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THE NORMALISATION OF SEXUAL DEVIANCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

Elias and Dunning speak of the need to re-channel the more aggressive elements of overt sexuality through the media, books, sport, etc., in order to promote 'civility' (Elias & Dunning, 1993); they argue that this allows for the dualist nature of libidinal or taboo desires to co-exist with civil society, without the contravention of either. Atkinson and Rodgers (2016) apply this 'civilising process' theory to video games,

arguing that, while media technologies can be used to create image-spaces where personal experimentation with such libidinal desires can take place, a deeper criminological understanding of virtual harms in these spaces is a necessity. Without the acknowledgement of new harms, these spaces become unchecked realms, which enable the further denial and neutralisation of damage inflicted on citizens with these virtual spaces (ludodromes). This chapter explores the relationship between representations of sexual violence in video games and normalisation. In doing so, it provides a cultural and feminist approach to the issues, delineating key debates whilst embedding cutting-edge examples of new media as well as notable examples from the history of the medium into the discussion.

Deviance in gaming requires analysis and interpretations framed in theoretical ways that permit new understandings to emerge. There has been a tendency for single voices to dominate in discussions of cultural forms in which violence takes place or is depicted. This chapter will use diverse voices and perspectives to demonstrate the need for innovative, collaborative scholarship, to enable new directions and new analyses to emerge on how depictions of sexual violence/ deviance in gaming have advanced and to what end.

FEMINIST AND CRITICAL APPROACHES TO GAMING

This chapter brings together two authors, a cultural criminologist and a feminist sociologist, to analyse gaming and sexual violence within this cultural form. We argue that critical, inclusionary and feminist approaches are crucial to moving debates on gaming forward and examining how criminology can play a role in understanding virtual harms. In particular, our concerns with power are not so far apart,

cultural criminology having been influenced strongly by various feminist debates and feminism being a broad philosophy and practice, with a core interest in power inequalities. Cultural criminology is fundamentally concerned with the same, specifically power in the construction of crime and deviance and positions cultural dynamics as the vehicles of the meaning of crime. In doing so, it seeks to identify, map and analyse ways in which cultural forces interconnect and liaise with the practices of crime and deviance in their broadest sense, including the transgressive, or yet to be, crime.

The field of philosophy, thinking and practice of feminism is broad, within it there are dedicated gamers, people in tech (people is used here to indicate that men too, can be feminists) and those who are directly opposed to all forms of culture where women are represented in unequal ways. Gaming is a challenge for feminism because game designers often utilise violence as one of the core means of character interaction. Therefore, given evidenced societal patterns of violence, is it unsurprising, that violence against women should become prevalent within virtual worlds; worlds created by real people, socialised in societies in which abuse (and abuse against women and children, in particular) are commonplace. That is not to say that gamers necessarily agree with sexual abuse in gaming, but the conditions under which the industry and cultural form operates, mean they cannot detach from it easily. Sexual abuse is part of the general landscape of gaming in tropes and narratives of violence against women, girls and low-powered groups, meaning that choosing to avoid this becomes difficult, if not albeit impossible within certain genres. Similar to Dines' (2010) account of 'pornified society', the cultural form of gaming is stretching the boundaries of social norms around abuse of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Dines positions pornography as a central tenet of

contemporary patriarchal society but explains that violence against women benefits neither women nor men, as it denigrates both, damages relationships and role models sexual behaviour towards a format based on violence and abuse. She also links the existence of pornography, and particularly the increasingly extreme nature of acts within it, to increasing abuse of women and girls. The cause-and-effect relationship is hotly debated, but radical feminists tend to position this as an aspect of a wider landscape of abuse against women, a landscape that we conceptualise here as including misogynistic violence and abuse towards female characters within videogames.

The emergence of notions of 'toxic masculinity', as a bundle of negatives around the socialisation and lived experience of men (Ging, 2017), has also taken centre stage in feminist and also cultural criminological accounts, with gaming included. For instance, sociologist Kimmel (2008) examines masculinity in the United States, focusing on the impact of male culture socialisation on young men. He represents the transition into adulthood for men as a perilous and confusing time that sets them up with norms of video game use, porn, alcohol abuse and short-term sexual conquests. Tying video game use into a cultural recipe for male transition seems to present gaming as part of a negative culture. This is perhaps why there is often antagonism between gamers and feminists, because gamers find their leisure, packaged up with negative features of contemporary life, with no notion of gaming having the potential of being positive. Whilst undoubtedly, there are problems with gaming currently, which relate to issues around the depiction of women characters, the inclusion of sexual violence specifically geared towards women characters and used as a means of interaction, nonetheless, the potential for change is real.

Feminist gamers argue that gaming can be redeemed from the current industry-push towards abuse of vulnerable

and low-power groups. Anita Sarkeesian, whose feminist website about gaming has strongly influenced debates (see www.feministfrequency.com), has made public that she does not see gaming as leading to abuse of women, instead gaming is part of a wider milieu of abuse against women, which needs urgent redress:

> When I say that media matters and has an influence on our lives, I'm not saying it's a 1:1 correlation or a monkey-see, monkey-do situation … but rather that media's influence is subtle and helps to shape our attitudes, beliefs and values for better and for worse. Media can inspire greatness and challenge the status quo or sadly, more often, it can demoralize and reinforce systems of power and privilege and oppression.
>
> (cited in Totilo, 2015, online)

Sarkeesian is a self-confessed gaming fan, with a mission to reshape the industry and excise negative tropes, such as sexist depictions of women and reinforcement of misogynistic culture. Other feminist concerns include the way females are characterised (particularly the lack of diversity of activity, dress and body shape), the focus on hyper-sexualised characters, the lack of credible roles for female characters and the buying and selling of women or use of them as trophies and rewards (particularly as sexual rewards). However, these are not only the concerns of self-identified feminists. Many of these critiques are shared across scholarly perspectives concerned with inclusion, inequalities and representations and, therefore, facilitate potential for collaboration and new perspectives emerging.

In bringing our cultural criminology and feminist sociological approaches together, the authors argue that gaming can be seen to have various central tropes that are highly problematic in relation to denigrating women, girls and other

excluded or lower power groups in modern societies. More-over, these same repetitive narratives often promote/reinforce sexist attitudes, rape myths and normalisation of abuse. However, we concur with Sarkeesian that the possibilities are there for gaming to be empowering and positive, if issues of power, privilege and sexual violence are taken seriously within the gaming industry. This chapter now turns to examining key narratives/tropes in games and sexual violence.

'FRIDGING THE GIRLFRIEND', GOD OF WAR AND TOMB RAIDER

This is a trope identified by comic book/graphic novel writer Gail Simone, and originally reported through her website (Women in Refrigerators, 1999), which represents the trend by media creators to kill, rape, depower or otherwise abuse female characters in order to motivate the male protagonist into action. The name derives from a 1994 Green Lantern comic in which Kyle Rayner (Green Lantern) finds his girlfriend, Alexandra Dewitt, killed and forced into a refrigerator (Marz, Banks, Tanghal, & Mattsson, 1994). This ultimate objectification, completely denies the individual character of the victim, dehu-manising her and reducing her to little more than a stimulant. The needlessly violent deaths experienced by such women often stretch to ridiculous levels of depravity. It's not enough to kill a woman; she must be humiliated, even in death, in order to propagate the correct response in the hero. Her experience becomes secondary to that of the hero. The depravity reaches an extreme in order to provoke reaction, and this paradigm excuses the hero's escalating responses when it comes to facing the antagonist. The irony is not lost here that Alexandra Dewitt is found forcibly stored in the same way as a literal 'piece of meat'. The act instils the idea of a 'protector' persona in the protagonist, by brutally attacking someone the hero is close to,

or merely to push the story arc further. There are numerous examples of this across all forms of media.

Video games are no exception, female characters who fall victim to this trope become little more than a tool for male agency and violence towards them a vehicle for his story. In the original 'God of War' (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2005), the antagonist, Ares, tricks the protagonist, Kratos, into violently killing his wife and daughter during an attack on a village, waging war at Ares' behest. This event spurs our now ashen white hero into seeking revenge against Ares. The urge to avenge the deaths of the innocents lies behind this relentless, madding fury for retribution. The accidental deaths of Kratos' family creates a technique of neutralisation, a denial of responsibility, that exonerates Kratos in the eyes of the narrative (Sykes & Matza, 1957), with Kratos' tale acting more as that of a revenge fantasy over any degree of moral redemption. The idea of being crazed with revenge further obligates the male character to operate outside of their sensibilities, robbing them of their responsibility, placing them as (secondary) victims, obscuring the victimhood of the woman as lesser. The victim narrative for the hero is easily escapable, as it is quickly subverted into violent, bloodthirsty revenge. In this narrative, the violence against the family is a backdrop to the foregrounded male journey to further violence.

The popular reboot of the Tomb Raider franchise (2013) created a similar issue. Ron Rosenberg, an executive at the developers provoked controversy when early on in the games' development, he offered footage of the heroine, Lara Croft, surrounded by indigenous characters and contextualised it casually as, 'enemies will try to rape her' (Fogg, 2018). He declared that the sexual assault was important in Lara's character development and that players would want to protect her (Matulef, 2012; Reynolds, 2012). The player wants to guide and drive Lara to safety; helping her whenever possible,

moulding her from the weak, 'damsel in distress' into the sexy, strong (hyper-sexualised) warrior that we recognise as Lara Croft from the first generation of Tomb Raider games. This comment was later retracted by the developers at Crystal Dynamics as being an instance of 'miss-speaking' (Fogg, 2018), and that the contentious scene depicted 'close physical intimidation' (Matulef, 2012). The casual manner with which Rosenberg made this announcement reveals a normalised attitude to the concept of sexual violence and a troublingly cavalier approach to sexual violence, communicated without thought for potential ramifications.

In the reboot (2013), Lara is not the hardened Tomb Raider that she undoubtedly becomes, but a young woman trapped on an island. The developers were trying to give a background to the character, which before was notably absent. However, there is an underlying implication that Croft needed to be broken down to her core through tragedy, before adopting the heroic and 'masculine' mindset now familiar. A common trope of heroes is overcoming adversity/tragedy, for example, Batman and Iron Man. But in Lara's case, unlike these male characters, the threat or portrayal of sexual violence is deployed to enable this transformation, Hamilton (2012) argues, to show that women can become heroes and that the male characters are evil. It can be seen that in the transformative tragedies experienced by heroes, males lose others (friends and loved ones), whereas female heroes are victimised. It is worth noting that Lara Croft endures multiple tragedies throughout her 'tomb raiding' career, but continues without wavering. The developers appear to be commenting that sexual assault changes a woman permanently, thus a priori that the ultimate power still remains with males, being the one who can rape, threaten rape and therefore transform female characters. Moreover, the notion that rape or sexual assault is some kind of positive transformative

awakening, bringing out the hero in Lara, is highly problematic in terms of ignoring the diverse experiences for real-world survivors of attempted or achieved rape.

Sexual violence, as portrayed in modern video games, most often appears as a narrative device, not an active role that the player must navigate or take part in. This pattern is also cognisant of sexual assault in films, such as the *Taken* and *Death Wish* franchises, where rape and sexual assault are ultimately seen as wrongs done to the loved ones of the protagonists, to provoke revenge. In these accounts, the female characters who experience abuse are backdrops to the motivations of men and move the story towards the 'understandable' violence response of males. This trope dismisses abuse towards women, subjugating it to the 'more important' male storyline, which in terms of reinforcing notions of women as 'natural' victims is unhelpful. However, there are examples where the player does engage in sexual abuse within the ludodrome (Atkinson & Rodgers, 2016), some of which are discussed below.

SEXUAL DEVIANCE AND THE RISE OF 'EROGE'

The first recognised 'erotic' video game, 'Night Life' (Koei, 1982a) was sold as a sexual aid for couples, featuring images of suggestions for different sexual positions and a schedule so that partners could identify when menstruation would occur. Night Life was a precursor to the 'eroge' genre (a portmanteau of erotic and game) which was quickly followed by the role-playing game 'Seduction of the Condominium Wife' (Koei, 1982b) which sealed the makers, the Japanese company Koei, as a powerful software developer.

A famous western proponent of this trend was 'Custer's Revenge' (Mystique, 1982a) for the Atari 2600. In this game, the player's avatar based upon General Custer, stood naked in

a Stetson-style hat with a comically erect penis, on the far left of the screen. The objective was to avoid arrows while traversing towards the right-hand corner where an Indigenous American female character, with equally comical breasts, was tied to a pole, immediately appropriating elements of sexual exploitation and overt racism. Upon successful completion of the level, Custer would reach the woman with the perceived intention of raping her. The simulated act of rape fulfilled the role of a reward for players who managed to avoid the onslaught of arrows. The title itself frames the dominance of the male, the invasion by Custer of the Indigenous American female character and sexual violation becomes 'revenge', mercilessly committed against a perceived weaker, subjugated innocent. The Indigenous American woman's violation was only presented to those who could successfully complete the levels, representing the wider Western cinematic and literature trope that by beating adversity, there is an expectation of entitlement. The 'champion' would 'get the girl', displaying a sense of entitlement among players that would be familiar from media representations of relationships, and cultural norms that promote goals of sexual conquests in response to overcoming problems.

The developers released two other games for the Atari 2600, 'Beat 'em & Eat'em' and 'Bachelor Party' (both Mystique, 1982b, 1982c), featuring heavily sexual themes. All were received negatively, and Mystique collapsed as a company, whereas, their Japanese counterparts were steadily growing. The Japanese games were well received in their home market and the United States' offerings sank their parent company and erotic gaming in the United States in general. The games from Koei were built around sex; their eroticism was a necessary component of the game. Mystique's products were sexualised versions of fairly rudimentary games. 'Beat 'em & Eat 'em' was essentially the 1978 game 'Avalanche'

where players caught falling rocks. 'Beat 'em' turned this into a masturbating man at the top of the screen dropping semen onto the players, masquerading as naked women. The avatars are tasked with catching the secretion in their mouths; letting it hit the ground too many times results in the player losing. Bachelor Party was 'Pong' (1972) with extraneous genitals to present a naked man with, once again, a comically erect penis (the ball) being bounced towards naked women, with comical breasts (the blocks). This could explain the demise of Mystique in that their output consisted of re-treads of games that had existed for close to 10 years (in Pong's case) as opposed to new material, using eroticism and therefore deviance as a superfluous gimmick. In both cases, the pornographic elements of the game centralise male desire and phallus-centricity. The games continue the common critique of porn that it exists as solely respite for the male gaze, and the women are just passive in sexual activity (Dines, 2010). However, gender-swapped versions of the games exist, simply with the roles reversed. In the gender-swapped 'Philly Flasher' (1982d), male avatars catch falling lactate from a woman. However, the gender-swap version cannot be said to subvert the pornographic element to the desires of women – lactation and cumming are hardly the same.

NIGHT TRAP

Sega's 'Night Trap' (Sega, 1992) featured heavily in the 1994 US Senate Committee hearing on violence in video games, due to its content. The game itself runs on an interactive movie-style basis. The player is tasked with watching security cameras to protect a group of teenage girls having a slumber party in a mysterious house. As the player watches the footage, vampires are constantly trying to attack and drag away the girls; your

objective is to spring traps located around the house to prevent this from happening (Donovan, 2010, p. 228). One immediately sees a commonality with the other games featured in this chapter, that the male gaze is highly active (ironically, voyeurism is vital to beating the game), as the women are passive recipients of violence and heroism. The lack of sentience displayed by the girls in the game speaks volumes about their role as damsels in distress, and with very little accountability or responsibility to alter their fate. Along with Mortal Kombat (1992), Night Trap was a subject of US Democratic Party Senators Joseph Lieberman and Herb Kohl's 1993–1994 Senate hearing committee. While the footage is relatively tame, it was the centre of a row over whether it promoted violence against women. However, besides the obvious voyeuristic implications of the gameplay, the aim of the game was to prevent sexual violence, those scenes would only trigger upon the player's failure. However, Lieberman completely misunderstood this concept, seeing it as a game which *rewarded* players with the footage for violent acts (Donovan, 2010, p. 228). The footage that was alluded to by the Senate, that gratuitous, gory violence could be meted out on women at the player's hands, simply did not exist in the game; Lieberman called the game 'sick' and 'disgusting' (Ponder, 2017). Ironically, in anticipation of backlash due to its content, the game's director, James Riley, explained that the violence was significantly toned down, as contributing party Hasbro (who were responsible for Night Trap's intended home console) were marketing towards children and were concerned about 'reproducible violence' (Ponder, 2017). The 'Vampires' were made toothless and comedic; needing tools to drill into their victims' necks to procure blood and called 'Augers' (Ponder, 2017). The satire and parodic aspect of the game, a response to the 1980s' trend for 'vampire melodramas', was completely lost on Lieberman's Committee (Ponder, 2017).

GRAND THEFT AUTO AND VICTIMISATION OF
SEX WORKERS

In 'Grand Theft Auto' (Take Two, 1997; Rockstar Games, 2013 for latest iteration), a low-key feature of the experience is the ability to 'pick up' prostitutes in your vehicle and drive to a secluded area to partake in a coital transaction. This act will increase the player's health in exchange for a sum of currency. After the transaction has taken place, the prostitute will leave the player's car and walk away. It is possible to then kill the prostitute and reclaim one's money. This element of sexual violence stands apart from similar examples for two reasons. Primarily, it is not a principle feature of the game; the game world features numerous health pickups that are a far more convenient method of regaining HP than investing the time and money in finding a sex worker and driving some-where quiet in order to begin the activity. Secondly, killing the prostitute to regain the money is an unfortunate plication of two parts of the game's mechanics. It is possible throughout the entirety of the game to kill bystanders and steal their money, with the only dis-incentive being that of the possibility of a raised 'wanted' level. The act of using a sex worker and killing her is an element of the game that has caused notable outrage in the media; most likely due to the sexual element, as the level of violence across the whole game is fairly consistent. The normalisation of sexual violence typified here is focussed on the player's exploitation of it; as it is entirely avoidable and not the decision of the game developers. Grand Theft Auto as a series is known for its satirical outlook (as discussed in earlier Chapter 3), the risky behaviour exhibited by sex workers in game (leaving the player's vehicle and walking away with disregard for their location or safety) could be interpreted as a comment on the eternal victimisation of sex workers, as ever-present victims and particularly vulnerability

to exploitation, abuse or murder. If players choose to utilise in-game sex workers in this way, the dynamic of using the sex worker for the purpose of regaining HP, then killing her to get back the money exchanged, can be read as a commentary on the 'disposable' attitudes that gamers have towards sex workers and which is left down to the individual player choice and their moral decisions. Also, of interest is that if a player wants to be particularly bloodthirsty and procure money through wanton murder, it is far more convenient to murder more affluent women avatars, who can be found in business areas and suburbs of the ludodrome. This would mean a speedier attainment of capital; however, this would be more likely to result in a raised wanted level, as it would involve appearing in public. Here the utilisation of inequalities as features of the game, and positioned as gamer choice, is visible. It is clear that gaming can reinforce inequalities, as well as negative social attitudes about prostitution/sex work and the disposability of women.

The models of the sex workers themselves are all based on dangerous clichés and stereotypes. All are female and overtly eager to 'do business' – robbing them of any agency, constructive back stories, or important engagement with the narrative. This singular vision of sex workers creates a disingenuous space, which is solely filled by the 'happy' sex worker – hardly reflective of the real. They are young, pretty and completely separate from the structural inequalities pushing women towards the role. Prostitutes in Grand Theft Auto are prostitutes, just because. They represent little more than the tools of male fantasy (Dines, 2010). In a game series that strives to flesh out its side characters as much as possible, the limited options available to the sex worker avatars (limited appearances, dialogue, engagement, etc.) appear problematic. This can, if left unchecked, contribute to the socially constructed gonzo porn-esque 'rape culture'

(Dines, 2010, pp. 62–63, 87) idea about real-life sex workers and women in general. In GTA V (Rockstar Games, 2013), one of the avatars, Michael, has a daughter who is edging towards the world of softcore pornography quite eagerly, much to her father's chagrin. A few missions involve actively disrupting this lifestyle and violently responding to those that are out to exploit the young woman. This is in stark contrast to the prostitutes and strip clubs that he frequents. Michael embodies a culture that Dines speaks of, where women whom men profess to love (wives, mothers and daughters) are seen as in a radically different light, by these same men, to adult performers/sex workers (Dines, 2010). Somehow, it is easier to lose empathy for the women in sex work, thus making it easier and guilt-free to exploit them, denying their victimhood (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The game itself makes this hypocrisy clear and is providing a commentary on a hypersexualised 'rich-bitch' stereotype, that sees herself as sexually empowered, rebelling against her hyper-masculine father, who believes that she is 'too good' for that lifestyle. However, it is acceptable for him to exploit other women, as it is symbolic of his macho image. The exchange of women in this way makes them totems for masculine power (Dworkin, 1984). The game encourages players to think like Michael and completing missions depends on the player carrying out Michael's wishes, thus as in many other examples, normalising the behaviour. The themes of entitlement, deception and buying women to fulfil one's pleasure mimic the worst of neo-liberal male sexual consumer culture in the real world.

A video montage comprising of scenes from Grand Theft Auto IV (Rockstar Games, 2008) produced by gaming industry news company IGN entitled 'Ladies of Liberty City: Very Bad Things' consisted of an array of footage from the game featuring the women from the game in situations ranging from titillation to violence, including a scene where

the protagonist, Niko, violently shoots a prostitute he has just paid for sex with. The company has since withdrawn the video from its domains and apologised that it 'crossed a line' (Totilo, 2008). This was not before sociologists jumped on the violent, pornographic nature of the video, misrepresenting it to align with their agendas, or possibly, misunderstanding the purpose of the piece (an unofficial montage, not a trailer representing the game) (Ezell, 2009; Dines, 2010, p. 62). Dines uses Ezell's graphic description of the content two years after the video was withdrawn without mentioning the video's origins and scant association with the game or developers; thus, problematically generalising the game based on minutes of footage specifically selected by a third party. This in turn legitimises the negativity surrounding gaming, as comments are made by those whose objectivity is woefully affected by their bias, in Dines' case, her anti-pornography stance. This may go as far as undermining the value of legitimate critique of the game, as it places the very real possibility that other critiques are coloured by a subjective bias and a result of a moral panic, which is not the case.

RAPE AND EXTREME VIOLENCE IN THE LUDODROME

The relatively recent creation of the most extreme examples of gaming, which position sexual violence as explicit to players' aims, provide illustrations of the extent to which the male lens of video games is prepared to go to meet consumer demand. In this extreme category, and bearing in mind that violence against women is already visible in readily available games, as described above, include Night Trap (Digital Pictures, includes themes of child abuse and sexual violence); RapeLay (Illusion Soft, 2006, which involves the gamer

taking on a role of a stalker with the aim of raping a mother and daughters); the Gal*Gun Series (Inti Creates, 2011, which allows players to sexual abuse of underage characters) and Rape Day (Desk Plant, 2019, which includes scenes of a baby being killed, necrophilia, rape and murder). As can be seen, these games directly focus on some of the most challenging issues for anti-gender-based violence professionals, law enforcement and criminal justice systems today including stalking, incest, rape and child abuse. These are serious, real experiences that countless people survive and then have to live with, in terms of trauma, mental well-being issues and physical damage (Bourke, 2012; Chivers-Wilson, 2006). The gaze of such extreme video games is not hindered by consequence or impact or lived experience; these, however, are the concerns of survivors, professionals in the field and feminists (Dines, 2010).

Rape Day (although admittedly difficult to access and play for most gamers) illustrates the extent to which sexual violence is seen by some game creators, as an acceptable feature of the ludodrome. It also demonstrates the consequences of having no boundaries in a self-regulated neoliberal industry. The developer, Desk Plant, markets the game on its website as a 'dark comedy with pornographic elements … [a] visual novel where you control the choices of a terrifying psychopath during a zombie apocalypse' (Rogers, 2019). Comedy and satire, as noted above, is commonly used as a trope to explain aspects of abuse in games, but it is interesting to ponder whom the comedy serves. Desk Plant promotes the game by saying, 'You can verbally harass, kill people and *rape* women as you choose to progress the story' (Rogers, 2019). This is a game explicitly focused on using rape as a key goal. It goes without saying that whilst many mainstream games reinforce gender stereotypes and power relationships, by positing women as available and

expendable sexual entities for forced sexual use, Rape Day
female characters' main purpose is to be raped and/or
murdered. Rape Day and similar games promote accep-
tance of rape myths, reinforcement of misogyny and enable a
sense of sexual aggression (Guggisberg, 2019). In March
2019, it was reported that the Steam Store would not be
distributing Rape Day. The Valve Corporation, who are the
American video game developer and digital distribution
company who own Steam Store, stated that, 'after significant
fact-finding and discussion, we think "Rape Day" poses
unknown costs and risks and therefore won't be on Steam'
(Statement from Erik Johnson, Valve Executive, 2019, cited
in Balana, 2019). Whilst one can stand behind Valve's deci-
sion, it is the case that the platform hosts numerous other
titles that involve female characters being abused. One
wonders what the risks and costs are and whether it is
actually the breadth of negative notoriety of the game, rather
than the content per se, that led to Valve's aversion to dis-
tribution. The fact remains that there is a heritage in gaming
of using sexual violence as a means to sales.

CONCLUSIONS AND WHERE NEXT FOR THE STUDY OF VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES?

This chapter has outlined conventional and feminist debates
and concerns around sexual violence in gaming. It is clear that
many concerns of feminists have resonance in other non-
feminist arenas that also have apprehensions around gaming
and equality, ethics and wider impacts on society. Gaming
advances in 30 years have run concurrent to societal advances
in the area of anti-racist and anti-sexist representations in TV
media, for instance. However, gaming has stayed stunningly
resistant, indeed arguably going in the opposite direction to

such media changes. However, after the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements, there is a greater societal critical engagement, and video games can no longer sit outside this analytical and change-oriented gaze. Instances of gamer and industry resistance can be seen recently. For example, the Gamergate movement resisted this level of analysis, when they were invited to share their space with women and female gamers who consciously and very visibly entered the gaming arena. The (male) gaming protestors would routinely state that gaming was their world (an illustration of entitlement), and that feminists had 'ruined' everything else, and wanted to do the same to video games. They displayed violent misogynistic views and caused trouble for the growing number of female gamers, particularly those that wanted to reduce toxic elements of masculinity in gaming. Developers were encouraged to cater to this market, by taking greater care in representations of women, although games, like Grand Theft Auto, would deploy a camouflage of a hyper-masculine satirical context to partially avoid such recriminations. Gaming, therefore, seems to fight back when held to account for sexist and misogynistic games and attitudes, with the emergence of games, such as Rape Day, illustrating the interest of game designers in creating highly violent content, with little concern for impact, ethics or real-world survivors.

When discussing sexual deviance and violence in the ludodrome, it is important to acknowledge that such portrayals will contribute to the socially constructed world of the player. These virtual harms interconnect with and imprint on life in the real. Whilst there have been movements to equalise gaming, there is a long way to go in creating equal opportunity and diversity-aware gaming, the integration of acceptable treatment of women characters and positive response to critiques of social economic power and inequalities. For instance, are the millions of victims/survivors of violence and sexual

abuse to be excluded from gaming? It seems there is no place for them as consumers, unless they accept the status quo and representations of violent abuse. The existence of rape as a cultural form of entertainment affects the multitude of people (and here we can cite men, women and children) who are victims of sexual assault in the real world, who live with all that brings. The games industry shows little concern about including gender-based violence and rape and those potential consumers. In a world of 'trigger warnings' and, increasingly, care taken to ensure that trauma of abuse survivors is respected, the gaming industry has remained relatively free of any responsibility. Criminological study would do well to study these potential audiences, if/how they negotiate a virtual world that is out of synch with cultural changes in the real world around equality.

Likewise, the study of gamers who continue to play, despite finding extreme violent aspects of games unacceptable, is crucial. If one is to understand misogyny in gaming, there has to be space to hear and analyse voices that do not banally accept dominant discourse. As noted in the introduction, choice is an odd concept in gaming; to play you often have to interact with all kinds of activities. Understanding how some people negotiate around aspects of games and the culture generally, which they do not relate to and reject is crucial. There is a need to examine masculinity as a set of cultural repertoires that men and boys interact with in complex ways, that is to say to step away from a coverall notion of 'toxic masculinity' and study points at which people are able to step away from it and how/why they do this. A criminological and feminist collaborative approach might fruitfully examine the exceptions to better understand the normalisation of violent abuse and sexual violence towards women in gaming – such examinations and the need change in videogames are urgent.

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