) outlines three primary sources of data in which ethnographers rely upon: observation, participant-observation, and interviews (p. 21). In comparing traditional observations, he notes that the participant-observer allows the researcher to get closer to the lived experiences of the ones being studied. Observations and perspectives of participants are key components to ethnographic research (Ward, 1999). Stacey (1999) also highlights the utility of intensive participant observation in that it 'yields a synthetic cultural account' (p. 22). However, ethnographers have been cited for the overuse of interviews

without incorporating participant observations. Others contend that what is to be gained in ethnography are the participants perspectives, which can be generated in interviews (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9). Regardless, by employing techniques such as participant observations and open-ended interviews, a researcher is able to gauge personal accounts and perspectives. However, with the progression and diffusion of advanced computer mediated technologies, ethnographic methods have had to further revamp and accommodate for the changing social landscape.

Hine (2008) explains that “ethnography has become embedded in academic culture as an appropriate way to explore how people make sense of the possibilities that the Internet offers them” (p. 260). But this method has been contested and tried and needs to be unpacked. Crichton & Kinash (2003) suggest that virtual ethnography is a method “in which one actively engages with people in online spaces in order to write the story of their situated context, informed by social interaction” (para. 2). Only viewing ethnography as a process to generate data ignores the knowledge that is generated as well as the process employed in generating this knowledge. Rybas & Gajjala (2007) outlined the online ethnographic method by following the ‘epistemology of doing:’

This methodology suggests that subjects/objects produce selves – through typing, writing, image manipulation, creation of avatars, digital video and audio – and engage in practices of everyday life at these interfaces (para. 9).

This approach recognizes the significance of emergent digital technologies and the impact on the lives of the user. By recognizing this impact, virtual ethnographic methods must be inclusive of both the “production and consumption

of technological artifacts” (para. 11) realizing the necessity for researchers to enter and become users of the space being studied.

In our research and teaching, we thus focus on building encounters in online settings, studying the discourses that emerge at the intersection of online/offline, and engaging the offline context through which the online worlds are entered (para. 11).

This point highlights the problem in defining the online world and virtual communities for the sake of research. Much of the research conducted on online ethnography begins with an analysis of whether or not virtual spaces are real spaces. But as many scholars conclude, virtual communities are real if those who engage within the space believe it to be real (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Rheingold (1993), who has studied virtual communities, defines them as the relationships that emerge out of computer-mediated communication that create a network of relationships. He argues that by the mere nature of computer-mediated communications, these interactions will inevitably lead to virtual community in need of being studied. Further, Jones (1995) specifically argues that space itself is knowledge and that the sharing of knowledge within a virtual community defines it as space. So when individuals participate in virtual communities, they blur the boundaries of real and virtual creating these definitional problems. This posed a problem for internet scholars in that early articulations of the virtual world were situated in the binary – either real or virtual. Other scholars view it “as either an environment in itself or an extension of real life...” (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 207). Only recently have scholars recognized online behavior as being influenced by human behavior (p. 5) urging

for virtual spaces to be seen as a hybrid of reality. Lori Kendall (1999) rightly points out that “on-line interaction cannot be divorced from the off-line social and political contexts within which participants live their daily lives” (p. 58).

### VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

It must first be understood that ‘virtual ethnography’ is a label that refers to a “broad range of methodological processes aimed at answering the complexities of the object of researcher and the different ways in which this object has been constructed” in online spaces (Dominguez, Beaulieu, Estalella, Gomez, Schnettler, & Read, 2007, para. 3). And although there is no set definition of the virtual ethnography, Christine Hine (2000) provides a useful guide in approaching online ethnographies. She outlines three fundamental aspects to ethnography that become pertinent when the internet is viewed as a site to be studied: 1) travel to interact with the inhabitants of the virtual space; 2) text, technology, and reflexivity; and 3) the making of ethnographic objects (p. 44).

The question posed by Thomsen, Straubhaar, & Bolyard, (1998) is a necessary one to ask in conducting virtual methods: where does an online ethnographer go and what is being observed? Since Van Maanen (1988) urges for the physical displacement in conducting ethnography, this presents a problem for virtual ethnographers. The purpose of physical displacement aids in the process of researchers breaking down their pre-existing conceptual frameworks (p. 3). But as Hine (2000) conceives, the process involved with virtual travel is more related to a researcher documenting the arrival story in the space discussing the

negotiation that transpires in becoming a member. This process is rather difficult as Annette Markham (1998) found:

Going online took a long time and involved far more than turning on the computer, tapping out words on the keyboard, and pressing the send/enter button. It was like entering a strange new world where the very metaphysics defied my comprehension of how worlds should work (p. 23).

So although no physical travel is required, what is necessary, as Markham points out, is outlining the process involved in traveling to the virtual site. As Hine (2000) notes, when one visits the internet, the focus is on the experience as opposed to the “physical displacement” (p. 45).

On the other hand, Williams (2007) provides an answer to the question posed by Thomsen, et al in listing several (virtual) sites that can be travelled to for study. These sites include “newsgroups, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Multi-User Domains (MUDs) and many other technologies of mediation” (p. 9). Many of these IRC and MUDs have recently become the home of the avatar creating space and subjects that can be studied as opposed to strictly textual spaces.

Avatars draw users to perceive their body as manifested in a cybernetic plane, through digital representations that are more or less models of their desired or fantasized appearance and behavior. It is this visual representation of the computer user in virtual space that creates a new dimension of communication within online communities. Forms of interaction need no longer be restricted to text... (p. 9).

Further impacting the idea of virtual travel surrounds the influence of time and space. Time actually constitutes a major criticism of virtual ethnography in that time and space are blurred when one is online. Even traditional ethnographies are plagued with the question – how long is long enough to study

any community? With ethnographies, there is no measure of how much time is enough. But one gauge is to continue with the study until the ethnographer understands the complexities of the community. As Miller & Slater (2000) explain, ethnographies are long-term commitments that involve multiple methods “such that any one aspect of their lives can be properly contextualized in others” (p. 21).

Ethnographers, regardless of physical place, do spend significant amounts of time with the individuals and communities being studied. This time is rather limited in retrospect and we are only able to ascertain small segments of the lives of the one’s being studied (Hammersley, 2006). But even further complicated by online environments is the impact of not interacting face to face with participants. Hammersley (2006) rightly warns that we are only gaining knowledge told to us, not actually observed. So how can virtual ethnographers address this concern in not actually occupying real spaces with physical bodies? Rybas & Gajjala (2007) explain that virtual ethnographers occupy the same cultural and virtual domains as their participants. So the space is real whether or not it has a physical location.

First, the cyberethnographer becomes a part of the setting, living and providing the framework for the interpretation of experiences. She is included in the epistemological space of the practice under investigation. This implies becoming a part of the online community, while building and maintaining one’s own networks. Therefore, this invites a reflexive dimension of ethnography (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007, para. 12).

So drawing from Hine’s (2000) assessment, virtual ethnography treats virtuality as another aspect of everyday life that is just as real as other physical spaces we

inhabit. She addressed the concern of other researchers that don't view virtual ethnography as "the real thing in methodologically purist terms" (p. 65).

The bulk of virtual ethnographic research conducted thus far surrounds text based communities as opposed to visual and voice based communities as in the present study. As Hine (2000) notes, text places more emphasis on interpreting by readers and "less on a shared understanding between authors and readers" (p. 50). So during the text based interactions, the researcher must grasp the significance of language and action occurring in the community creating meaning around the collection of texts (Van Maanen, 1988, as cited in Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). But Sterne suggests that the focus should shift from the interpretation of text to the context surrounding the creation of the text or event under study.

In this case, the research considers not what a given event means to its participants but how the meanings are possible and what the conditions making particular practices are (as cited in Rybas & Gajjala, 2007, para. 8).

Fortunately for the purposes of the current research, the community being studied is a voice based community so text will actually take a secondary role as a cultural product. Hammersley & Atkinson refer to the reliance on oral interactions as the "romantic legacy of ethnography which treats speech as more authentic than writing" (as cited in Hine, 2000, p. 51). I agree that text is important but given the nature of this online community, I am able to draw more from the traditional oral approaches in addition to the virtual and textual.

An aspect that I will need to account for is the potential that my interpretations are biased. As Hine outlines, the purpose is to not try understanding all internet users, but rather develop an understanding of what it means to be a user. Given that I am an African-American female, I will need to reflect on the experience of being a Black woman in a virtual space occupied by mostly white males (Everett, 2009; McQuivey, 2001). In addition, I will need to share this experience with not only the reader but with my participants as well. Bud Goodall suggests that this aspect of reflexivity is a part of the scholarly work in that it allows the researcher to personally reflect on the lived experience revealing the relationship that develops between the writer and the subjects (as cited in Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). Specifically, ethnographic “reflexivity implies theorizing and analyzing how subjectivities of the researcher and the subjects get mutually constituted in the interaction” (para. 12). Put simply, what is the relationship that develops and how does this impact the interpretation of the text or events in the space? By merely participating in the virtual environment, the researcher becomes part of the community and culture being studied. So it is imperative to incorporate ‘auto ethnographic writing’ to expose the “social and cultural aspects of personal experience” (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007, para. 12). By failing to acknowledge the experience of the researcher, the positionality and assumptions of the researcher won’t be recognized. Furthermore, this failure poses considerable damage to the research process as well as poses harm to the community being studied (Gajjala, 2004).

Some researchers fail to incorporate this reflexivity citing it moves the research from objective to subjective. Others note that acknowledging the self in the study reduces the authority researchers claim to have over the participants. Visweswaran suggests “that ethnographers need to consider ways to “disrupt” their own authority as ethnographers allowing for a “questioning of the work” (as cited in Gajjala, 2004, p. 36). Being self-reflexive leads to this “disruption” in that the researcher has to answer the questions posed by members of the community. Gajjala (2004) confirms this point in that the individuals being researched will ‘talk back’ and question the researchers’ role usurping the authority inherent in research methods (p. 31).

In the case of feminist researchers, this occurs because of the contradictory demands between feminist ideals of dialogic engagement and the implicit need for the researcher to hide her subjectivity in an effort to seem “unbiased.” In the case of research conducted in Internet spaces, the interactive nature of the medium potentially leads to a questioning of the researcher’s conceptual and methodological assumptions by “subjects” (Gajjala, 2004, p. 31).

Markham (2004) also recognizes the importance of the researcher in the virtual ethnography. In the study she conducted, she found that researchers are part of the construction of online identities and this aspect should be addressed in the research process. Positivists view the research process as objective merely shedding light on a social phenomenon. However, researchers, especially ethnographers, “construct the reality of a social setting through direct and indirect experience and are influenced by the tools they use” which is reflected in the writing process (Williams, 2007, p. 8).

Banks & Banks discuss the pedagogical potential of autoethnography in that it “teaches lay and academic audiences about themselves, illustrates new forms of scholarly writing, and explicates the mode of critical attitude and self-disclosure” (as cited in Rybas & Gajjala, 2007, para. 12). Rybas & Gajjala (2007) rightly explain the use of the term critical here in that it “refers to the process of questioning commonsense assumptions while scrutinizing otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” (para. 12). This refers back to the critiques of traditional methods by feminist scholars. So adopting this process is imperative for scholars conducting research on the lives of women. This also reveals the emancipatory potential of this process:

...objectivity is not only hermeneutic – understanding of cultural symbols of one group in terms of another thus supporting the status quo – but also emancipator – challenging culture and pointing at implications of descriptions and constrains of discourse (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007, para. 12).

Traditional ethnography has the advantage of actually mapping physical locations that constitute the object of study. As Clifford notes, ‘the objects produced and studied through ethnography...have been largely understood in spatial terms (as cited in Hine, 2000, p. 58). Silverman provides a useful example in understanding what is meant by the object of study relating to the family. One would think the physical home is where ethnography on family would be conducted, however, multiple sites comprise where family is performed (as cited in Hine, 2000, p. 58). There is danger inherent in situating the field site as a place one goes to study. It reinforces the idea that culture is something that exists only

in physical space (Hine, 2000). Because of this assumption, virtual ethnographers have the task of justifying the locations they study. Further complicating the matter, only fragments of user's lives are revealed limiting the virtual ethnography in ways not experienced by traditional ethnography.

The diffusion of media and digital technologies throughout the world has interlinked cultures and allowed for the physical (and virtual) mobility of people and things (as cited in Hine, 2000, p. 58). To deal with this cultural merging, scholars urge for a more holistic approach in studying communities as opposed to the fragmented approach. Alex Steward (1998) asks how much of the participants lives – real or virtual – can we as researchers actually see? In traditional ethnographies, researchers are fortunate enough to experience a wide range of the participant's lives by merely sharing the same space. With virtual ethnographies, we only see what the online participants want us to see or what the space allows. So this narrow focus presents us with fragmented portions of their online lives. However, a positive aspect of this fragmented approach is that researchers are able to conduct intensive analyses of these interactions creating a more holistic look at one aspect (p. 82). Some critics argue that this in depth approach is still fragmented.

The idea of a holistic study of a given context is a disciplinary fiction which fails to acknowledge the partiality and selectivity of any ethnographic description (Hammersley, 1990; Stanley, 1990). It also fails to take on board the full implications of interconnectedness: how can there be a holistic study of a site if its boundaries are unstable and only occasionally enacted? Where does the local stop and the global begin (Hine, 2000, p. 59)?

Hine suggests that the solution to the holistic dilemma is to implement a multi-dimensional approach by incorporating multiple sites or multiple communities to address this dilemma.

Another approach in aiding the adoption of virtual spaces as objects of study is to view them as unique cultural spheres impacted by real life (Hine, 2000). Rybas & Gajjala (2007) suggest that the lives we lead online and offline are actually “intersecting and interweaving experiences” (para. 8). This perception of the internet creates a great deal of conflict in how research is conducted. As Hine (2000) reveals, it is either viewed as a cultural artifact where the focus is on the role of the internet in offline contexts or as a medium focusing on the characteristics of online behavior. This dichotomous view negates how virtual culture has been impacted by online and offline behavior (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007; Hine 2000). As this dissertation will reveal, offline behavior has definitely manifested within online spaces.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study employed commonly used ethnographic methods as outlined by Prus (1996): participant observations and narrative interviewing. Adhering to the principles of ethnography, my hope was to examine observable patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life by immersing myself into the day to day activities of the community. Because I studied a variety of communities comprised of females of color, I was able to create a multi-site ethnography (Hine, 2000). In conducting all of the research, I had a first hand, day-to-day

view of the Xbox live culture as well as a segment of its members for a period of 7 months.

## PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

The sample for the current study was obtained between July and August 2010. Out of the individuals who agreed to participate, only 16 were able to be included in the study and others agreed but did not provide a means to be contacted. Given the nature of gaming, many individuals were under the age of 18. I contacted Xbox live gamers through the Xbox live gaming space and the Xbox live. This solicitation only generated 3 interviews but I relied on snowball sampling to collect a larger population. The interview process constituted of individual and group interviews about identity, linguistic profiling, and inequalities and oppressions in Xbox live.

## RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Having been a member of Xbox live since 2004, I had a sense of what the community was like, changes it had undergone, and knowledge of experiences of people like me – women of color. However, it was not until I began graduate school that I realized that this community was a site that needed to be systematically analyzed by documenting the experiences of marginalized users. Being an insider into this community, I did not have to learn how to play, learn how to act, or conduct much preliminary research leading to data collection. The biggest chore was to navigate the researcher/member role strategically to be able to gain the information I needed to answer my research questions. Fortunately, I did not have to learn the language of an Xbox live gamer, I already knew it. I did

not have to learn how to be an appropriate ‘Xbox-er’, as I was already one. I just had to learn how to not let my role as a researcher/member cloud my judgment or skew the data collection and analysis process in anyway. As a researcher, I began recognizing and documenting the behaviors and patterns of Xbox live gamers.

Within a month of data collection, I stopped logging my hours within the space given that my recreational play and research time were one in the same. If I was on Xbox live, I was documenting behaviors and patterns. Since I have been an Xbox live gamer, I consistently log about 2 hours a weekday with weekends reaching up to 5 or 6 hours a day. From the time I began researching, I estimate that I have logged 400-450 hours within the Xbox live gaming community. These hours include playing actual video games, watching Netflix movies in parties, chatting in parties, or engaging in other activities available to Xbox live members. Rarely was I alone in the space. Almost every documented hour was spent with Xbox live members.

Ethically speaking, the community members I studied knew I was a researcher. If a new member would join the community being studied, I would explain my purpose to them allowing them to opt out of the research (opting out simply meant that I would not document their conversations, behaviors, and/or actions). Similar to Annette Markham (1998), the ethnography was very open with all participants knowing I was a researcher. However, gamers on opposing teams would not know I was a researcher. I did not engage in direct conversation with gamers who were not part of the gaming community I was studying. I would, however, document the gamers’ behaviors and actions if the observed

behaviors had a direct impact on my community. The chart that I used to document observations is located in the appendices (see Appendix A).

### NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

I employed narrative interviewing as opposed to the question and answer format to establish a collaborative and dialogical relationship with the participants. Although I began with a basic interview guide, the questions asked were open-ended, unstructured, and conversational. In many instances, the participants would talk for a length of time before I would move to the next question. I wanted the participants to openly discuss their experiences whether past or current. I wanted to create a natural conversational flow so that my participants were always comfortable and always willing to talk about experiences regardless if I had asked a question or not. It became second nature for my participants to message me requesting a ‘debriefing’ of a racist, sexist, or racist/sexist experience that they wanted immediately documented. This narrative approach encourages people to develop a deeper understanding of their situation through self-reflection (Lather, 1991). Rarely would I talk in these instances. Upon hearing, documenting, and transcribing these stories, I also took note of my own reflections and feelings about the situation. Being a member of this community, I would often feel extreme anger and emotion, just as the participants were feeling. Because of the emotional attachment, I had to constantly ensure I was not engaging in aggressive or overly charged behavior (lashing out, cursing, etc), but rather document what I was witnessing and take notes from my participants when they would ‘debrief.’ I soon learned to turn the other cheek

when these negative events would happen to me directly and often times would not speak within the gaming space at all (in the presence of Xbox gamers who were not a part of my gaming community being studied).

Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool used in research to understand other's stories (Van Manen, 1988). These narrated stories, as was previously discussed in another context, allow the researcher to gain insight into the value placed not just on isolated acts, but on whole sequences of events. The self-narration process that I led my participants to adopt was a means of making sense out of the experiences and perceptions of a given event. This was not meant to be a record of facts – just sense making of experiences (Van Manen, 1988).

This narrative process proved to be successful in helping the studied community make sense of their negative experiences. For too long, they had complained that the guardians within the space (Microsoft Xbox) did not care about them given that their numbers among the larger gaming community was so small (although no documented numbers exist, I hypothesize that male gamers significantly outweigh female gamers). This research process led us to expose ourselves to one another through storytelling leading to trust, respect, committed relationships, and justice among one another. This collaborative, shared, empathetic re-creation and re-interpretation of experiences sufficed for many of these women. As Chan (2002) suggests, it is all about the individual story and the co-creation of a story between the researcher and the narrator. Narrative inquiry proved useful to the ideological and lived experiences of women of color within Xbox live.

## SAMPLE

The method of identifying interviewees was Snowball Sampling. This was not the initial method of recruiting participants, but given my lack of success at gaining more participants, it was the only efficient method available. Snowball sampling is a form of non-probability sampling that does not involve random selection of a known population in the same way that probability sampling does. This was not a problem given that my goal was not to create generalizable results, but rather qualitatively explore and describe the community as well as the negative experiences of marginalized gamers. As Thomson (1997) posits, snowball sampling is a method which uses social networks to a researcher's advantage providing access to an ever expanding set of potential contacts.

I began my first interviews with a small community of female gamers I was a member of. This community was useful in identifying areas of improvement in the interview questions and even suggested I move beyond the semi-structured, question/answer format to the conversational approach. They rightly pointed out that the latter method was less formal and would generate more meaningful conversation. So I incorporated questions such as describing the first, worst, and last racist/sexist experience within Xbox live. This approach worked well and I urged each gamer I interviewed to keep a log of experiences to share with me. I made myself available via Skype, Yahoo Instant Messenger, AIM Instant Messenger, and Facebook while I was not on Xbox live so they could always share their experiences. This made transcribing much easier given the events came in text format (except for Skype in most cases).

For the purposes of this research, the data gathered from interviewing sixteen Xbox live members was used. Twelve women of color (eight African-American and four Latina) and four African-American males agreed to participate in the interview process and IRB approval was granted prior to conducting any research (it will be explained in subsequent chapters why men of color are included in the sample). I obtained consent using email or the Xbox message center by sending the consent form electronically requesting a reply with the statement of “I agree” on the subject line. I did not conduct any interviews until after participants agreed to participate in the study (see informational letter, Appendix B).

All interviews were conducted in voiced, real time except for when participants would submit ‘debriefing’ information via instant messenger, Xbox message, or email (see Appendix C for interview guide). Given that I had initial insider information, jargon and game related slang was a non-issue except for transcribing and incorporating these responses into the analysis. I did not alter any language of the participants but did provide clarification when necessary.

In the chapters that follow, I will outline descriptive information (Chapter 5) of my participants as well as thematically organize the results of the information gathered from the interviews and observations. Chapter 6 will outline why marginalized bodies can be viewed as deviant within the space and outline the process leading up to acts of racism (results from the interviews with the men of color); Chapter 7 will discuss the intersecting oppressions faced by women of color as well as the methods employed by women of color to combat the

inequalities they face within Xbox live. Chapter 8 will conclude this study introducing areas of future research.

## Chapter 5

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The participants within this study provided varying accounts of their experiences within Xbox live. Every participant realized that the problem within the space was linked with the voice and linguistic profiling occurs within the space. When a motivated gamer hears Black sounding individuals, that motivated person may engage in racist language. This same linguistic profiling occurs with women, other racial minorities, and even persons from other countries. The type of offensive language used depends on the identifier assumed (sounds like a girl, sounds Mexican, sounds like a dyke, etc). All the participants agreed that the voice was the problem and if this advanced technology was not present, the extreme degree of racial and gendered hatred would not exist.

I will begin by providing descriptive data of the four African American males and outline their negative experiences within Xbox live. These accounts are presented within two major themes: 1) the process leading to racism and 2) acts of racism stemming from linguistic profiling. The interviews did not necessarily follow this narrative sequence but rather were intertwined as they were telling their stories.

### THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Through my interviews and observations, I was able to not only document women of color, but also the experiences of African-American and Latino males and they will be included in the initial discussion. This is necessary because many of my female participants had already segregated themselves, and I was

unable to witness firsthand their experiences within the larger gaming community. By identifying males who have shared similar experiences, I was able to gauge how individual acts of hate manifest within the community. These experiences will reveal how racialized narratives operate through stereotypes and inform as well as confirm the ‘common sense’ knowledge that shapes the hegemonic imaginary in the space of online gaming. Specifically,

Without the monstrous body to demarcate the borders of the generic, without the female body to distinguish the shape of the male and without the pathological to give form to the normal, the taxonomies of value that underlie political, social and economic arrangements [of power] would collapse” (as quoted in Erevelles, 2000, p. 35).

Without deviant others, respectable gamers would have no meaning of self.

The participants’ demographic characteristics are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below. Each gamertag was replaced with a pseudonym. Table 1 illustrates the descriptive data on the males within the study:

Table 1: Male Participants Demographic Summary

<b>Gamertag</b>	<b>Age/Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sexual Orient</b>	<b>Clan Name</b>
silentassassin321	27/M	AfrAmer	Hetero	NA
xxRobotechxx:	22/M	AfrAmer	Hetero	NA
ChrisIsNice	32/M	AfrAmer	Hetero	NA
LightzOut	24/M	AfrAmer	Hetero	NA

*Silentassassin321*, *ChrisIsNice*, and *LightzOut* are all from the Southern region of the United States and *xxRobotechxx* is from a large city in the Northeast. *Silentassassin321* was the only participant currently residing in an area where he was not originally from – a large metropolitan area in the Southwest. All four have been members of Xbox live for more than six years and they have witnessed

numerous changes within the community. What they have not witnessed has been a solution to the problem of linguistic profiling within Xbox live.

### THE PROCESS LEADING TO RACISM

All the participants agreed that the problem within Xbox live is based off of linguistic profiling although they did not employ this term. They suggested that when a motivated offender hears a Black sounding individual, then that motivated offender would begin a process leading to an act of racism. To illustrate the process that occurs, read the following excerpt from this gaming session (full excerpts are located in Appendix D):

*NewbSlayer:* They got your ass with that torque. Right in the face. That's the same thing I'm going to do to you. You fucking Newb (Speaking in Standard American English)

*silentassassin321:* Whateva man. Shut the fuck up.

*NewbSlayer:* Wait. Are you black?

*silentassassin321:* Why? Are you white?

*(xxRobotechxx dies and enters the room)*

*xxRobotechxx:* Man dats some bullshit. Fifty fucking shots. Fake bullets. I gotta have fake bullets.

*NewbSlayer:* Is that another fucking nigger? I'm gonna kill your black nigger asses.

*xxRobotechxx:* What the fuck man? Here we go wit dis shit. Get yo' white ass out dis room. Let me boot his ass.

*silentassassin321:* Get yo' short dick out the room. Fucking honky.

*NewbSlayer:* Your mom sucks nigger dick. Nigger Nigger Nigger

*(NewbSlayer leaves the room)*

*(TubeTastic101 leaves the room)*

*silentassassin321*: Got dayum I get tired'a dat shit. Fucking white short dick honkey.

*xxRobotechxx*: I see they bringing dat shit to Gears. Wish dey would keep dat fuck shit in Call fa' Duty.

This excerpt shows the 'trash talking' that occurs within the space and what happens when the 'trash talking' becomes racialized. *NewbSlayer* asks if the users within this particular game happen to be Black. He bases this off of how *silentassassin321* sounds. To reiterate, there are only linguistic cues within this space not unless one employs video chat (which did not occur within this study). This excerpt also shows the racialized response of *silentassassin321* as well as *xxRobotechxx*. These two gamers in return acted in a racist manner towards their offender. However, during my observations, I never witnessed a Black sounding individual begin the racist speech within the space.

Another key question that generated significant responses from my participants was 'how often do these inequalities occur while gaming? All participants explained that inequalities were a frequently occurring event, a mainstay in Xbox live. The participants stated that they would not always use microphones to communicate within the space because of linguistic profiling. They felt safer when they were with other Black sounding gamers. This holds true with the women within the study as well which will be outlined in the following section.

WOMEN, LINGUISTIC PROFILING, AND INTERSECTING OPPRESSIONS

The data within this study were collected from the interviews of twelve women – eight African-American and four Puerto Rican although they all identified racially as Black. Descriptive information on these women is listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Female Participants Demographic Summary

<b>Gamertag</b>	<b>Age/ Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sexual Orient</b>	<b>Clan Name</b>
MissUnique	28/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
ThugMisses	31/F	AfrAmer	Hetero	Conscious Daughters
cdXFemmeFataleXcd	29/F	AfrAmer	Bisexual	Conscious Daughters
ShedaBoss	26/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
MizzBoss917	23/F	Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
XpkX RicanMami	23/F	Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
XpkX MammaMia	20/F	Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
YeahSheBlaze	19/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
Patroa917	22/F	Latina	Bisexual	PuertoReekanKillaz
BossMama	22/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
xxxTooTrill4uxxx	21/F	AfrAmer	Hetero	MilitantMisses
UReady4War2	26/F	AfrAmer	Bisexual	MilitantMisses

These women had grouped themselves into clans within Xbox live. A clan is similar to a guild as seen in computer gaming and is a group of players who play together in online gaming. Many clans coordinate matches to play other clans and log their scores into online scoring systems. From my observations, this coordinated activity does not occur in all games and is seen most often in shooter games such as Gears of War and Call of Duty (all installments).

Many game researchers have studied the motivation behind joining guilds and clans within online gaming and found that most players join guilds to strategize within the game and complete difficult objectives (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2007); guilds are also very popular given that Seay, Jerome, Lee, & Kraut (2004) found that 78% of online gamers were members of guilds.

Guilds/clans are not organized in this manner within Xbox live and clan membership is not imperative to completing objectives. From my observations, clan membership within Xbox live appears to have more social value than anything although no studies have yet emerged on clan membership in Xbox live.

To explain the contrasts among the clans within this study, I will begin with descriptive information to shed light on each one. I created names for these clans that would not reveal actual clan names and protect their identities although I attempted to create names that were reflective of the actual clan.

**Conscious Daughters:** Conscious Daughters (CD's) have existed since July 2006 and formed their clan while playing the first installment of Gears of War. CD's are dedicated to social justice and are a very conscious group. All nine of the members are currently attending college or have already received college degrees. Five members, including me (*mzmygrane*), are currently enrolled in graduate school (the remaining four members agreed to participate in the study). CD's formed as a means to reach out to women of all colors to create a safe haven for gaming; however, all members of the clan were African-American and at the time of the interviews, had not yet successfully recruited women from different ethnic backgrounds. Although CD's would organize matches with opposing teams, their priority was not serious gaming but rather the focus was on the social interactions within Xbox live. Compared to other female clans in the current study, CD's were a clan in name only.

A member from Conscious Daughters explains what occurs when males hear how women sound. Women have been racially categorized and assumptions

about White and Black women have emerged within the space. The excerpt below explains this process.

*cdXFemmeFataleXcd*: When I started gaming, of course, like all of us, we played with guys. At first, the dudes liked that we were a part of their groups and we would hang out with them all the time. You remember that right?

*Mzmygrane*: Oh yeah. Wake-n-game right? We couldn't wait to get online.

*cdXFemmeFataleXcd*: Well they started getting too comfortable and I guess they true colors started coming through. They started calling us bitches. Started saying all kind of nasty shit. Suck my dick this suck my dick that. But we were like tokens. Especially for those of us who were good. They paraded us around like trophies. We were supposed to be seen and not heard.

*Mzmygrane*: Oh yeah. Mascots.

*cdXFemmeFataleXcd*: Right. You know those white girls we used to play with? They liked that shit. They didn't mind being talked to like a dog. I guess you just get used to the abuse right? But they wanted us to be like the white girls. Just laugh it off and keep on smiling. Fuck that. That's battered woman syndrome.

This excerpt reveals a view held of White women by Blacks, that they accept an inferior role to men within the space. This view of White women was actually a position shared by almost all female participants within the study. The excerpt below reveals this.

*ShedaBoss*: White dudes talk hella shit to dem girls. And they just laugh they ass off. Its gross.

*ThugMisses*: I know right. I'm like 'ma, come wit us.' We ask dem to join us all da time. It don't matter if dey good or not. We just hate seeing women treated like dat.

*ShedaBoss*: I know. And dey don't have to go through dat. It's not like dey gotta work wit 'em or have to deal wit 'em. It's the fucking internet. It's so much space out there to do ya' own thing. Na' mean.

*Mzmygrane:* Well maybe they are intimidated by you. When they encounter you, you guys are talking shit. They probably feel safer with people like them, just like you feel safer with people like you.

*MizzBoss917:* Mygrane what the fuck we gon do to dem in here? We aint never came across stupid to white girls.

*ThugMisses:* Well yeah we have. Think about how bad we talk to dem when we see dem laughin at sexist jokes and shit.

*MizzBoss917:* Well dats shit talkin fa dey own good. I'm not disrespectin dem. You know I love da ladies.

*(everyone laughs)*

*ShedaBoss:* Shit dats why dey scared. Dey think they gon get turned out. But I aint even on no shit like dat wit dem.

*ThugMisses:* We really just trying to help. But dey don't know dey need it. They think its part ah' da game.

From what these gamers reveal, White women would rather engage in the sexist world of gaming as opposed to joining a raced space with women of color. The White women they have encountered seem to accept their reality within the male gaming community. They do not perceive these inequalities in the same manner as women of color seem to be. Many women within this study seem to be reaching out to their White counterparts to join them and avoid the dominant male.

**Puerto Reekan Killaz:** I found the most difficulty gaining entrée into the Blatina clan. I was previously familiar with one member of this clan and she introduced me to other members. Upon recognizing that I would not be welcome with open arms, I began merely observing and gaming and rarely participated in conversations. These observations helped me recognize the inner workings of this

particular clan. The clan I came from welcomed all women regardless of race and I assumed that other women of color would be as hospitable. But the observations helped me learn how the women interacted with one another, with males, and with outsiders in general.

I realized that the Puerto Reekan Killaz had created their clan as an all-lesbian space, and I had made it known previously that I had a male partner (not realizing that I was ostracizing myself). Fortunately, since I was described as a femme (feminine woman) and the members of Puerto Reekan Killaz described themselves as studs (masculine female – similar to butch), they did not force me to leave their space. I also discovered that the clan rarely welcomed members who were unable to speak Spanish. My Black, female body was not enough for me to pass within this space initially. Because I was so impressed with the tactics this clan employed towards males, I did not want to give up. Although I was not able to learn Spanish fluently, I did incorporate phrases and words that I knew and earned the nickname ‘Spanglish’ among members of Puerto Rican Killaz.

From my observations and interviews with Puerto Reekan Killaz, I found that their intersecting experiences were amplified by not just their gender and race, but also by their citizenship and linguistic (in)abilities.

*XpkX RicanMami:* All I know is that only people just like you understand you. So there’s no way you can understand where we coming from. Now I know you being African-American and all you understand some of the struggle. But since we Latina as well, we got added shit to deal with. Again, not to take away nothin’ from you as a Black woman. Ok? So don’t get mad, I’m just being real like you want me to right?

*Mzmygrane:* Yes that’s all I want. Digame. Let it out. Tell me how you feelin.

*XpkX RicanMami*: ...the point I was makin first is that people look at me and assume I'm not American. They think I'm a fucking illegal just cuz I'm Hispanic. So I got the race thing, the gender thing, and the citizenship thing to deal wit.

*Mzmygrane*: I feel you. Language too.

*XpkX RicanMami*: Shit yeah you right. Just cuz I talk with an accent people think I can't speak English good. I just wish more Blacks would understand where we comin from. We aint trying to take over as the most oppressed. Ain't no damn contest who the most fucked up minority is in this country. We all fucked up. I just wish people would recognize that we got it hard too. Especially Black people.

From their experiences, they recognized the inability for males and other ethnic minorities to empathize with their experiences within the space. Individuals with privileged identities oftentimes take their privilege for granted. African-Americans have the privilege of citizenship over ethnic minorities who migrate from black and brown countries. This privilege leads to incidences of oppression in some cases as is seen above.

**Militant Misses:** The Militant Misses (MM) as a clan were more focused on hardcore gaming as opposed to socializing within the space. They created this segregated space because they weren't being taken seriously as hardcore Gears of War and Modern Warfare gamers. As a result, they created their own space and took a militant approach in ensuring all of their members were adequately trained and prepared to fight in clan matches. The space was created as practice grounds to prepare fighting males. Interestingly, MM rarely played against other female clans because they thought women were inferior to men. Members of Militant Misses did not take other women serious as gamers.

When asked the question what could be done about inequalities within the space, the Militant Misses responded saying that increased gaming skills would reduce instances of hate within Xbox. The following conversation outlines their stance.

*UReady4War2:* Now mzmygrane, when you gon join our clan? I see you getting better?

*Mzmygrane:* Nah I'm good. I remember playing wit yall one time and yall got mad at me cuz I couldn't get no kills.

*UReady4War2:* (*Laughing*) Well you got yo game up now, so you don't have to worry about that.

*Mzmygrane:* But that's what I've been trying to ask you. Why is that so important to yall?

*UReady4War2:* Because we won't be taken seriously – duh.

*Mzmygrane:* Taken seriously by who?

*UReady4War2:* Dudes.

*Mzmygrane:* Why is that so important to you? Do you feel you need a man to confirm who you are?

*UReady4War2:* Hell naw.

*Mzmygrane:* Then what is it. Explain it to me. Your entire thought process. Why yall practice so much. Why you so mean to the girls? Why yall won't play other girl clans?

*UReady4War2:* Ok ok ok chill. Everytime I talk to you, you always bringing up how women aint taken seriously. You always bring up all that racist and sexist shit. But you know they only bring that up when they aint got nothing else to talk about. Seriously, kiki, if you pay attention to when men do all that shit talking to yall, its because yall pissed them off by sucking (*begins laughing*). Nah I'm just joking, kinda. But we aint had no dudes talk shit to us like that in a long time. They still talk shit, but they be mad that we just whooped dey ass in the game. We make them mad. They don't make us mad anymore.

*Mzmygrane:* But why are you so hard on women who just want to play for fun – like me?

*UReady4War2:* Because there is a solution. There's a way to not experience all that negative shit. Just get better at the game. Why wouldn't you do that?

*Mzmygrane:* Because I shouldn't have to. Guys don't have this burden. We do. And you are putting it back on us to deal with the burden. We're not the problem. They are.

*UReady4War2:* Fair enough. Just be ready to still be called bitch (*laughing*).

The Militant Misses did not enjoy being oppressed within the space and had identified a means to avoid inequalities. However, as is outlined in the above excerpt, the responsibility falls upon women to alleviate the oppressions.

#### WOMEN RESISTING ONLINE

Aside from segregating, only one clan actually employed tactics to resist the dominant structures within Xbox live. Puerto Reekan Killaz as a clan organized to resist the oppressive structures within Xbox live. To gain a better sense of tactics employed, ponder the following excerpt:

*Mzmygrane:* Ok so I know why you do it, I want some examples of what you do. Are there certain types of games where you do certain things? Walk me through some examples.

*Patroa917:* Oh yeah. You see the most in Modern Warfare since Gears doesn't have friendly fire on. Let's just play a round so you can see firsthand.

*(Several minutes past while we both prepare to play a match)*

*Patroa917:* Ok everything depends on the map. So if we get Wetwork, or Bog, or Ambush (*names of maps from Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*), we just hang out in the back and spawn kill.

*(Waiting for game to load)*

*Patroa917*: Aight bet. We got Bog. Now you go to the otha side and hang out behind that crate. Or just hang wherever our teammates are and kill em.

*(We are in a game mode called Hardcore where friendly fire is enabled meaning we can kill our teammates)*

*Mzmygrane*: Umm. Kill our teammates? What about the other team?

*Patroa917*: Kill em all. Shit! Spawn kill them and friendly kill us! Well not me (*laughing*).

*Mzmygrane*: Ok. Umm. What purpose does this serve?

*Patroa917*: No purpose. Just making everybody mad. We can make our team mad of course by killin em. And we make the opposing team mad by spawn killing. Everybody pissed off and it makes me happy.

The first half of our griefing exercises was spent killing members of our own team. This type of griefing behavior, although annoying, seriously disrupted the enjoyment of the males within the game. I could hear them through speakers in the television as they were lashing out against me and *Patroa917*. As we continued gaming, I continued to ask questions about these methods employed and wondered how often these types of tactics were employed by the women within this clan:

*Mzmygrane*: How often do you do this? Everyday? Every time you play?

*Patroa917*: Nah. Most of the time it's not just random like we doin now. We mostly do it after somebody piss us off. Oh shit. You see that shit (*she sniped someone's head off*).

She explains that this type of behavior is usually in response to an oppressive act that occurs against them within Xbox live. They react in this manner only when someone forces them to this type of action.

The excerpt continues below and outlines other griefing tactics employed by this clan:

*(We complete several games and engage in the same behavior. By this time, I have several messages of gamers complaining about my actions. Several gamers also submitted complaints on my actions within the game. I continue resistance griefing with Patroa917 and ignore the messages. Our game plan changes when we play a map called Ambush).*

*Patroa917: Oh shit let's have suhmo' fun. Follow me. (I follow her towards the middle of map near the fence)*

*Patroa917: Ok pull out the pistol and jump up and down on my head.*

*Mzmygrane: Ok what's supposed to happen?*

*Patroa917: Just wait for it. See what I'm doing is looking down...*

*Mzmygrane: Oh shit hell naw. Now what do I do?  
(I have glitched outside of the map which is another griefing tactic – stretching the limits of the architecture of the map to your advantage).*

*Patroa917: Kill anybody you see. Well except me. They won't know where the hell it's coming from. Not unless they see you. Oh kill yourself when you run outta bullets.*

*Mzmygrane: (Laughing). Hell naw. Ok.*

*(I successfully kill my teammates and the opposing team. When I run out of bullets, I kill myself and begin the process over again. By this point, I have about a dozen messages of players complaining about my behavior within the space.)*

This griefing tactic further annoyed gamers within the space. Since I was invisible, the opposing team as well as my team were unable to locate me and kill me. This infuriated the gamers within this session and I could continue hearing them within the space as well as see the messages pouring into my inbox. They were complaining. The excerpt continues below and we switch to another game to continue griefing.

*(We change games and invite two other members of Puerto Reekan Killaz to the game lobby. Blaze is one of the members not welcoming of me and she immediately begins speaking Spanish. The other members respond in Spanish and I am unable to make out what they're saying so I wait for instructions. Several minutes pass. I am sent an invitation to another gaming lobby).*

*Patroa917: Aight mygrane, first off, my bad. You know how she is. But for the first round we lag switchin then we gotta boot ur ass – my bad mama. We got a clan match comin up. But let's close out dis chat and get into the lobby. Don't be mad at me aight? Hit me up next time you on.*

*Mzmygrane: Nah you good. It's ok. I completely understand.*

I did not speak for the remainder of this match and the members of the clan were speaking Spanish. *Patroa917* would speak English and provide me with griefing instructions. The particular resistance tactic employed here was called lag switching. It refers to a disruption in the communication between a console and server. Many internet modems have switches that can be turned on and off which is what *Patroa917* did during this match. It slowed the game play and the players seemed like they were teleporting. But it allowed her to kill the members of the opposing team. Once again, the opposing gamers did not appreciate this kind of griefing activity and they began filing complaints. This organized griefing only continued for another round and then the members of Puerto Reekan Killaz left and started a clan match.

To understand the context of the actions and responses of the women within this study, I analyze their behavior and examine the longterm potential for their resistance strategies. The next chapter will analyze this assumption, incorporate additional data, and be examined within the contexts of deviance, linguistic profiling, and resistance.

## Chapter 6

### DEVIANT BODIES: THE PRESENCE OF THE 'OTHER' IN ONLINE GAMING

Thus far, I have argued that video games and online gaming spaces continue to deploy and maintain whiteness and masculinity as privilege. What results is linguistic profiling based on how these women and people of color sound further resulting in their marginalization. With this chapter, I will argue that marginalized gamers within Xbox live have been constructed as deviant bodies, undeserving of the full status of gamer by the default white male. Through my participant observations and interviews conducted, this chapter will give substance to these arguments through the experiences and perspectives of several gamers. It is my hope that their stories and experiences will demonstrate how individual acts of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other inequalities manifest in this online gaming community as well as how normalized these events have become to marginalized gamers experiencing them. To accomplish this goal, this chapter will be divided three different sections: 1) an explanation of deviant bodies within Xbox live, 2) an analysis of the process that leads to individual acts of hate, and 3) the normalization process involved in diminishing acts of hate.

#### DEVIANCE AND DEVIANT BODIES

In the broad sense, deviance is a term that refers to behavior that does not conform to socially accepted norms. Traditional definitions of deviance can be viewed from two opposing perspectives: either absolutist or relativist. In determining the level of deviance from the absolutist approach, sociologists

usually compare the degree of difference between the deviant behavior and the established norm, or as Newman (2008) suggests, absolutism views human behavior as ‘inherently proper and good’ or improper, immoral, evil, and bad’ (p. 220). The problem with this approach is that there are arbitrary differences in right or wrong especially when incorporating gender, race, class, age, and other factors. There is also strong emotional reaction towards those considered deviant from the absolutist perspective as is often seen with the issue of same-sex marriage (Newman, 2008). This perspective mirrors a failure to conform notion and has led to strict social controls over behavior – the law and order effect. To increase social control, three things usually occur: 1) more rules are established, 2) these rules are strict and inflexible (for certain bodies), and 3) a system is in place to punish violators. When this absolutist approach is adopted by our social institutions, we see more laws and regulations prohibiting certain actions for certain people (Newman, 2008).

On the other hand, the relativist approach views that no behavior or person is inherently deviant; deviance emerges through a labeling process where some behaviors are identified as bad, undesirable, or unacceptable on the basis of rules made by those in positions of power (Coakley, 1994). For those who lack power within any social structure, their behavior may be labeled deviant more often than those with power. Relativist definitions of deviance recognize how many acts of deviance have been socially constructed and created based off of a “collective of human judgments and ideas (Newman, 2008, p. 222). Powerless individuals don’t have the resources to resist the deviant label when their behavior does not

conform to the standards of the hegemonic structure. Most often, the aforementioned responses to social control occur in this instance as well. In the context of the current analysis, the relativist approach will be explored and there are three definitions I've restructured for this direction: 1) deviant behavior violates social norms in a particular space and results in punitive actions by those who established the norm; 2) one only becomes deviant or a behavior only becomes deviant once a negative valuation is placed on it; and 3) definitions of deviance vary based on the setting and the people around. This approach to deviance is similar to cultural criminologists who look broadly at mythical and misleading imagery, constructions of gender, ethnicity, age, etc, and new forms of social control (Ferrell & Websdale, 1996). Although much of their focus is still on criminal behavior, their work recognizes the importance of power, identity and difference, and how constructions of identity impact the response of hegemonic structures in place in society leading to social control within particular spaces.

As Terry & Urla (1995) explain, deviant social behavior “manifests in the materiality of the body” (p. 2). However, not all bodies within Xbox live are subject to the label of deviant. Most often, blackness and any association with blackness is punished the most violently within the space. As Radhika Mohanram (1999) explains, “blackness is a discursive practice exercised by the confluence of history, economics, geography, and language” (p. xiv) and these spaces continue to expand. Blackness has been constructed in a manner that enables and is enabled by its counterpart - whiteness (Mohanram, 1999). She writes: “first whiteness has the ability to move; second the ability to move results in the

unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 4). As the relativist view of deviance would confirm, this embodiment is a process rather than a given and in order to sustain this meaning, it must constantly and continuously be articulated and performed which is what occurs within Xbox live – “inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power between races” (Mohanram, 1999, p. 3). As Razack (2002) explains, “...racial hierarchies come into existence through patriarchy and capitalism, each system of domination constituting the other” (p. 6). As was explained in earlier chapters, digital spaces (users and owners) are now reflective of this patriarchal, capitalist structured confirming the hegemonic domination of whiteness.

#### DEVIANT BODIES, RACISM, AND XBOX LIVE

To provide substance to these arguments, all anyone would have to do is put on a headset and wait for a ‘Black-sounding’ gamer to speak. The fact that it is so instant and reoccurring is disheartening, considering Xbox live feels that racism is not a problem. But many gamers such as *silentassassin321* and *xxRobotechxx*, (both African-American males) witness these acts of hate on a daily basis. From what many gamers suggest and from what I observed, there is a process that leads to racist speech in Xbox live. The racism experienced followed this traditional format: questioning, provoking, instigating, racist speech, and either diffusion or a virtual race war.

Questioning is the first step that may lead to racism. The simple question asked is 'are you black' attempting to confirm the sound of Blackness. Almost every instance that I witnessed in my observations and previous gaming experiences did in fact begin with this question or another similar racial inquiry. The second step in the process is provoking. This provoking takes the form of harassment similar to griefing explained previously. The difference is that this harassment is always linked to race – racial harassment if you will. Many gamers who used racist language recited offensive Black and/or immigrant jokes, challenged the penis size of Black men, challenged citizenship of Latino sounding gamers, explained disgust for big lips, criticized the use of Ebonics, and even disrespected Black mothers. The purpose of this provoking seemed to be a means to situate blackness as inferior which confirms the domination of whiteness over the other within the space.

Most of the time the provoking would lead into instigation but oftentimes, instigating preceded provoking. Either way, instigation was the only step that sometimes would not occur. But when it did, gamers using this racist speech would enter a game room with friends and this group of friends would fuel the 'flames' of the offending gamer. Oftentimes the friend's will ad lib the statements of the offender or just joke and laugh at the comments made. This provoking and instigation leads to the ultimate act of racism which is the Black sounding gamer being called 'nigger'. No matter what the previous responses of the gamer of color was, the offending gamer would eventually say 'nigger'. Once this word was uttered, either diffusion or a virtual race war followed. If diffusion

occurs, either the offending gamer or the gamer of color would leave or get removed from the game by the host. If there was no diffusion, then the Black sounding gamer would enter into a heated argument using profanity and racially insensitive language as well.

Listening to the chatter inside Xbox Live would not immediately evoke cause for concern. The gamers typically talk about strategy within the gaming space, coordinate flanks to overtake the other team, joke with one another, and have other general conversations. When the offending gamer enters the room, conversations change. In the excerpt provided in the previous chapter, questioning led straight into racism with little provocation. The initial provoking occurred when the offender questioned and challenged the gaming skills of *silentassassin321* after he was player-killed and entered the gaming room.

The reason I used that excerpt in the previous chapter as opposed to any other is threefold. First, *silentassassin321* used a racially offensive term towards his offender. During the interview, I asked why he used an insulting term and his response was very problematic but interesting nonetheless:

*Silentassassin321*: Are you joking? I aint hurtin his feelings. What could I possibly say that would hurt this muh'fuckah. He white. Aint' shit I can say that will equal the word nigga.

His justification raises an interesting point. The term 'nigger' seems to be the pinnacle of hate speech and when used towards this victimized gamer creates a great deal of emotional anguish that could lead to violence if he was able to locate this offender.

*Silentassassin321:* If I could find this bitch I would whoop his ass. On some real shit. But they do this behind they TV screen. Tough guys. Internet tough guys. You know how many times I've been called nigga to my face?

*Mzmygrane:* How many?

*Silentassassin321:* None. You know how many times I've been called nigga online?

*Mzmygrane:* How many?

*Silentassassin321:* Too many ta' count. You know what that tells me?

*Mzmygrane:* What?

*Silentassassin321:* Of the dozens of white dudes I see everyday, most of them I call friend, at least two ah' three wanna call me nigga.

This elaboration was extremely problematic for me to fathom and made me question even more why Microsoft had not created a better system to ward off verbal abuse resulting from linguistic profiling. Many of these gamers of color experience these acts of hate at the hands of the White gamer. They attend school with White males. They work with White males, and White males dominate most of the social institutions of their lives. This situation fueled in this gaming space seems to be creating a hostile environment for this gamer to assume that White men he encounters want to call him 'nigger'. Black sounding gamers were inherently deviant because of linguistics and they were immediately punished based on how they sounded.

A second issue associated with the occurrences of hate is that the speed at which the racist events occur and quickly expire. I am not sure if this was a good sign that they brushed off this act of ignorance or a bad sign – a gamer such as

*silentassassin321* might harbor his feelings of being victimized which may explain his hostility. Many males of color I encountered normalized this behavior as something that constantly occurs within Xbox live.

*ChrisIsNice*: Man this happens all the time. It ain't nothing new. And Xbox don't care. We just expect it. Sometimes it can happen e'er day. That's what if I'm not playin' wit my boys, then I aint even on the mic.

Many Blacks have normalized negative situations in their lives – the constant presence of police, violence in inner cities, poverty, racism, etc and this is one instance where the normalization process occurs again. Even as I mentioned before, video games have also become a site of normalizing stereotypical Black life. By normalizing these events and by not filing complaints against offending gamers, there is no way for oppressed gamers to stress this problem to Microsoft. This failure to report racist incidents only confirms Microsoft's stance that there is no problem within the space. Many of the males of color that I encountered had long given up on Microsoft to punish White males for their racist acts within Xbox live.

*ChrisIsNice*: Shit we just deal wit it like we deal wit all dis otha shit in our lives. ...hoods fucked up. We in and outta jail. Aint no fucking jobs. And white folks gon do what they do best. Ignore the shit they created. So why should we expect anything less from dey ass on Xbox?

An interesting point is that several African-Americans during the observations actually linked filing complaints to snitching – a 'no no' in many inner city communities. This adoption of resistive culture may have bled into this gaming community.

The third most important aspect outlined in the excerpt is that racist acts within Xbox live are fueled merely by how a gamer sounds, linguistic profiling. First, the gaming room was filled with mostly males who sounded African-American or Black Latino, and they mostly used Ebonics to speak with one another. The type of English a gamer is using is extremely important to note. Within the excerpt, I noted the gamers who were using Standard American English. I didn't want to assume that they were Caucasian but they sounded like White males, and their avatars were White and male. This mere technological advance negates what many utopians hope for within the space – no one has to know you're a dog. This may have been the case within text based communities, but the presence of voice creates particular challenges in disguising the real world self. As all of the males described within the interviews, their only 'sin' was their 'skin' and they didn't have the "complexion for the protection". Xbox just became an extension of Black life in a White world and there was no place for them.

Related to linguistic profiling, gamers of color had developed their own way to linguistically identify who may racially offend them.

*xxRobotechxx*: It's always deez dum ass white dudes that start all dis shit. Its' in they blood or sunning. But it's not all white dudes. Deez guys I'm playin wit now are white. They cool as hell. But you can tell by how they sound who is gonna start with that nigga shit.

*Mzmygrane*: How do they sound?

*xxRobotechxx*: I'onno. Corny. Nerdy. Dey not kids. Dey not red necks like people wanna believe. In my head, he look like da dudes from Geek Squad.

*xxRobotechxx* has given a face to his offender in this gaming space which could cause further problems for him as this view may cause him to see White males who fit this profile negatively. He may choose not to associate with a person who looks like this electronics giant employee, or he may one day engage in a violent act.

The gamers who engage in this racist speech don't view their actions as racist and their justifications are interesting to note. When offending gamers are asked why they engage in this behavior, many of them actually view their behavior as annoying – not racist. As Nakamura (2009) identified in her discussion of Chinese gold farmers, the gamer of color is not only undesirable, but also presumed absent; as she uncovered, this resulted in the oppression of Asian players in World of Warcraft. When this absent gamer does emerge, so does the racialization of the gaming space. But some players who negatively view Chinese farmers do not believe their feelings constitute racial discrimination (Nakamura, 2009), and the same pattern exists within Xbox live.

When asked why offending gamers engaged in acts of racism, most of them fit within the following thematic schemes: 1) I'm not racist, 2) it's just a game, or 3) I say it to White people too. No gamer ever considered themselves or their actions racist as the excerpt from the previous chapter explained.

The offending gamer, *GoState88*, justified his use of this racist word is straightforward and three important points emerged from our dialogue. First, he justified the use of the word as a response to gamers who had annoyed him regardless if the gamer was a person of color or not. In this instance, the anti-

social, grieving behavior of camping is cited as the origins of the use of the word. Secondly, this gamer removed the historical context of this word stating it was a stupid word that no longer carried the same meaning. This gamer seemed to be well aware that the word previously meant something to people of color, but given the ‘post-racial - colorblind’ ideology he has adopted, it must be another word free to use. The last important point that I want to highlight surrounds his use of the word around his African-American best friend. I’ve witnessed this on several occasions where a White gamer and a Black gamer will use this word in the sense that many African-Americans use it with one another. From the interviews and observations, the accepted use of the word by a White person depends on where the African-American person is from.

*ChrisIsNice*: Niggas from my hood ain’t havin dat shit. Mind you, I’m from da dirty (Southern region of the United States) so dat word gotta mean something different for niggas out west or in da norf’. My folks was part’a da struggle and dey raised me wit dat mindset.

*ChrisIsNice*’s assessment is justifiable. Even though African-Americans throughout the country struggled during the segregationist era, the south was ground zero for the Civil Rights Movement, hence his extreme sensitivity towards the word compared to other African-American gamers.

It seems through my observations that male gamers of color have normalized the racist acts occurring within the space (confirmed by the fact that very few of them file complaints on these gamers anymore). Male gamers of color are also fortunate enough to have large enough numbers that they find refuge in one another. This was not the case for women of color. In my

experiences gaming, finding another female to game with inside Xbox live rarely occurs. When I do encounter a female, she is most often White. Women of color are few within this space so when we do find one another, we immediately become friends. The fact that women experience racism and sexism at the hands of male gamers shows the need to develop and sustain a close community. The marginalized body of the female of color experiences violence at the hands of dominant others as a means to validate and assert the privilege identity as dominant (male and/or white) (Razack, 2002). In the next chapter, I will introduce the intersecting experiences of women of color showing how the amplification effect of oppression associated with their raced, gendered, and otherwise marked bodies.

## Chapter 7

### DEVIANT BODIES RESISTING ONLINE

From my observations and interviews, Black women in Xbox live experience discriminatory acts resulting from the label of deviance placed upon their ascribed identities as recognized through their voice. Once their voices are heard within the space, they experience inequalities. Additionally, these women perceive males as the oppressor to avoid and White women as passive bystanders not understanding of their own victimization. Many women respond to males by avoiding and self-segregating or by engaging in grieving behavior if they encounter a male; however, this grieving behavior was not at all organized or collective. Furthermore, their actions were largely dependent on their clan membership. This chapter will unpack these claims.

The women within my study were all members of various clans. Clan members I interviewed and observed identified themselves with one another by having similar gamertags. Because of the intersecting oppressions faced among the larger gaming community, many women of color segregated themselves and only interacted with other women of color. With this section, I aim to reveal the negative experiences of women of color based on their ascribed physical identities. Beginning with my own experience, I will show how the compounding effects of multiple identities amplify the oppressions women of color face. The following excerpt demonstrates the problem of gender and race and the constant pressure placed on women to confirm and defend their identities within online spaces.

*Mzmygrane:* That's why you got hacked. You shouldn't've gave them your email address. And password? What were you thinking. And Microsoft will do the investigation thing which aint nothing really. They suspend your account for a few days and that's it.

*ApocalypseNow:* I told dem dudes not to believe that. Why aint' nobody else heard of the beta but them?

*Mzmygrane:* Watch. He is gonna' end up having to get a new account.

*DaddyMack1:* shut the fuck up. You're so annoying. Dude boot that fucking kid.

*BMXR:* Who da' fuck you talking to?

*DaddyMack1:* Mezza Mah Grainey or whatever the hell that kids name is.

*Mzmygrane:* Oh he talking to me? Well he's an idiot and he can't read. The name is Miss Migraine, as in a real bad headache. And I'm not a little kid. I'm a grown ass woman.

*(gamers in room begin laughing)*

*DaddyMack1:* A fucking girl?! Shouldn't you be playing the Wii?

*BMXR:* Ey watch it. Da Wii aight. I got one. But no joke Mzmygrane. I thought you was a little kid at first too. True shit.

*DaddyMack1:* Ha. You're the idiot now. A dumb name for a dumb girl (laughs hysterically at his own joke).

*ApocalypseNow:* Ey dude chill on dat. You in our space. But on da real ma, you cool as hell. But sometimes you do be sounding like a little white boy.

*(gamers in room continue laughing)*

*Mzmygrane:* That's fucked up. And yall stupid for not being able to tell a girl from a boy. Now the race thing, ok I get. I know I sound white. But a little boy? Come on. Where is the love!!

*BMXR:* You just betta be glad assassin can vouch for yo' ass or you would get the boot – like dis.

*(DaddyMack1 leaves room)*

*Mzmygrane*: Whateva. Fuck you X. And why you boot him? He wasn't bothering me.

*BMXR*: Nah, he aint gon fuck wit my guhl (girl) like dat.

This excerpt although very simple, reveals how problematic confirming my identity in digital spaces has been for me. It could be assumed that identifying the race and gender of the female gamer within the gaming space is an easy feat, but it is not. When I started gaming, most people assumed I was a White male adolescent as is illustrated in the excerpt above or a White female. My voice is soft, and I speak using Standard American English in most settings although I frequently incorporate slang in informal settings. In this gaming space, being able to pass has actually allowed me to witness some of the most disturbing racial and sexist incidents inside the gaming space.

For an African-American woman who has adopted Standard American English, I face a multitude of obstacles in the virtual gaming space. First, I am able to gender pass meaning I can adopt a female or young male identity; second, I can racially pass as an African-American or a Caucasian. A useful definition of passing comes from Fordham's discussion of African-American women passing in higher education.

Passing implies impersonation, acting as if one is someone or something one is not. Hence, gender "passing," or impersonation - the coexistence of a prescription and proscription to imitate white American males and females suggests masquerading or presenting a persona or some personae that contradict the literal image of the marginalized or doubly refracted "Other" (Fordham, 1993, p. 81).

A more applicable definition comes from Nakamura (2002) in her coverage of passing in the online context. She discusses passing as the ability for user's to

create a 'rendition' of oneself knowing that it may be safer, better, and more powerful to be a different race or gender (Nakamura, 2002, pp. 31-32). Her coverage of passing also addresses the desire to do so because of cultural inequities that exist within virtual spaces. My experience introduces a problem that many women encounter: confirming one's identity. Proving my gender confirms the assumption that gaming is a male activity and women must be infrequent visitors invading the digital locker room (McQuivey, 2001). Second, because women are perceived to be rare in video gaming, when males encounter them, interrogation ensues. Females have to answer why they play, how they learned, why they aren't engaged in female activities, and other insensitive and inappropriate questions.

There are other aspects of gaming that must be proven by females in Xbox live. For instance, many women have to prove their ownership of the Xbox console. On many occasions, I have been asked how many hours I spent in line for the Xbox. Even more ridiculous, many women have reported being asked specifics about gameplay to confirm they are actually completing the missions, not some male other. Additionally, many males will often question ownership of the Xbox Live account (the gamertag) leading many women, including myself, to adopt gender signifiers within the gamertag – hence *mzmygrane*. Many women have some form of Miss in the gamertag or use feminine words (Spanish language) showing female ownership.

Aside from gender passing, racial passing has caused more discomfort for me. The confusion and commotion that I cause when I enter Black gaming spaces

and use racial language is particularly problematic. One extreme example in particular was an incident where I used the word 'nigga' as I often do in informal settings with my African-American friends. There was a gamer in the room I hadn't played with before and I offended him as a 'white bitch saying nigga'. One of my friends was also in this room and immediately came to my defense when this gamer would not believe I was actually African-American - he had to confirm my blackness. But the gamer had every right to be upset because I sounded White and was using the 'n' word. From his perspective, how I sounded clouded the fact that I could actually look like his sister or his mom. Even after being told by several gamers that I was in fact African-American meant nothing to him as he furthered his argument calling me a 'sell out'. He assumed I grew up in a White environment, knew nothing about the Black experience, and should not be using the word as I knew nothing about Black people. Since this unfortunate experience, I have never used that word in any voiced based virtual space because linguistically speaking, I do (virtually) embody whiteness, and I neglected this fact. I was linguistically profiled as a White woman.

My intersecting experiences varied some from the women within my study, and their experiences impacted their actions towards male gamers. Since these women had already segregated themselves from the larger community, I was unable to observe and document their negative experiences within Xbox live. However, by employing a narrative analysis, I was able to recreate their experiences using their own stories. These experiences informed the segregated spaces they created to thwart the hegemonic structure of Xbox live. Additionally,

many women segregated themselves because of discriminations experienced with other women. I will address these findings and will divide the remainder of this chapter into the following sections: narrative description of intersecting experiences and a discussion on the survival and resistance strategies employed by women of color.

### BLACK WOMEN AS A HETEROGENOUS GROUP

Although the women within this study had similar experiences in Xbox live, they were not a homogenous population and their ways of dealing with this marginalization varied drastically. I naively went into this project assuming that all women of color would behave, interact, and react in similar manners. But first it is important to explain how clan membership impacted women's reactions and responses within Xbox live.

As I began systematically studying the organization of different clans, I uncovered many important features of my clan, Conscious Daughters, in particular which forced me to check my assumptions about the experiences of women of color within Xbox live. Most importantly, many women in Xbox live were not aware of their own marginalization within the space although many women created their own gaming spaces within Xbox live to avoid gamers who may engage in racist or sexist language. When Conscious Daughters became aware of the marginalization of women of color within Xbox live, they made it their purpose to reveal this marginalization to other gamers in Xbox live. However, the purpose was lost many times as the following narrative from *MissUnique*, an original member of Conscious Daughters, will reveal.

*Mzmygrane:* Earlier you said that Black women in Xbox live had a slave mentality – that they didn't know they were free. Now we laughed when you said this, but what did you mean?

*MissUnique:* You know exactly what I mean. It's like the woman who gets beat and never leaves her husband. She doesn't see anything wrong or she is so powerless she thinks she can't do nothing about it. I think people have slave mentalities when they experience something bad but don't do nothing about it. And white folks can have slave mentalities too.

*Mzmygrane:* Do you have any specific examples from your experiences gaming in Xbox?

*MissUnique:* Hell yeah! I got a fucking ton of 'em. You remember when we were playing that one clan, *Hot Girls* or *Hot Bitches* or some shit like that?

*Mzmygrane:* Yeah

*MissUnique:* Well I friended a couple of them and started private chatting with one. Well she was talking shit about us saying we wasn't that good and we make women in Xbox live look bad. So you know I was pissed especially when I'm trying to just reach out to make some new friends. And I told her we just like getting on to have fun. We aint hard core gamers or nothing like that we just like to chill with 'ar [our] folks. So she said that they practice wit dudes to make them better and I went into the whole spill about how we don't really fuck with dudes no more in here and I told her why. I told her I was tired of being called bitch, black bitch, dyke bitch, or any variation of bitch. She told my black ass to deal wit it. That's just how it is. She tried to tell me I was being too got damn sensitive. And I told her she was a fuckin dumbass. So we went on and on with that for a while then she said we were better than them cuz we in college and shit. So she took that shit to a whole 'notha level.

*Mzmygrane:* Oh this was the girl that called us sell outs cuz we sound white?

*MissUnique:* Yeah that bitch. So to me, she looking at the wrong shit. She so focused on us that she ignoring who the problem is.

Our initial experiences with other women of color stemmed from our failure to address the privilege of our ascribed identities: educated, mostly heterosexual, and White-sounding. As I outlined previously, I neglected the fact that I embody

virtual whiteness so being critical of hegemonic whiteness to others posed a problem. But aside from that oversight, this excerpt illustrates the failure of many women to see, recognize, and address the inequalities they experience within Xbox live. The focus immediately went to the privileges held by other women as opposed to the privilege of being a male within the space. As *MissUnique* pointed out, the woman she encountered could not see that males posed a problem within the space. Further, many women directed their anger within the space towards one another as opposed to directing their energy towards males within the space. Many women within the study directed their energy towards those with privileged identities as the following discussion of Puerto Reekan Killaz will explain.

The Puerto Reekan Killaz created a space that is essentially free from racism, sexism, heterosexism, and nativism. To ensure this space stays safe, they are strict in who they friend and let become a member of their clan. Even more importantly, these women are critical of anyone who doesn't understand their struggles as Latinas and will avoid these individuals. This may seem rather discriminatory but it is an appropriate response for them to deal with their negative experiences. It is similar to women avoiding men or Black's avoiding racist Whites. These women avoid African Americans who are insensitive to their citizenship status although they are United States citizens.

The ideological framework of Militant Misses is a major shift from the other clans within the study. As women of color, they would rather play with males and endure racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other inequalities. MM

explain that these acts of hate are a part of the gaming experience and women like me were too sensitive and should not be playing if I could not endure the hardships of the male space.

The members of Militant Misses have a unique standpoint and although it varies from other women, it is not an unreasonable stance to take. No one wants to be referred to in a racist or sexist manner and they have figured out a way to avoid that. By excelling in the game, they have shifted the conversation so the focus is on the game – not who’s playing the game. However, the process involved to reach this point is problematic. What the excerpt does not reveal is the harshness displayed towards the other members in the clan to reach this level of perfection. The approach taken by the Militant Misses places the onus of the deviant body on women and places the burden of reducing inequalities in the space on us as well. Another interesting point to note is that no member of Militant Misses had a gender signifier in their gamertag further reducing their association with female gamers. The women within this clan did not share prior stories of discrimination with me as they refused to discuss that aspect of gaming. They did not engage in questions I had on identities or oppressions and would only answer questions related to the game. The members who did participate were once members of Conscious Daughters. As a favor, they conducted the interviews although they would not let me engage in this type of conversation with other members of MM.

## INTERSECTING OPPRESSIONS AND XBOX LIVE

For the most part, the participants spoke negatively of males within Xbox live citing that they have only encountered racism at the hands of White males and sexism at the hands of both Black and White males. What is often ignored are other aspects of our identities that can influence oppressions gamers may experience. The following excerpt will reveal a particular narrative from a member of Puerto Rican Killaz outlining intersecting oppressions experienced in Xbox live.

*XpkX MammaMia:* One time I can remember clearly. Shit it happened so much I forget about all of them. But I'm glad you taking our stories down. Maybe somebody will listen to yo' smart ass. How school going anyway?

*Mzmygrane:* Well they either gon' listen or I'll never get a job. (*Laughing*). But school is good. Thanks for asking.

*XpkX MammaMia:* Good. Well I remember this one time in particular we was gaming with some Black dudes. Think they was Black. They sounded Black. It was sort of a clan match. But it started off cool. They had mad respect fa' us. Then they started flirtin' and shit and you know where dat leads. They started saying shit like 'I bet you suck a mean dick' and 'why you gaming when you should be licking my balls' and shit like that. So Laysha (*XpkX RicanMami*) tries to chill e'erbody out before shit go to far. Well *Boss* jumped in that shit and it was all she wrote. And you know *Boss* talk like a nigga so they started on that dyke shit. She was getting with 'em saying 'my girl look betta than urs' and 'I'm more of a man than you'll ever be' and that cut into the pride of Black men you know. So they just pulled e'er word out the arsenal: Dyke bitch. Cunt. Whore. You going to hell. Breath smell like pussy. You know all that shit. They even started crackin' on our accents and shit. They said something like our social security numbers started with letters and we need to get south of the border. And then all hell broke loose. You know Puerto Ricans hate being called Mexican. So we all had to defend PR baby! It was curtains afta that. (*Laughing*)

*Mzmygrane:* So how long did this conversation last? How did it diffuse?

*XpkX MammaMia:* Well when we jumped in you couldn't hear shit. Blaze trying to tell him we citizens and we aint Mexicans. Me I was like, why even try to explain shit to this dumass nigga anyway. That's one thing that bother me about some of my Black friends. They like cracking that immigrant shit. I think a lot of them think we aint legal. Then you try to explain the territory shit and they don't get it. So why try? Why even bother? Its like I'm defending who I am to people who don't care. So fuck it. I aint losing sleep.

*Mzmygrane:* So did yall just leave the room or get booted or what?

*XpkX MammaMia:* Girl by the time the argument was happening we was in a party chat. Like I said they was coo' as hell. But we filed complaints on their ass afta that. That's one thing you can count on, niggas will try and holla at you on this shit. It aint that many girls on here so they dicks get hard when they hear pussy (*Laughing*).

The members of Puerto Reekan Killas hope that other marginalized groups will recognize that marginalization is not only situated in race and gender but in other social positions as well. The members of PRK seemed discouraged that a group as marginalized as African-American's would not recognize the multiple ways that lead to oppression among the Latino population.

The women of Puerto Reekan Killaz also discussed the heterosexism they experienced by Black males. From conversations witnessed during my observations, many Black males assume that many female gamers are lesbian and tailor their speech to match this assumed view. Even though the Latina women in the study did identify as sexual minorities, there is no way to know that in the space. Preview the following excerpt to gain additional understanding:

*XpkX RicanMami:* Dey assume dat we lesbians.

*XpkX MammaMia:* Bitch we are.  
(*all laughing*)

*XpkX RicanMami:* But dey don't know dat. Dey assume dat because we don't take no shit from dem. If you a strong black woman den you gotta be lesbian.

*YeahSheBlaze:* The fact dat dey can't control us make dem mad. So they start disrespectin us and we talk shit back. I tell dem dat I can fuck dey bitch or my bitch look better and dat make dem so mad.

*XpkX MammaMia:* You right. Dats why dey get mad. They feel like we takin dey manhood.

This excerpt reflects the continued view of many Black men and their fear of their manhood being usurped by Black women. Going back to traditional Black feminism, Black males were hesitant to incorporate Black women into the liberation movements as they viewed racism as the loss of manhood without considering the sexist experiences of Black women. Chicana feminists experienced a similar conflict as they were asked to vow loyalty to the culture as opposed to being asked to embrace their racialized, gendered realities (Roth, 2004; Nieto Gomez, 1997). Even more disturbing, Conscious Daughters explained how many Black males are inclusive of women but only when they agree to fill a subservient role. As the excerpt in the previous chapter outlined, there is a desire for women to serve as mascots – reflecting an inferior view of women within this space. This is also a perspective seen in other areas of life as well, especially in male dominated spaces. The participants were not willing to be submissive and refused to be continued victims of discrimination which also impacted their decisions to create their own spaces. This excerpt also introduces the view of White women within the space. I was disheartened that no White women agreed to participate within this study to give voice to their own

experiences within Xbox live. But the women within the study did not shy away from discussing their opinion of White women within the space.

From what the participants reveal, White women don't view their experiences in the space as sexist or don't acknowledge it. They accept it as part of gaming in the male universe, very similar to Militant Misses. Many women within the study also realized the problem associated with unifying as a female collective recognizing that White women are not entirely comfortable in the racialized gendered space that also frequently doubles as Black lesbian space – similar to the failure to unify during early feminist movements. Audre Lorde (2001) realized that the only way to build community and raise consciousness is to embrace each other's differences:

As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist (Lorde, 2001, p. 90).

This failure is present within the Xbox live community. The participants couldn't understand why White women would not want join their gaming world as opposed to subjecting themselves to discrimination. But the Black women were not a unified group either and did not recognize this contradiction. From the Black female perspective, White women encourage their own victimization by continuing to engage with their oppressors.

Several women within the Conscious Daughters clan created two ways to explain White women's interactions with males within Xbox live: tokens or

trophies. From their view, trophies were attractive women that gamed with males but were mostly an invisible population. But when they do speak, they become immediate victims of sexual harassment and other acts of sexism. Tokens were viewed as females whose gaming skills were superb but were exploited at the hands of her male counterparts. They were bragging points for males within the space. From what the participant suggested, the women were proud to be viewed as equals to males and assumed that the exploitation was just a part of being ‘one of the guys.’

From the interviews, many White women within the space refused to see males as the dominant oppressor. But White women did not in turn become the oppressor as was seen during the feminist movements (hooks, 2009; Roth, 2004). Black women stated emphatically that White women never discriminated against them because of their race nor did they use racist language towards them. The Black women within the space only experienced racism and/or sexism at the hands of males – Black and White – within the space.

#### BLACK WOMEN RESISTING IN XBOX LIVE

All three clans within the space responded drastically differently to the oppressions experienced within the space. Conscious Daughters chose to avoid males entirely and Militant Misses chose to game with males to prove themselves equal. However, Puerto Reekan Killaz actually employed tactics reminiscent of women in the liberation movements; their resistance strategies were a means to combat the oppressions experienced within the space. Puerto Reekan Killaz as an organized group typify the four tenets of Black feminist standpoint theory. These

women chose to define their own community, they addressed the interlocking nature of oppression, they embraced political activism, and they recognized the importance of culture. These tenets, as outlined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) allowed this group of women to reach meaningful solutions to the inequalities that impede Black women's lives.

The third and fourth themes of Black feminist thought discuss the necessity of actively engaging the community to resist dominant structures present in the lives of women as well as recognizing the "distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination" (Taylor, 1998, p. 235). The coupling of these two themes is reflective of the women within Puerto Reekan Killaz - to understand the power relations that dominate and pervade our daily lives; unfortunately, the other women within this study did not organize as a collective group but responded in their own manner and resisted the dominant structure individually. Reiterating Collins (2006), less powerful people have often waited for those in power to redistribute power to them. In essence, clans such as Militant Misses and Conscious Daughters are still waiting whereas Puerto Reekan Killaz are revolting and lashing out forcefully (by co-opting resources available to them within Xbox live). This modification of resource mobilization theory was a means to resist the oppressive structures impeding their full inclusion into the community. Although they defined their activities as grieving, I found their efforts more collective and organized and not irrational. It is interesting to note, that these tactics were very individualistic and

not reflective of tactics employed by women in other clans. But their efforts will not go unnoticed.

#### LONG TERM STRATEGIES OR SHORT TERM GAINS

Since the women of Puerto Reekan Killaz do disrupt gameflow, they would be defined as a griefer within online communities. However, since their actions originated from the intersecting oppressions they experienced, I term it resistance grieving. These women have used resources available to them to thwart their negative experiences and fight back against the dominant structures within the space.

These tactics employed by Puerto Reekan Killaz although admirable since they are doing something to combat oppressions experienced within the space cause some concern for me. I am concerned that the players that we began grieving had no idea why we were engaging in that type of behavior. They had no idea that we are doing this for a purpose and not just to disrupt game flow. These resistance strategies are lost upon the rest of the community. Their tactics resembled survival strategies as opposed to organized and collective activity as I would hope I would find. On the other hand, these women were the only group I observed who identified solutions to combat and resist discrimination in the space as opposed to merely segregating. Additionally, the White women who were referenced within this study may have also employed survival strategies to just get by in the space. They may not be accepting the inferior status placed upon them by men but rather coping with their reality. Although collective action could eventually liberate women within this space and alleviate the inequalities linked

to their identities, they have identified their own individual strategies to cope with their realities.

## Chapter 8

### REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An analysis of interview data in the preceding chapters highlights the problems associated with identity. Several themes emerged: 1) Linguistic profiling associated with ascribed identities, 2) intersecting oppressions associated with identities, 3) a process leading to acts of hate, 4) segregation of marginalized bodies, and 5) resistance strategies employed to combat acts of hate.

The data from the interviews do not document a singular sense of collective identity, unifying as a body of marginalized gamers, but rather they show a variety of ways to cope with inequalities within the space. Even though I am linking their stories collectively, my purpose is to show that the Xbox live gaming community deploys hegemonic whiteness and masculinity to the detriment of minorities within the space.

### RECURRING THEMES

#### 1) Linguistic Profiling

Linguistic profiling has been cited as the point of origin of inequalities within the space. Voice based communities do not have the luxury of masking the true self so our real world selves emerge. This contradicts many who view virtual spaces as utopic – a place where we can be liberated from the body. However, our voices cannot be easily changed and leads to the racism, sexism, nativism, etc experienced. Every single participant discussed that the problem within this space is the voice and all inequalities are based on the assumption of how someone sounds.

## 2) Intersecting oppressions associated with identities

The result of the linguistic profile leads to oppressions based off ascribed identities. *Silentassassin321*, *ChrisIsNice*, and the other males within the study all introduced the problem associated with the sound of Blackness in the space. A motivated gamer may then react in a racist manner towards this Black sounding gamer. What the Conscious Daughters, Puerto Reekan Killaz, and Militant Misses explain, these oppressions are amplified when additional identifiers are factored in. For instance, gender adds a dimension of sexism, and being a sexual minority increases one's risk for heterosexism. Additionally, being a member of a linguistic minority (or sounding like it) adds a dimension of nativism as many American's will lash out on those who (virtually) appear to be un-American. The women of Puerto Reekan Killaz seemed to experience a myriad of oppressions because of the number of marginalized identities they embodied. Their hope was that other oppressed bodies would acknowledge their disadvantage within the space.

## 3) The Process Leading to Acts of Hate

The males within the study were adamant about the emergence of acts of hate within the space, and they all suggested they could forecast when one would occur. The process leading to hate followed this sequence of events: questioning, provoking, instigation, racism. The male gamers within this study said they could identify when acts of hate would occur as well as a profile of the individual who would engage in these acts. They profiled White males that resembled Geek Squad employees. They didn't feel that the individual who engaged in racism

was a 'red neck' or a kid being childish. They refused to accept the mediated image of the racist and created their own profile. With technologies continuing to emerge, gamers may one day be able to identify one another in real life. Because of this potential, Microsoft must take an affirmative stance in alleviating inequalities within the space.

#### 4) Segregation of Marginalized Bodies

A typical response that many women and people of color have employed has been to segregate from the larger gaming community and interact with one another in party chats. Xbox live has a chat option that allows for up to eight gamers to privately chat amongst one another. This option has been partially adopted by males as they may still engage with the larger gaming community. But all of the women within this study as well as other women I have encountered in Xbox live only game within segregated spaces.

This segregation occurred because of the continued acts of racism and sexism cited by minority gamers. This forced segregation resembles a type of redlining or ghettoization of virtual spaces – a virtual manifestation of a real world inequality. Gamers who pay their membership should be able to take full advantage of the space and many women and people of color are unable to because of the hegemonic elite. Microsoft must take a stance to remedy this situation.

#### 5) Resistance Strategies Employed to Combat Acts of Hate

To resist oppressions, many women within Xbox live employ strategies to combat the inequalities experienced within the space. However, as was identified

these resistance strategies were not collective and organized among the larger female gaming community as I hoped to find. Rather, these strategies were situated in the individual although Puerto Reekan Killaz exemplified the most organization within Xbox live. These women would employ tactics known as griefing to combat oppressive structures. These women would player-kill (friendly fire kill), lag switch to disrupt the gaming connection, stretch the limits of the gaming architecture and kill players outside the map. However, their tactics were merely employed for personal satisfaction and were not used to resist the larger structures or make change within the space. Aside from the participants telling me this, their actions also revealed this truth. When griefing would occur, the male gamers had no idea why they were being harassed in this manner. The women of Puerto Reekan Killaz would not express their purpose and had no intention on doing so. This was unfortunate because their tactics could have been employed by the larger marginalized community to generate a critical mass of disgruntled gamers.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

My personal experiences with racism and sexism within Xbox live led to this dissertation project. This study introduces inequalities within Xbox live as well as provides a systematic study of inequalities within virtual communities. Because many game scholars have taken a utopic or neutral approach to virtual communities, there has not yet been a study to document the negative experiences of marginalized bodies within virtual communities. Black feminist standpoint theory as well as intersectional theory were utilized to give voice and meaning to

the complex issues of race, racism, gender, sexism, etc that exists in virtual communities. Linguistic profiling was also used as a means to understand the origins of the inequalities within the space. Unfortunately, I hoped to find a more organized effort within Xbox live and what I found were individual resistance strategies employed.

Since this research is among the first, there are multiple trajectories that this research can take to further examine Xbox live and its gamers. So I propose the following recommendations for further study:

- a) A longitudinal study examining long term responses of marginalized gamers within Xbox live should occur

What I identified within Xbox live is that women of color employ certain methods to cope and deal with the inequalities they experience. However, these women and their tactics must be assessed overtime to examine their potential to liberate marginalized communities. Their communities must also be examined to see what changes occur over time. From my own personal experiences, as the women around me have aged, we have become less interested in what occurs within the space. We have normalized the events so much that many of us feel nothing will be done. I hope that resistance strategies will continue to evolve to actually serve a collective purpose.

- b) A critical examination of game developers, designers, and others in the industry

From what I identified within this study, game developers share no responsibility in what their video games deploy. Stakeholders within gaming communities have

adopted a similar view regarding the inequalities within their virtual worlds. But they need to recognize the role that they are playing in deploying stereotypical imagery or ignoring the experiences of marginalized bodies.

c) Quantitatively assess the extent of inequality within the space

The experiences I examined within Xbox live need to be quantified to identify if these experiences are isolated, coincidental, or actually representative of a larger problem within Xbox live. Because Xbox wanted to quantitatively assess the 'racism' problem, this could provide Microsoft with the data needed to take this problem serious.

d) Interview gamers who engage in racist, sexist, and otherwise offensive behavior

Motivated gamers who perpetuate the inequalities need to be analyzed to understand why they engage in this type of behavior. It was problematic to see that the offending gamers diminished the seriousness of their actions and this needs to be examined.

## REFLECTIONS AND SUMMARY

The findings from my research indicate that there is a need to critically assess the experiences of non-traditional gamers in online communities. First, stakeholders (Microsoft, game developers, marketing industry) needs to recognize the diversity of its console gaming population. They must also recognize that members of the default gaming population (white males) are deploying hegemonic whiteness and masculinity and are also deploying individual acts of hate within the space. Before discussions on how to counteract racism and sexism

can ensue, these things must be acknowledged especially given the popularity of Xbox live as well as other gaming communities.

Scholarship must also move beyond the utopic view of online communities recognizing anonymity can no longer be fully achieved. Advanced technology within Xbox live allows for gamers to hear one another (voice chat) and see one another as well (video chat). Identities can also be linked to the avatar although many gamers can opt for the avatar to bear no resemblance to the true self.

As has been disseminated in the literature, there is this mythical idea that the internet can help solve all of society's problems. The "No one knows you're a dog" line has been overplayed and disputed on several occasions. But as Everett identifies with her research on Black women organizing in virtual space, the potential for positive change is there (Everett, 2009). But within this online gaming space, who is responsible for ensuring equality? Audre Lorde discusses the problem with the view that women are responsible for extending their own equality.

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear it is the task of women of Color to educate white women-in the face of tremendous resistance-as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. In light of these facts, the women decided to forge their own movement, the Black Feminist Movement (Lorde, 2003, p. 27).

Lorde has accurately assessed what occurred with many Black women within the Xbox live gaming space. Noting Lorde, many gamers suggested that it was not their responsibility to have the normative gamer notice her within the gaming spaces. Nor does she feel it is her responsibility to educate White women on sexism. Because they are the continual victims of intersecting oppressions within the Xbox live gaming space, many refuse to be continued victims.

Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's work, the women in this study have understood their oppressed status and have made sense of their experiences. This actually negates the prevailing view held of oppressed groups – that they identify with the powerful and have no valid interpretation of their own oppression (Collins, 1989, p. 746). This view also holds that the oppressed are less human than their rulers and are incapable of articulating their own standpoint (Collins, 1989, p. 747). As Collins confirms, Black women have refused to become victims and have resisted becoming passive bystanders. This resiliency continues throughout the lives of Black women and they have translated this to the online gaming space of Xbox live.

## REFERENCES

- (2009). *Playstation 3 System Features*. Retrieved November 8, 2009, from Playstation Network: <http://www.us.playstation.com/PSN>
- (2009, September 24). *Description of Xbox 360 gamer profiles*. Retrieved November 22, 2009, from Xbox: <http://support.xbox.com/support/en/us/nxe/kb.aspx?ID=905882&lcid=1033&category=xboxlive>
- Adichie, C. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. (T. I. Spreading, Producer) Retrieved from [www.ted.com/talks/chimamda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html)
- Alcoff, L., & Potter, E. (1993). Introduction: When Feminisms Intersect Epistemology. In L. Alcoff, & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.
- Allen, B. J. (2002). Goals for emancipatory communication research on black women. In M. Houston & O. I. Davis (Eds.), *Centering ourselves: African American feminist and womanist studies of discourse* (pp. 21–34). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Amos, V. & Parmar, P. (2005). Challenging Imperial Feminism. *Feminist Review* (80), 44-63.
- Andrews, J., & Baker, N. (2006). Xbox 370 System Architecture. *IEEE Computer Society* , 25-37.
- Andrews, M., Sclater, S., Squire, C., Treacher, A. (eds.) (2000). *Lines of Narrative: Psychosocial Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Arrighi, G., & Silver, B.J. (1999). *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asia Playstation.com*. (2010, June 15). Retrieved December 8, 2010, from Registered accounts on PlayStation Network exceed 50 million worldwide: <http://asia.playstation.com/sg/en/news/pressDetail/159150>
- Bakalar, J. (2010, August 30). *Xbox Live Gold subscribers face price increase*. Retrieved January 28, 2011, from CNET News: [http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938\\_105-20015064-1.html](http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-20015064-1.html)

- Barrett, P. (2006). White Thumbs, Black Bodies: Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Fantasies in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* , 28 (1), 95-119.
- Bartle, R. (1996). Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs. *The Journal of Virtual Environments* , 1-26.
- Baugh, J. (2003). Linguistic Profiling. In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, & A. S. Ball, *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas* (pp. 155-168). New York: Routledge
- Beasley, B., & Standley, T. C. (2002). Shirts vs. skins: Clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5, 279–293.
- Beller, P. (2009, July 6). *Female Gamers On The Rise*. Retrieved March 11, 2011, from Forbes.com: <http://www.forbes.com/2009/07/06/video-games-girls-markets-equities-technology.html>
- Bhopal, K. (1995). Women and feminism as subjects of black study: the difficulties and dilemmas of carrying out re-search. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 4 (2), 153-168.
- Boje, D.M., Luhman, J.T., & Baack, D.E. (1999). Hegemonic stories and encounters between storytelling organizations. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 8(4), 340-360.
- Bonilla-Silva, E., & Zuberi, T. (2008). Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods. In E. Bonilla-Silva, & T. Zuberi (Eds.), *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (pp. 3-27). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brand, J. E., & Knight, S. J. (2003). The diverse worlds project: narrative, style, characters and physical world in popular computer and video games. *International Rating Conference: "Classification in a Convergent World"*. Darling Harbour: Bond University.
- Brenick, A., Henning, A., Killen, M., O'Connor, A., & Collins, M. (2007). Social Evaluations of Stereotypic Images in Video Games: Unfair, Legitimate, or "Just Entertainment. *Youth Society* , 38 (4), 395-419.
- Brookey, R. A. (2009). Paradise Crashed: Rethinking MMORPG's and Other Virtual Worlds. An Introduction. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2 (26), 101-103.

- Bucholz, M. (1999). You da man: Narrating the racial other in the production of white masculinity. *Journal fo Sociolinguistics* , 3 (4), 443-460.
- Burgess, M., Stermer, S., & Burgess, S. (2007). Sex, Lies, and Video Games: The Portrayal of Male and Female Characters on Video Game Covers. *Sex Roles* , 57, 419-433.
- Chan, D. (2005) Playing with race: The ethics of racialized representations in e-games. *International Review of Information Ethics*, 4(12), 24-30.
- Chan, E., 2002. A lived experience of dualism between the natural and human science paradigms in nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 40, 739–746.
- Chase, S.E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed) (pp. 651-680). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chubb, P. (2010, November 4). *Product Reviews News*. Retrieved December 6, 2010, from Kinect Xbox 360 Problems With Skin Color: <http://www.product-reviews.net/2010/11/04/kinect-xbox-360-problems-with-skin-color/>
- Coakley, J. (1994). *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Cole, J., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (2003). *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*. New York: Ballentine Books.
- Collins, P. H. (2006). *From Black power to hip hop: racism, nationalism, and feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought. In J. James, & T. D. Sharpley-Whiting (Eds.), *The Black Feminist Reader* (pp. 183-207). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Collins, P. H. (1998). It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation. *Hypatia* , 13 (3), 62-82.
- Collins, P. H. (1989). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought. *Signs* , 14 (4), 745-773.
- Combahee River Collective (2009). A Black Feminist Statement. In S. M. James, F. S. Foster, & B. Guy-Sheftall (Eds.), *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (pp. 3-11). New York: The Feminist Press.

- Connell, R. (2001). The Social Organization of Masculinity. In S. Whitehead, & F. Barrett (Eds.), *The Masculinities Reader* (pp. 30-48). Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* , 43 (6), 1241-1299.
- Crichton, S., & Kinash, S. (2003). Virtual ethnography: Interactive interviewing online as method, *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 29 (2). Retrieved 4 April 2010 from [http://www.cjlt.ca/content/vol29.2/cjlt29-2\\_art-5.html](http://www.cjlt.ca/content/vol29.2/cjlt29-2_art-5.html).
- Davis, Angela. (1983). *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage.
- Denzin, N. (2006). *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Dill, K., Brown, B., & Collins, M. (2008). Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* , 1402-1408.
- Dill, K., & Thill, K. (2007). Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perception Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. *Sex Roles* , 57, 851-864.
- Dominguez, D., Beaulieu, A., Estalella, A., Gomez, E., Schnettler, B., Read., R. (2007). Virtual Ethnography. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Retrieved 10 April 2010 <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/274>.
- Downs, E. & Smith, S.L. (2009). Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis. *Sex Roles*, 62, 721-733.
- Ducheneaut, N., Yee, N., Nickell, E., & Moore, R. J. (2007). The Life and Death of Online Gaming Communities: A Look at Guilds in World of Warcraft. *CHI 2007* (pp. 839-848). San Jose, CA: ACM.
- Ducheneaut, N., Nicholas, Y., Nickell, E., & Moore, R. (2006). "Alone Together?" Exploring the Social Dynamics of Massively Multiplayer Online Game. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in computing systems* (pp. 407-416). Montreal: ACM.

- England, K. (1993). Suburban pink collar ghettos: The spatial entrapment of women? *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83, 225-242.
- Erevelles, N. (2000). Educating unruly bodies: critical pedagogy, disability studies, and the politics of schooling. *Educational Theory*, 30(2), 23-48.
- Everett, A. (2009). *Digital Diaspora*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Ewick, P., & Silbey, S. (1995). Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative. *Law & Society Review*, 29 (2), 197-226.
- Fernandez, M. (2003). Cyberfeminism, Racism, Embodiment. *Domain Errors*, 29-44.
- Ferrell, J., & Websdale, N. (1996). Materials for Making Trouble. In J. Ferrell, & N. Websdale, *Making Trouble: Cultural Constructions of Crime, Deviance, and Control* (pp. 3-21). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Fonow, M. & Cook J. (1991). *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as lived research*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Foo, C. Y., & Koivisto, E. M. (2004). Defining grief play in MMORPG's: player and developer perceptions. *The Australasian Computing Education Conference*, 74, pp. 245-250. Singapore.
- Fordham, S. (1993). "Those Loud Black Girls": (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender "Passing" in the Academy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24 (1), 3-32.
- Frasier, A. (2009, January 20). *Black People Don't Play Video Games*. Retrieved November 22, 2009, from The Koalition:  
<http://www.thecoalition.com/black-people-dont-play-video-games/>
- Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007). The Hegemony of Play. *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference* (pp. 1-10). Digital Games Research Association.
- Gajjala, R. (2004). *Cyber selves: Feminist ethnographies of South Asian women*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Geddes, R. (2008, October 9). *IGN: TGS 2008: Avatars Required*. Retrieved November 22, 2009, from IGN:  
<http://xboxlive.ign.com/articles/918/918113p1.html>

- Hall, R. L., Garrett-Akinsanya, B., & Hucles, M. (2007). Voices of Black Feminist Leaders: Making Spaces for Ourselves. In J. L. Chin, & B. E. Lott, *Women and leadership: transforming visions and diverse voices* (pp. 281-296). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: Problems and prospects, *Ethnography and Education*, 1 (1), 3-14.
- Haraway, D. J. (1999). 'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word. In R. Parker, & P. Aggleton, *Culture, society and sexuality: a reader* (pp. 76-96). London: UCL Press.
- Harding, S. (1995). Just add women and stir? In *Missing Links: Gender Equity in Science and Technology for Development* (pp. 295-307). Ottawa, ON, Canada: International Development Research Centre.
- Harding, S. (1993). Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"? In L. Alcoff, & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies* (pp. 49-82). New York: Routledge.
- Harnois, C. (2010). Race, Gender, and the Black Women's Standpoint. *Sociological Forum*, 25 (1), 68-85.
- Higgin, T. (2009). Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. *Games & Culture*, 4 (3), 3-26.
- Hine, C. (2008). Virtual ethnography: Modes, Varieties, Affordances. In N. Fielding, R.M. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods* (pp. 257-270). London: Sage Publications.
- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hoffman, D. L., Novak, T. P., & Schlosser, A. E. (2000). The evolution of the digital divide: How gaps in Internet access may impact electronic commerce. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* [Online] 5(3). Available: <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol5/issue3/hoffman.html>
- Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F. (2000). *The Self that We Live by: Narrative Identity in the Postmodern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- hooks, b. (2009). Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory. In S. M. James, F. S. Foster, & B. Guy-Sheftall (Eds.), *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (pp. 31-43). New York: The Feminist Press.

- hooks, b. (1991). Theory as Liberatory Practice. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* , 4 (1), 1-12.
- Humm, M. (1990). *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Humphreys, M., & Brown, A. D. (2002). Narratives of organizational identity and identification: A case study of hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies*, 23, pp. 421– 447.
- Hymowitz, C., & Weissman, M. (1978). *A history of women in America*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Jansz, J., & Martis, R. G. (2007). The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games. *Sex Roles* , 56 (3), 141-148.
- Jayarathne, T. & Stewart, A. (1991). Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies. In M. Fonow, & J. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond Methodology* (pp. 85-106). Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.
- Jones, S. (1995). Cybersociety: Computer-mediated communication and community. *Understanding Community in the Information Age* (pp. 10-35). Thousand, Oaks: CA.
- Jordan, N. (1996). Feminist Methodology and Research Among Rural African Women in the Transkei. In T. M. Cruz, & A. S. Silva (Ed.), *Proceedings of the ISA Conference for Southern Africa*, (pp. 145-153). Durban, South Africa.
- Joseph, R. L. (2009). "Tyra Banks Is Fat": Reading (Post-) Racism and (Post-) Feminism in the New Millennium. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* , 3 (26), 237-254.
- Juul, J. (2002). *Time to play – an examination of game temporality*. Retrieved from <http://www.jesperjuul.dk/text/timetoplay/>
- Katsiaficas, G.N. (1989). The Eros Effect. Paper prepared for presentation at the 1989 American Sociological Association National Meetings in San Francisco.
- Kendall, L. (1999). Recontextualizing ‘cyberspace’: Methodological considerations for on-line researcher. In S. Jones (ed.), *Doing Internet research: Critical issues and methods for examining the net* (pp. 57-74). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Kennedy, H. (2002). Lara Croft: Feminist icon or cyberbimbo? On the limits of textual analysis. *Game studies*, 2 (2). Available online at <http://www.gamestudies.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/0202/kennedy/>
- Keyboard Klansman*. (2008, January). Retrieved November 2009, from Dr. Phil: <http://www.drphil.com/slideshows/slideshow/4201/?id=4201&isTip=&sli de=1&null=null>
- Ki-moon, B. (2009, June 16). *Remarks at seminar on cyber hate: Danger in Cyber Space*. Retrieved November 10, 2009, from UN News Centre: [http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/search\\_full.asp?statID=517#](http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/search_full.asp?statID=517#)
- Kolko, B. (2000) 'Erasing @race: Going White in the (Inter)Face', in B. Kolko, L. Nakamura, and G. B. Rodman *Race in Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.
- Landis, D. (2008, January 9). *Ripten Real Independent Press to Every Nerd*. Retrieved November 22, 2009, from Dr. Phil Combats Racists on Xbox Live (Not Physically - That Would be Too Awesome): <http://www.ripten.com/2008/01/09/dr-phil-combats-racists-on-xbox-live-not-physically-that-would-be-too-awesome/>
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Leonard, D. (2003). "Live in Your World, Play in Ours": Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other. *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education*, 3 (4), 1-9.
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lin, H., & Sun, C.-T. (2005). The 'White-eyed' Player Culture: Grief Play and Construction of Deviance in MMORPGs. *DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views - World in Play* (pp. 1-12). Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA.
- Linde, C. (1986). Private Stories in Public Discourse: Narrative Analysis in the Social Sciences. *Poetics* 15:183–202.
- Lorde, A. (1981/2009). The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism. In S. M. James, F. S. Foster, & B. Guy-Sheftall (Eds.), *Still Brave: The*

- Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (pp. 23-29). New York: The Feminist Press.
- Lorde, A., & Clarke, C. (2007). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.
- Lorde, A. (2003). The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. In R. Lewis, & S. Mills (Eds.), *Feminist postcolonial theory: a reader*. Routledge.
- Lorde, A. (2001). The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. In K.-K. Bhavnani (Ed.), *Feminism & Race* (pp. 89-92). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Markham, A.N. (2004). Internet communication as a tool for qualitative research. In D. Silverman (Ed), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Methods, and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Markham, A. (1998). *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space*. London: Sage Publications.
- Marriott, M. (2004, August 23). *Popular video games play on racial stereotypes, critics say*. Retrieved December 5, 2010, from The San Diego Union-Tribune: [http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040823/news\\_mz1b23video.html](http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040823/news_mz1b23video.html)
- Marx, Gary T., and Douglas McAdam. (1994). *Collective Behavior and Social Movements*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McLaughlin, Rus (2008, February 29). "IGN Presents: The History of Tomb Raider". IGN.
- McQuivey, J. (2001). The digital locker room: The young, white male as center of the video gaming universe. In E. Toth, & L. Aldoory, *The gender challenge to media: diverse voices from the field* (pp. 183-214). Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Miller, D. & Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford, UK: Berg.

- Miller, M. K., & Summers, A. (2007). Gender differences in video game characters' roles, appearances, and attire as portrayed in video game magazines. *Sex Roles*, 57, 733–742.
- Miller, R. (2009, February 26). Retrieved November 8, 2009, from Engadget: <http://www.engadget.com/2009/02/26/playstation-network-snags-20m-users-xbox-live-still-way-more-pr/>
- Mishler E.G. (1995) Models of narrative analysis: a typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5, pp. 87-123.
- Mohanram, R. 1999. *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Myers, D. (2007). Self and selfishness in online social play. *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conferences* (pp. 226-234). Authors & Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA).
- Myers, M. (2010, March 31). *Gears of War 3: Adding a Female Character?* Retrieved November 10, 2010, from The Boston Phoenix: <http://thebostonphoenix.com/blogs/laserorgy/archive/2010/03/31/gears-of-war-3-adding-a-female-character.aspx>
- Nakamura, L. (2009). Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26 (2), 128-144.
- Nakamura L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Internet*. London: Routledge.
- Newman, D. (2008). *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Nieto Gomez, A. (1997). Sexism in the Movimiento. In A. Garcia (Ed.), *Chicana feminist thought: the basic historical writings*. New York: Routledge.
- Noddings, N. (2001). The Care Tradition: Beyond "Add Women and Stir". *Theory into Practice*, 40 (1), 29-34.
- Oakley, A. (1999). People's ways of knowing: gender and methodology. In S. Hood, B. Mayall, & S. Oliver (Eds.), *Critical Issues in social research: power and prejudice* (pp. 134-170). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Poole, S. (2000). *Trigger happy: videogames and the entertainment revolution*. New York: Arcade Publishing.

- Prus, R. (1996). *Symbolic interactionism and ethnographic research: Intersubjectivity and the study of human lived experience*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Quan, H.L.T. (2005). Geniuses of resistance: feminist consciousness and the Black radical tradition. *Race & Class*, 47 (2), 39-53.
- Razack, S. (2002). Gendered racial violence and spatialized justice: The murder of Pamela George. *Race Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*. Ed. Sherene Razack. Toronto: Between the Lines, pp. 121-156.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Roth, B. (2004). *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2001). *Surviving your dissertation* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rybas, N., & Gajjala, R. (2007). Developing Cyberethnographic Research Methods for Understanding Digitally Mediated Identities. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 8(3) from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/282/619>.
- Schuetz, A. (1944). The stranger: an essay in social psychology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49 (6), 499-507.
- Scott, J. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Seay, A. F., Jerome, W. J., Lee, K. S., & Kraut, R. E. (2004). Project Massive: A Study of Online Gaming Communities. *Proceedings of CHI 2004, ACM*, (pp. 1421-1424). New York.
- Smelser, N. (1962). *Theory of Collective Behavior*. New York: Free Press
- Smith, J. H. (2004). Playing dirty - understanding conflicts in multiplayer games. *The Association of Internet Researchers* (pp. 1-15). Sussex: The University of Sussex.

- Stacey, J. (1999). Ethnography Confronts the Global Village: A New Home for a New Century?, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28 (6), 687-697.
- Stacey, J. (1988). Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography? *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11 (1), 21-27.
- Stewart, A. (1998). *The Ethnographer's Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stewart, A. J., & McDermott, C. (2004). Gender in psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 519-544.
- Storey, J. (1996). *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Suler, J. (2004). The Online Disinhibition Effect. *Cyber Psychology and Behavior*, 7 (3), 321-326.
- Suler, J., & Phillips, W. (1998). The Bad Boys of Cyberspace: Deviant Behavior in Multimedia Chat Communities. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1, 275-294.
- Taylor, U. (1998). The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29 (2), 234-253.
- Terry, J., & Urla, J. (1995). *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Thompsen, P. (2003). What's Fueling the Flames in Cyberspace? A Social Influence Model. In L. Strate, R. L. Jacobson, & S. Gibson (Eds.), *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment* (Second ed., pp. 329-347). Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Thomsen, S.R., Straubhaar, J.D., & Bolyard, D.M. (1998). Ethnomethodology and the study of online communities: exploring the cyber streets, *Information Research*, 4 (1). Retrieved 10 April 2010, from <http://informationr.net/ir/4-1/paper50.html>.
- Thompson, S.K. (1997). Adaptive sampling in behavioral surveys. In *The Validity of Self Reported Drug Use: Improving the Accuracy of Survey Estimates*, (Eds., L. Harrison and A. Hughes). NIDA Research Monograph 167, Rockville, MD: National Institute of Drug Abuse, 296-319.

- Thorsen, T. (2009, January 6). Retrieved November 2009, from Gamespot:  
<http://www.gamespot.com/news/6202733.html>
- Totilo, S. (2005, November 21). *Racism Among the Many Foes Online Gamers Must Fight*. Retrieved October 30, 2009, from MTV:  
<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1514305/20051121/index.jhtml>
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wadley, G., Gibbs, M., Hew, K., & Graham, C. (2003). Computer Supported Cooperative Play, "Third Places" and Online Videogames. In S. Viller, & P. Wyeth (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Australian Conference on Computer Human Interaction* (pp. 238-241). Brisbane: University of Queensland.
- Ward, K.J. (1999). The cyber-ethnographic (re)construction of two feminist online communities, *Sociological Research Online*, 4 (1). Retrieved 10 April 2010, from [www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/1/ward.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/1/ward.html)
- Ware, N. (2010). "You must defeat shen long to stand a chance: Street Fighter, race, play, and player. (Master's Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2010). Retrieved from <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/Ware%20Nicholas%20R.pdf?bgsu1277062605>
- Warner, D., & Raiter, M. (2005). Social Context in Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs): Ethical Questions in Shared Space. *International Review of Information Ethics*, 46-52.
- Webb, S. (2001). Avatar Culture: Narrative, power, and identity in virtual world environments. *Information, Communication, & Society*, 4 (4), 560-594.
- Weber, Lynn. (2009). *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: An Intersectional Framework*, 2nd edition. New York, NY: Oxford.
- Williams, M. (2007). Avatar watching: participant observation in graphical online environments. *Qualitative Research*, 7 (5), 5-24.
- Whitten, M. (2010, February 5). *An Open Letter from Xbox Live General Manager Marc Whitten*. Retrieved December 5, 2010, from Microsoft:  
<http://www.xbox.com/en-US/press/2010/0205-whittenletter.htm>
- Yee, N. (2004). *Avatar and Identity*. Retrieved December 5, 2010, from The Daedalus Gateway: The Psychology of MMORPGs:  
[http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/gateway\\_identity.html](http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/gateway_identity.html)

Zinn, M.B. (1979). Field research in minority communities: Ethical, methodological, and political observations of an insider, *Social Problems*, 27 (2), 209-219.

APPENDIX A

XBOX LIVE CHAT AND OBSERVATION LOG

<b>Xbox Live In-Game Chat Log</b>					
<b>Date</b>					
<b>Time/Duration</b>					
<b>Game Title</b>					
<b>Game Mode</b>					
<b>Chat Option</b>					
<b>Team Demographics</b>					
<b>Opposing Team Demographics</b>					
<b>Chat Topics</b>					
<b>Offensive General Chatter</b>					
Instigator/Suppressor					
<b>Offensive Racial Chatter</b>					
Instigator/Suppressor					
<b>Offensive Gender Chatter</b>					
Instigator/Suppressor					
<b>Offensive Sexuality Chatter</b>					
Instigator/Suppressor					
<b>Participants Debriefing</b>					
<b>My Reflections</b>					

APPENDIX B  
INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Xbox Live Gamer:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Lisa Anderson in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to gauge how women understand their intersecting oppressions in the Xbox live community.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve you answering a series of questions and can range anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. The duration depends on your availability as the questions can be divided. The interview can span a day or several days depending on your availability. Additionally, they will occur within Xbox live using the private chat option. You will answer questions related to your gaming preferences, types of games you play, interactions with friends in Xbox, and interactions with other gamers in Xbox with a focus on the interactions that are discriminatory in nature. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Additionally, you must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

Although there are no direct benefits of your participation, the purpose in this research is to identify meaningful solutions to the issue of discrimination within online gaming. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your confidentiality in the study will be maintained as the interviewer will remove your gamertag replacing it with an alternate, fictional, gamertag. Your gamertag will only be assigned to your responses through the duration of the transcription while the interviewer places your responses in text format. At this point, your fictional gamertag will be assigned to the text. Your responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Transcription will occur within one month of your interview. The audio of the interview will be kept in the office of Kishonna Gray, the interviewer, on Arizona State's University Tempe campus. Upon transcription, the audio will be destroyed. Advanced audio recorders do not use tape so the audio will be digital and will be destroyed by deleting the audio file.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team by mail at Arizona State University, School of Social Transformation, Tempe AZ, 85287, by email at [klgray@asu.edu](mailto:klgray@asu.edu) or [lmanderson@asu.edu](mailto:lmanderson@asu.edu), or via phone at 480-965-7085. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## **General Information**

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Ethnicity
5. Sexual Orientation

## **Topic 1: General Gamer Information**

1. How much time do you spend playing per day/week
2. What is your favorite genre of game?
3. Currently, what game do you play most? Top three?
4. What attracts you to particular games?
5. How long you've been an Xbox Live member
6. Which gamer zone are you in? Why did you select this zone?
7. Define the term gamer for me?
  - a. Do you consider yourself a gamer?
  - b. How did you become a gamer?
8. I hear a lot about hardcore gamers – are there in fact different levels of gamers?
  - a. Define or explain the different levels of gamers?
  - b. What sets them apart from other gamers?
9. What kinds of gamers do you encounter in Xbox live?
10. Do you typically play with someone you know?
  - a. How did you meet these people?
11. What kinds of things do you talk about?
12. Have you ever met these people in real life?
  - a. Communicated other than the gaming space – email, phone, facebook, etc

13. How do you select your friends in Xbox live?
14. Do you typically play with people on your friend list only or do you play with other random gamers?

**Topic 2: Avatar and Gamer tag**

15. Describe your avatar for me.
  - a. Why did you create the avatar in this manner?
16. How did you select your gamertag?
  - a. If it's racialized/gendered as why?
  - b. Ask if avatar or gamertag pose any kind of problems within the space.

**Topic 3: Origins of racist and sexist speech in Xbox Live**

17. I hear a lot about trash talking in the game. Tell me more about this (will probably deviate from guide here as what they say will spark other questions – but I will return to the guide to move into racism/sexism).
  - a. Do you trash talk? With whom? (friends, random gamers)
18. Explain to me when trash talking becomes serious.
  - a. Is it from trash talking that leads to verbal abuse?
  - b. What kind of verbal abuse have you heard/experienced?
19. How do conversations about race/gender emerge? How does racism/sexism emerge?
20. Have you personally experienced any type of discrimination or acts of hate?
  - a. Describe the first experience? Worst? Last?
21. What happens to provoke these conversations?
  - a. What is said?
    - i. How does this make you feel?
  - b. How are they diffused/ended/concluded?
  - c. How often does this occur while your gaming?
    - i. Every day, every week, randomly, etc.
22. What role, if any, does your gamertag or avatar play in perpetuating/instigating this racism/sexism?

23. Does this kind of racism/sexism keep you from playing with certain kinds of people?
- Who do you avoid?
  - Who do you seek out?
  - How do you avoid these kinds of gamers?
24. Why do you feel certain gamers engage in this kind of racist/sexist activity?
- In your opinion, do you think that they feel that their actions are racist/sexist?
  - Do you think they would engage in this behavior in real life? Why or why not?
25. Have you experienced this kind of racism/sexism in the real world?
- If yes, explain.
  - If no, why do you think this is.
  - Why does this happen online?
  - What is it about being online that encourages someone to engage in these actions?

**Topic 4: Taking Action against Racism/Sexism in Xbox Live**

26. Can anything be done about the discrimination that occurs in Xbox live?
- Can it be reported? How?
  - Have you reported it?
  - What results from these reports?
27. Have you ever taken matters into your own hands?
- What have you done?
  - Why haven't you?
  - What was the result?
28. Are you in a clan?
- Did you join a clan/segregated gaming community because of the verbal abuse?
  - Is this a useful solution to this problem?
29. What kinds of things has Xbox done to ensure this doesn't happen?
- Are there any disclaimers?
  - Is there feedback from the reports that you file?
  - (If nothing happens) How does it make you feel about Xbox?

- i. You pay monthly/yearly membership correct? But you have to experience this – is that fair?
- d. Has the party system helped ease some of the discrimination or made it worse (segregation)?

**Topic 5: Concluding the Interview**

- 30. Do you have anything further to add?
  - a. Anything you wanted to highlight?
  - b. Anything I missed?
  - c. Questions for future interviews I conduct?
  - d. Can I contact you again to follow up if necessary?

APPENDIX D  
FULL DATA EXCERPTS

*silentassassin321*: yall starting the room up yet?

*xxRobotechxx*: Nah, we waitin fa sa'moe peeps to come in...you might as well stay.

*silentassassin321*: aight...I'll send some invites.

*Streetdreamer*: ay...chris? Yall switch to locust...let blade come ova here

*ChrisIsNice*: My bad dude. We'll switch over.

*Silentassassin321*: dem otha dudes got mics?

*xxRobotechxx*: dey was talkin earlier

(several seconds pass with no other gamers entering)

*xxRobotechxx*: fuck it. I'll start this shit. Somebody'll come in. ready up.

*silentassassin321*: aight. Let me switch to Marcus since you got Cole.

(clock ticks signaling the game is beginning)

*silentassassin321*: blade let me fuk wit snipe for a lil bit...watch high side..i'll watch low side

*vxvBladeRunnervxv*: Alright. Let's see what you got with that man (chuckles)  
(Speaking in Standard American English)

(*NewbSlayer* enters the room)

*xxRobotechxx*: good...we getting mo' people.

(*TubeTastic101* enters the room)

*vxvBladeRunnervxv*: Tech watch grenades. They flanking high side.

*xxRobotechxx*: 4.3! 4.3! 4.3! I'm out. I'm out. We got torque? Who got torque? I hear dat shit somewhere.

*silentassassin321*: Fuck I'm down...pick me up, pick me up, pick me...got dammit.

(*PunishMeNow* player-kills *silentassassin321*)

*(silentassassin321 enters lobby where players who are killed wait until the next round. Players who entered the room are also waiting in this lobby. These players continue watching the game from their teammates point of view)*

*NewbSlayer: They got your ass with that torque. Right in the face. That's the same thing I'm going to do to you. You fucking Newb (Speaking in Standard American English)*

*silentassassin321: Whateva man. Shut the fuck up.*

*NewbSlayer: Wait. Are you black?*

*silentassassin321: Why? Are you white?*

*(xxRobotechxx dies and enters the room)*

*xxRobotechxx: Man dats some bullshit. Fifty fucking shots. Fake bullets. I gotta have fake bullets.*

*NewbSlayer: Is that another fucking nigger? I'm gonna kill your black nigger asses.*

*xxRobotechxx: What the fuck man? Here we go wit dis shit. Get yo' white ass out dis room. Let me boot his ass.*

*silentassassin321: Get yo' short dick out the room. Fucking honky.*

*NewbSlayer: Your mom sucks nigger dick. Nigger Nigger Nigger*

*(NewbSlayer leaves the room)*

*(TubeTastic101 leaves the room)*

*silentassassin321: Got dayum I get tired'a dat shit. Fucking white short dick honkey.*

*xxRobotechxx: I see they bringing dat shit to Gears. Wish dey would keep dat fuck shit in Call fa' Duty.*

*(Stretdreamer dies and enters the room)*

*Stretdreamer: Dat muthafuckah snipin his ass off.*

*(Cog victory)*

*xxRobotechxx*: Good shit blade.

*vxvBladeRunnervxv*: Man I had one bullet left. That was a miracle right there.  
(Laughing)

*silentassassin321*: Hell yea it was. Do dat shit again. Go head get dat snipe. I'm laggin so damn bad I can't do shit wit it.

*LightzOut*: Fuck that. Rush to snipe. I'll get grenades.

*ChrisIsNice*: We got sunnin' fa dat ass dis round...

*LightzOut*: Oh my homeboy just got on. I'll send'a invite.

(*next round begins*)

*xxRobotechxx*: Dat's wussup. Rushing low side...watch the flank.

---

*Silentassassin321*: Why do yall feel the need to say dat stupid shit? Get yo' ass out tha room.

*GoState88*: I'm not going anywhere cuz your mom is sucking my dick. Your nigger mom loves white cock.

*RicanPapi*: Ey yo I got it dawg. I'll boot his ass.

(*GoState88* leaves the room)

*Mzmygrane*: Hey assassin, I wanna talk to him. Tell them to hold on.

(During this observation, I am sharing a console with *silentassassin321*. We are split screening which is a two player mode in some games. In order for me to be able to talk with the offending gamer, I would have to interrupt *silentassassin321*'s voice chat. Other times I would perform observations from my own console)

*Silentassassin321*: Hey yall hol' on for a minute.

(After he informs the other gamers of his brief verbal absence, I send *GoState88* an invitation for a private chat. After only a couple seconds, the offending gamer enters the private chat)

*GoState88*: What the fuck dude. What do you want?

*Mzmygrane:* Hi State. I am conducting interviews for a research project and wanted to ask you about your last gaming session. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions.

*GoState88:* Is this a joke? (laughs and makes a comment to someone else that I can't make out).

*Mzmygrane:* No it's not a joke but feel free to leave the private chat at any time. I will only ask a couple questions.

*GoState88:* Am I'm gonna get paid?

*Mzmygrane:* I apologize but no. This is strictly voluntary.

*GoState88:* Alright. What are you gonna ask me? Why I called that guy a nigger?

*Mzmygrane:* Actually yes. That's exactly what I want to know.

*GoState88:* What are you some kind of nigger lover?

*Mzmygrane:* What do you mean?

(I knew exactly what he meant. He thought I was white. I thought if I let him know I was actually African-American that he would leave the private chat and not answer the question. But I couldn't lie. So I told him)

*GoState88:* ARE YOU A NIGGER LOVER? (he repeats very slowly and loudly)

*Mzmygrane:* Well actually I am African-American myself.

*GoState88:* Oh shit, nuh uh? I'm not making you mad saying nigger?

*Mzmygrane:* Actually it is a very offensive term but I'm not mad. I wanna know why you use it. Have you ever called anyone in person that word?

*GoState88:* Well actually my best friend is black. I say it around him all the time. It's just a stupid word. I just say it to fuck with people. Well, especially to people that make me mad.

*Mzmygrane:* Did those guys in the last room make you mad? Is that why you said it to them?

*GoState88:* Yeah they were camping and they just happened to be black.

(camping is a passive style of playing where gamers will fall back and shoot from a distance usually sniping. Griefing campers will sometimes glitch to get outside the map and player-kill but avoid being killed themselves)

*Mzmygrane*: Oh ok. I understand. But do you think that makes you racist?

*GoState88*: Dude I'm not fucking racist. I told you. It's just a stupid word. It doesn't mean anything anymore.

*Mzmygrane*: Oh ok. Thank you so much. Sorry for taking up your time.

*GoState88*: Alright bye nigger (laughs as he leaves the private chat)

---

*XpkX RicanMami*: All I know is that only people just like you understand you. So there's no way you can understand where we coming from. Now I know you being African-American and all you understand some of the struggle. But since we Latina as well, we got added shit to deal with. Again, not to take away nothin' from you as a Black woman. Ok? So don't get mad, I'm just being real like you want me to right?

*Mzmygrane*: Yes that's all I want. Digame. Let it out. Tell me how you feelin.

*XpkX RicanMami*: (*Laughing*) That's cute. You aint gotta try and speak Spanish. MizzBlaze big on 'at. But since you cute, you get a free pass wit me.

*Mzmygrane*: (*Laughing*) Ok cuz I've been trying. I swear. I forgot all that shit I learned in high school.

*XpkX RicanMami*: You aint caught on yet? You in the middle ah' Mexico damn near. All dem damn Mexicans in Arizona and you aint picked up on Spanish yet. That's a fucking shame.

*Mzmygrane*: (*Laughing*) Whatever. Shut up and get to the point.

*XpkX RicanMami*: Ok ok ok. My bad. I'm fuckin wit you. But the point I was makin first is that people look at me and assume I'm not American. They think I'm a fucking illegal just cuz I'm Hispanic. So I got the race thing, the gender thing, and the citizenship thing to deal wit.

*Mzmygrane*: I feel you. Language too.

*XpkX RicanMami*: Shit yeah you right. Just cuz I talk with an accent people think I can't speak English good. I just wish more Blacks would understand where we comin from. We aint trying to take over as the most oppressed. Ain't no damn

contest who the most fucked up minority is in this country. We all fucked up. I just wish people would recognize that we got it hard too. Especially Black people.

*Mzmygrane:* Well answer this question for me. Why do you identify as Black since you seem to be separating yourself from them? Well us? Umm Blacks?

*XpkX RicanMami:* Cuz I consider myself Black. As my race. Ain't no brown category to mark. Ethnically, I am Latino or Hispanic or whatever. Now it is fucked up that I get to choose what race I identify the most with. Even though it aint no way to measure it, I would never consider choosing White cuz I don't identify with the privilege of whiteness. Now I got a lot of family that choose White and they say it makes life easier. I just feel that's selling out.

*Mzmygrane:* Oh oh a sell out huh. Like you called me before?

*XpkX RicanMami:* (*Laughing*) Nah ma. I was just trippin out at first. Cuz you sound mad white for real. Then you come into the room talking all Angela Davis and shit, I was like who the fuck is this! But you cool ma. Fa real. And don't trip out on *Blaze* and *Boss*. They ain't got nothing important to say anyway. You got enough peeps fa ya interviews?

*Mzmygrane:* Oh yeah. I'm good. I got four of yall so that's straight. But back to what you said. Why you think you're family is selling out by saying White?

*XpkX RicanMami:* I just think that people of color need to stick together. We all oppressed. We all a part of the same struggle.

---

*Mzmygrane:* Ok so I know why you do it, I want some examples of what you do. Are there certain types of games where you do certain things? Walk me through some examples.

*Patroa917:* Oh yeah. You see the most in Modern Warfare since Gears doesn't have friendly fire on. Let's just play a round so you can see firsthand.  
(*Several minutes past while we both prepare to play a match*)

*Patroa917:* Ok everything depends on the map. So if we get Wetwork, or Bog, or Ambush (*names of maps from Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*), we just hang out in the back and spawn kill.  
(*Waiting for game to load*)

*Patroa917:* Aight bet. We got Bog. Now you go to the otha side and hang out behind that crate. Or just hang wherever our teammates are and kill em.

*(We are in a game mode called Hardcore where friendly fire is enabled meaning we can kill our teammates)*

*Mzmygrane:* Umm. Kill our teammates? What about the other team?

*Patroa917:* Kill em all. Shit! Spawn kill them and friendly kill us! Well not me *(laughing)*.

*Mzmygrane:* Ok. Umm. What purpose does this serve?

*Patroa917:* No purpose. Just making everybody mad. We can make our team mad of course by killin em. And we make the opposing team mad by spawn killing. Everybody pissed off and it makes me happy.

*Mzmygrane:* How often do you do this? Everyday? Every time you play?

*Patroa917:* Nah. Most of the time it's not just random like we doin now. We mostly do it after somebody piss us off. Oh shit. You see that shit *(she sniped someone's head off)*.

*(We complete several games and engage in the same behavior. By this time, I have several messages of gamers complaining about my actions. Several gamers also submitted complaints on my actions within the game. I continue resistance grieving with Patroa917 and ignore the messages. Our game plan changes when we play a map called Ambush).*

*Patroa917:* Oh shit let's have suhmo' fun. Follow me. *(I follow her towards the middle of map near the fence)*

*Patroa917:* Ok pull out the pistol and jump up and down on my head.

*Mzmygrane:* Ok what's supposed to happen?

*Patroa917:* Just wait for it. See what I'm doing is looking down...

*Mzmygrane:* Oh shit hell naw. Now what do I do?  
*(I have glitched outside of the map which is another grieving tactic – stretching the limits of the architecture of the map to your advantage).*

*Patroa917:* Kill anybody you see. Well except me. They won't know where the hell it's coming from. Not unless they see you. Oh kill yourself when you run outta bullets.

*Mzmygrane:* *(Laughing)*. Hell naw. Ok.

*(I successfully kill my teammates and the opposing team. When I run out of bullets, I kill myself and begin the process over again. By this point, I have about a dozen messages of players complaining about my behavior within the space.)*

*Patroa917: Oh good shit. Blaze n Boss are online. We got fo' (four) folks so let's get on Gears. Put yo gears in mygrane. We'll start off wit some of dat grieving shit as you call it.*

*(We change games and invite two other members of Puerto Reekan Killaz to the game lobby. Blaze is one of the members not welcoming of me and she immediately begins speaking Spanish. The other members respond in Spanish and I am unable to make out what they're saying so I wait for instructions. Several minutes pass. I am sent an invitation to another gaming lobby).*

*Patroa917: Aight mygrane, first off, my bad. You know how she is. But for the first round we lag switchin then we gotta boot ur ass – my bad mama. We got a clan match comin up. But let's close out dis chat and get into the lobby. Don't be mad at me aight? Hit me up next time you on.*

*Mzmygrane: Nah you good. It's ok. I completely understand.*

---

*XpkX MammaMia: I don't know why you getting so crunk, we just fucking around. Aint nothing impressive by this shit.*

*Mzmygrane: But yeah it is. You guys are doing something to fight back. It's very impressive. Give me some examples of what you actually do and then tell me why you do it?*

*XpkX MammaMia: Aight, umm, well we started off just player killing. Especially in games where it was friendly fire. Now we used to just grief out on dudes that would fuck wit us. You know saying all that illegal shit, go back to Mexico crap. But then we just said fuck it, lets grief out on all of 'em.*

*Mzmygrane: Now when you say grief, what do you actually mean?*

*XpkX MammaMia: Well I know a lot of folks grief just to be dicks. But we doing it for a purpose. We have a reason. But we really just want to keep guys from enjoying the game. They keep us from enjoying the game by not welcoming women fully so this is the only way we can repay them. It's not like Xbox gives a fuck. And funny thing. You know *Blaze* actually got suspended for grieving. She got so many complaints they suspended her account. And all the complaints we fucking filed for racism and sexism shit and nothing happened. But then we decide to do something, finally stick it to the man (*laughing*) and we get punished. I like how you define us, as deviants. That's so true. We get punished all the time.*

APPENDIX E  
IRB APPROVAL

**To:** Lisa Anderson  
WEST

*for* **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair *or*  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 06/24/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 06/24/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 1006005253

**Study Title:** Intersecting Oppressions and Online Gaming: Understanding Women of Color in Xbox Live

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kishonna Gray is a doctoral candidate in Justice and Social Inquiry in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. She received her MS degree in Criminal Justice from Eastern Kentucky University. Her research interests broadly entail critical race, gender, and media. She has conducted research on the racialization of disaster myths during Hurricane Katrina, social inequalities in online communities, online resistance strategies, and she is currently developing a Black cyber feminist theory to understand the experiences and responses of women of color online. She has published a book and a couple articles. She enjoys playing video games, spending time with her family, and cooking.

