Not All Fun And Gaymes: Technology, Transgression, and Representation Among Gaymers

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NOT ALL FUN AND GAYMES: TECHNOLOGY, TRANSGRESSION, AND REPRESENTATION AMONG GAYMERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by Kyle Bikowski
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Abstract

Over the past decade, a new identity has emerged within gaming and gay communities. This identity, Gaymer (Gay-gamer), incorporates elements from both gaming and gay communities, but is accepted by neither. This thesis asks how the interplay of actual and virtual worlds have shaped Gaymer identities, and further asks what the relationship between Gaymers and both the gay and gaming communities are; what elements are conducive to the formation of Gaymer communities; how Gaymers work with or around affordances to assert their identities in virtual and actual spaces; and to what degree representation, either within games as playable characters or within the industry as game producers, is important to Gaymers. These are answered through the use of ethnographic methods such as participant observation at monthly meet-ups of Houston Gaymers, semi-structured interviews, and formal interviews, as well as informal polls and analysis of posts in two Facebook groups, autoethnography, and analysis of message board archives. After identifying gaps in the academic literature of gay gamers, the thesis focuses on the hostility the gaming community often shows towards Gaymers and how representation within games has been problematic. This thesis makes a recommendation to game developers that producing games that allow for sexual ambiguity of characters is an effective way to improve inclusivity. Next, the relationship between Gaymers and the gay community is examined. This includes a discussion of how a convergence of consumer culture, new technologies such as readily accessible pornography and dating apps, and homonormativity have resulted in hegemonic homosexuality, which excludes Gaymers through contradictory sexual scripts. Finally, an examination of both sexual fields theory and videoludification is used to show how Gaymers are actively blurring the lines between virtual and actual worlds, creating a community of their own.
Introduction. Press Start to Begin the Tutorial

On my way to class for my Teaching Assistant position in early February of 2019, I received a Facebook notification that would set off what I would (much later) come to realize was a fortuitous chain of events. My original choice of field site for this thesis, the GaymerX Convention in New York City had been cancelled. With my thesis proposal defense two weeks away and a grant application due two weeks after that, I spent the next hour desperately searching Google for any conventions or groups near Louisiana. What I found was Houston Gaymers, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2009 to provide a social space for Gaymers to interact, support local businesses, and donate to local children’s hospitals. Most promising, besides their close proximity, was that according to their website they had an online user base of nearly 2000 members, 500+ local members in the greater Houston area, and over 75 meetups a year. On the fourth Saturday of each month, they hold their Main Meetup, which is what I decided would be perfect for my fieldwork. I immediately reached out to their board of directors for consent, and within a week was approved.

Two months later, at 9 o’clock on the night of Saturday, April 27th, 2019, I arrived with my partner at a nondescript, two-story commercial building with multiple store fronts, located at the outskirts of the Montrose district, a historical hub for LGBTQ+ culture in Houston.

I was feeling nervous and excited about beginning my field work. Being somewhat of an introvert, the prospect of going into a situation where I did not know anyone to ask them personal details about themselves was daunting. This was also my first experience in the field, and I was nervous I would not be able to get any good data or that people would object to being a
part of my research. As a Gaymer myself, I also had more personal concerns. What if I wasn’t
gamer enough for them? What if I wasn’t \textit{gay} enough?

Upon entering, I found myself in a small vestibule and was instantly greeted by one of
the board members of Houston Gaymers with a “Hi, welcome to Gaymers! Is this your first
time?” I told them (their name tag indicated they/them/their pronouns) it was and introduced
myself as being the person who had contacted them about conducting my Master’s research at
their events. They wished me luck and let me know that if there was anything that I needed to
just let them know. Then, they asked me to sign-in on an iPad and offered me a tour. After filling
out a nametag, complete with a little red sticker to let everyone know I was new, I was led into
the main bar area. My host let me know what games were being played at which stations and
where the drag show would be held at midnight. After wishing me luck again on my thesis, they
returned to their post at the entrance.

Despite the fact that it was early and the bar was not yet full, there were enough people
there that, combined with the music playing and the games being displayed, I was a bit
overwhelmed. I decided the best course of action to start with was to pick an empty booth in a
raised corner of the bar, so that I could more easily observe what was going on. It happened that
this corner was equipped with \textit{Soul Caliber VI}, a multiplayer-capable fighting game. Within
minutes of arriving in the booth, a group had begun to form to play. I took turns playing and
watching, participating in a ritual that would be repeated countless times over my visits. First
there was an introduction, then a conversation about what types of games we play, and then
attention turned to the game at hand.

About halfway through the night, after spending about two hours alternating between
walking around observing my surroundings and joining groups to play games, I decided to step
out into the courtyard for a cigarette to clear my head. Briefly, I was alone and able to collect my thoughts, but I was soon joined by someone else. After a few moments of silence, he broke the ice by telling me he liked my shirt. I had to look down, as I had forgotten what I was wearing (it was a *Legend of Zelda* shirt). I responded by telling him that I liked his *Pokémon* hat. He introduced himself to me, first with his real name. Later he would say that he preferred I use his gamertag in this work, so I will refer to him as Cherry-licious; a 33-year-old, Hispanic high school teacher in Houston. As we talked about how long he had been attending these events and what games we played, we were eventually joined by Jacob, a 34-year-old, mixed Caucasian and Hispanic man, who was between jobs. The cycle of questions repeated, and eventually I felt comfortable enough to inform them that I was there for research and to ask if they wanted to participate. Both of them found the idea fascinating and agreed immediately.

I would spend the rest of the night talking to them, with both men introducing me to more people through out the night. In fact, over the course of my three visits, Cherry-licious and Jacob would fully embrace my project, and me, offering to help in anyway they could, and we eventually became friends. Everyone I spoke with at the events was more than happy to participate, and it was easy to join various social circles at the meet-ups. By the end of the first night it became clear that these were more than just events— they were the gatherings of an inclusive and welcoming community.

**Background**

Where did the sense of community and acceptance at the Houston Gaymers meet-up come from? How did a label like Gaymer draw people into this space? What even *is* a Gaymer?
Psychologist Justin Maki places Gaymers (Gay-gamers) as an offshoot of the Gay Geek community, which he states was the first community to be entirely classified by their social interests (video games), rather than by their physical appearance or sexual interests (Maki 2017). I would add that Gaymers, then, are also the first gay identity to emerge entirely in relation to digital technology. Bears, twinks, drag queens, leather, even S&M communities are all in some way connected to physical traits, apparel, or physical sexual acts. Furthermore, Gaymers do not exist as a group completely in a virtual world, nor do they exist entirely in the actual world. The Gaymer identity is situated firmly between both worlds, with the expression of one’s virtual world gaming completely intertwined with one’s offline sexuality, which is increasingly being displayed and discussed within the virtual worlds.

Examination of virtual worlds began at least as far back as the 1990s, when journalist Julian Dibbell explored LambdaMOO, a text based multi-user virtual world. A decade later, anthropologist Tom Boellstorff and psychologist Nick Yee began studying Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs), generally under the subgenre of Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). In all cases, these pioneers observed their contacts to compartmentalize their identities: online and offline personas, in groups and out groups on and offline.

Somewhere around 2013, a new phenomenon began to emerge. Millennials had become accustomed to sharing their daily lives on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook. Their online and offline personas were beginning to become more intertwined. Likewise, by this time voice chat for communicating with party members in MMORPGs had become standard. Players no longer knew each other only through the text communications of their avatars, they knew the voice and personality of their actual world drivers. Feeling unwelcome in the gaming world due to the frequent use of homophobic slurs and general air of toxic masculinity, gay gamers often
chose to conceal their sexuality from their gaming group. Feeling unwelcome in the gay community because of their enjoyment of a stereotypically heteronormative activity, gay gamers felt the need to conceal their gaming from their sexuality group. Suddenly, a new group began to increase in visibility: Gaymers.

While the term “Gaymer” has existed since at least the late 1990s, appearing in academic writings as early as 2006 (Lauteria 2006), it was not until the events of the #GamerGate controversy that individuals identifying as Gaymers began to coalesce into a more formal community. #GamerGate began in 2014 when game developer Zoe Quinn was accused by her ex-boyfriend of sleeping with a reviewer at gamer blog Kotaku in exchange for good reviews of her game, Depression Quest. Although this was quickly disproven, users of the website 4Chan, began circulating a conspiracy theory about how feminists, female gamers, and female gaming scholars were attempting to destroy the gaming industry. Countless women were brutally harassed and sent death and rape threats, as well as having their personal information released online, an act known as doxing. While on the surface #GamerGate was an ugly moment in a fringe culture barely covered by mainstream news, scholars have argued that it had far reaching effects, from the labeling and backlash against people deemed “Social Justice Warriors” which required a reexamination of how scholars study gaming (Chess and Shaw 2015), to laying the groundwork for the rise of the alt-right (Nagle 2017). As Megan Condis notes in her study of gendered gaming, “from the moment that #GamerGate appeared on Twitter’s horizon, the racist wing of the alt-right saw a recruitment opportunity…internet and pop culture-savvy #GamerGaters provided an ideal vehicle for their digital Trojan horses,” (Condis 2018:103).

Evans and Janish (2015) argue that #GamerGate was less about feminism and was actually a response to changes in the gaming industry brought about by the perceived “intrusion” of
marginalized groups, which resulted in a push from the marginalized individuals for more representation.

Prior to the #GamerGate controversy, the gamer identity was stereotypically defined as white, masculine, heterosexual, and male. #GamerGate was positioned in such a way that there were true gamers (those who fit this stereotype) and those who were either trying to be gamers or to destroy gaming (everyone else), who #GamerGaters labeled “feminists”. This positioning creates a surface level binary that would make the conflict appear to be purely anti-woman. The truth is that #GamerGate was a full-blown virtual war within the gaming community, in which all groups against the #GamerGaters began to coalesce and form coalitions in opposition (Evans and Janish 2015). The Gaymer label, once used as a slur in gaming, was rebranded into the label of choice for those who identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community that wanted to assert their identities as true gamers. Like many groups, Gaymers moved from the margins during #GamerGate and began to push for more representation in video games, more abilities to choose queer story lines, more diversity amongst programmers, and acceptance as legitimate members of the gaming community.

As I show in this thesis, the Gaymer label’s use now also extends in the other direction, as many have found it necessary to assert their gaming identity while pushing for their acceptance as legitimate members of the LGBTQ+ community. Many Gaymers have shared their experiences in which they were made to feel unwelcome by other members of the gay community, based around an idea that gaming is not something that gay men are supposed to do.

In thinking about the spaces that Gaymers feel they do not belong, or at least are not welcome, I began to look at what made Houston Gaymers a space in which Gaymers were able to thrive. Considering the primary function of the meet-up is to provide a social space for
Gaymers, it is a good place to start. In this thesis, I also go further, looking at how Gaymers make spaces not specifically aimed at them into spaces of their own.

**Research Questions**

This thesis examines how Gaymer identities are shaped by the interplay of actual and virtual worlds. To help answer my central research question, I also ask the following questions:

- What is the relationship between Gaymers and the rest of the gaming community and the rest of the gay community?
- What elements are conducive to the formation of Gaymer communities?
- In what ways do Gaymers work with or around affordances to assert their identities in virtual spaces? How do Gaymers assert their identity outside of virtual spaces?
- To what degree is representation, either within games as playable characters or within the industry as game producers, important to Gaymers?

**Theoretical Approaches**

*On Culture*

This thesis is not a cultural ethnography. That is to say, I will avoid using any concept of “gamer culture,” “gaymer culture,” or “gay culture,” except in the cases of direct quotation. I present two reasons for this: historic examples where monolithic representation has been problematic, and to avoid creating false boundaries between groups. As discussed earlier, the idea of a monolithic “Gamer Culture” led to a wide variety of groups feeling excluded for not
fitting the “ideal” form and to violence enacted against those groups by those who felt they had an exclusive claim to the gamer identity.

As will be examined in Chapter 3, ideas of a monolithic “gay culture” have been equally as problematic, especially when one considers the various small communities that make up the greater gay community and full spectrum of masculine and feminine presentation present under the gay identity. The concept of there being an authentic or correct way to be gay has caused numerous divisions and arguments over what is a proper form of representation and has led many to feel as if they do not truly belong in the gay community.

All of the problems above apply to the idea of a monolithic “Gaymer culture.” While there are no examples that I am currently aware of, it is more than feasible that as the Gaymer identity matures, what is and is not considered part of “Gaymer culture” could lead to exclusionary discussions over who is and is not a “true” Gaymer. It is important that during this formative period that scholars are not using language that dismisses the differences in backgrounds, gender performance, and play styles of those who claim the identity.

I also do not want to draw false boundaries or create the illusion of a trichotomy. Identifying as a member of the gaming community, Gayming community, or the gay community is in no way mutually exclusive of the others. In fact, as will be discussed in Chapter 1, there is often a fair amount of code switching and the identity being claimed at any given time is generally dependent on situational context. Furthermore, I will show in Chapter 4 that the Gaymer identity has been formed through a blending of practices and performances in both the gamer and Gay communities. As I will demonstrate elements of the Gaymer identity are extending into and shaping aspects of both of the other communities, although to different degrees.
In light of these issues, what this thesis will be is an ethnography of the particular. In her article, “Writing Against Culture,” Lila Abu-Lughod (2014) argues against the use of generalization and towards looking at how individuals actually live the institutions they are part of. As an example, I will not be making generalized statements such as “Gaymers play X type of character,” but rather will be looking at how people’s Gaymer identity influences the decisions they make in character creation, or how the options they are given for character creation influence their identity as a Gaymer. I will also be focusing on how individual Gaymers, both within and outside Houston Gaymers, connect to the gamer community, the Gaymer community, and the gay community, in addition to the way they connect to the games and characters that they play. Abu-Lughod makes the argument that as “anthropologists are increasingly concerned with national and transnational connections of people, cultural forms, media, techniques, and commodities,” these works should include “the shifting groupings, identities, and interactions within and across such borders as well” (2014:393). In this study, the shifting groupings would refer to how individuals situate themselves in various communities and how their identities vary dependent on context, as well as how they interact across the “boundaries” of each group and between actual and virtual worlds.

Play

As video games play an important role in this thesis, I address theories on play and games. Johan Huizinga (1950) presented his theory that almost all play has meaning. His concept of a “magic circle” that creates clear boundaries for where a game begins and ends has often been used by ethnographers of virtual worlds to describe how players incorporate themselves into the game. He also posited that strict forms of order cease to be play and turn it into an
imitation and argued that the demarcation between “true” players and inferior ones, such as professional versus amateur sports, halt the creation of culture. I challenge both of these ideas with my research. Through a synthesis and application of play and cyborg theory, I argue that the permeability and blurring of lines between virtual and actual worlds facilitated by various technologies and the formation of identities such as Gaymers have shown that games now extend far beyond the virtual worlds that contain them, meaning that the magic circle is more elastic than Huizinga and other scholars have acknowledged. Further, I assert that the demarcation between “true” gamers neither caused video games to stop being “play” nor did they stop the creation of culture; rather, they spurred it.

Sociologists Jaakko Stenros, Markus Montola, and Frans Mayra (2007) also argue that the lines bounding the magic circle are becoming increasingly blurred in their paper. They discuss how the gaming generation is now maturing and everything from entertainment to news is taking on more of a game-like quality, in which players are no longer always aware that they are playing, such as trying to determine fact from fiction or being on the receiving end of a prank television show. Additionally, they note how many video games have lost the clear objective of win or lose, and now are far more open ended and longer lasting. Finally, they note that some games are played through a constant shifting between the playful and serious, such as the game Killer. Killer is a game in which players live their daily lives but at any moment can kill or be killed by other players, such as by being poisoned (denoted if they drink vinegar), shot with a water gun, or blown up by an alarm clock representing a time bomb. I build on this work by examining how, like other gamers, Gaymers often move from game to game with their social networks and often refer to each other by their in-game names, or handles, even in actual world settings.
Games and Agency

I incorporate Actor-Network Theory (ANT) into my research as I argue that games and gaming systems have agency when it comes to spurring action, and community building. The basic premise of the theory is that both human and non-human actors exist and that they act upon each other. In ANT, both human and non-human actors are given equal agency (Latour 2005).

I also argue that video games have different meanings to different individuals, primarily based on their own past experiences and individual circumstances. Anthropologists Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol use ANT to discuss a water pump in Zimbabwe. They discuss that the lines between what the pump is and isn’t are not easily defined and that the pump itself does different things depending on its context. It can help build a community, provide water, and be a device for improving health (de Laet and Mol 2000).

Video games can alter people’s perceptions of the world and lead them to sympathize with another group, as evidenced in a study by communications scholar T.J. Lavender (2011). He created a game called “Homeless: it’s no game” and then asked people to play it to determine if the game had any influence on attitudes about the homeless. Everyone was given a survey and then asked either to play the game, read a short story about the homeless, or was part of a control group which either looked at internet articles or watched movies. The survey was then given again immediately following the activity and again seven days later. Individuals who played the game had a higher and longer lasting increase in sympathy towards homeless people than did those in the other groups. Additionally, those who played the game that felt it was a realistic depiction of homelessness reported an increase in their belief that video games are effective at increasing awareness, something not reported in either of the other two groups.
In another example, psychologist Nick Yee (2006) discusses how many gamers view the game as a second job, including that some games actually have player-based industries created within them which are getting closer and closer to real world industries. He notes that the underlying concept of many games is based on behavioral conditioning, in which a specific set of timing and layering of rewards allow for pleasure to be gained from working, ultimately training the player to be a better and more efficient worker. This is similar to how Latour (1992) describes door hinges training people not to manually close doors and warning sounds in cars training people to put on their seatbelt.

Psychologists Scott Rigby and Richard M. Ryan (2011) argue that fun has nothing to do with why video games are popular, rather they satisfy three psychological needs of individuals: Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness. I am most interested in the topic of relatedness, the need to have meaningful connections to others, as the idea of a Gaymer community was facilitated by video games, yet the need was not being met by the rest of the gaming community.

Lisa Nakamura (2008) argues that the freedom of the internet can provide a space for people of color to regain some control of their image; I examine to see whether this is true for Gaymers as well.

Methodologies

In *Coming of Age in Second Life*, anthropologist Tom Boellstorff (2008) makes the case that virtual worlds can be studied like the actual world. Whether it be looking at subgroups within the world or looking at the virtual world as its own social group, he says that the same issues studied in actual world communities can be studied. He also insists that, for this to be done, the virtual world must be looked at as its own community. Using this method, I will
examine each of multiple spaces on its own terms to see how they help facilitate the continuance of Gaymer community. To distinguish between offline and online spaces, I will be using the terminology laid out by Boellstorff, using “virtual” for anything that occurs within online spaces and “actual” for anything occurring in offline spaces. These terms are more effective in communicating differences and crossover between these spaces than terms such as real, offline, and online, because real carries the connotation that everything else is fake, online necessitates that the spaces be connected to the internet (not always the case in gaming), and offline could then be confusing as to whether or not I am discussing a non-internet related virtual spaces or actual world occurrences.

I also build upon the work of Anthropologist Lisa Nakamura (2008), which examined the affordances offered to people of color on the internet in relation to avatar creation, as well as ways in which various websites challenge or enforce racial stereotypes. She looked at the interplay of various websites, movies, chat clients, and games to make her argument that these media do not exist in a vacuum separate from each other, or from actual world histories. I examine the interrelatedness of various media forms, but also add an ethnographic component. As I studied virtual spaces, it was important for me to make note of the histories of not only these spaces themselves but also of other forms of media that may influence their appeal, or lack thereof, to Gaymers.

For my research on events in gaming history, I choose to look at regular chat boards and message boards, rather than search for any event-specific tags or websites. This builds upon work by public relations scholar Daren C. Brabham (2015), who argues that when studying social media, scholars should look less at social media events, and more at the ways people are using social media in their daily lives. This includes what is being posted, how groups exist in
relation to the rest of a social media platform, and that the fact that researchers need to actually talk to people, not just observe what they are doing.

Methods

Although Gaymer is an umbrella term that can include all members of the LGBTQ+ gaming community, in an effort to limit the scope of this project I am focusing my research on English-speaking, cis-gender males who self-identify as gay. I made this choice because covering all Gaymers would be far too broad for the scope of a master’s thesis. Further, I choose to use a capitalized version of Gaymer to refer to individuals who have self-identified as such, for reasons developed further in Chapter 1. I also chose to exclude my partner from my study, although he does identify as a Gaymer and accompanied me to my field site. This choice was made in part to avoid any ethical questions that could arise.

I used several different methods to answer my research questions. In order to learn more about what elements aid in the formation of Gaymer communities, I performed ethnographic research with the Houston Gaymers, while informal interviews there and formal interviews with personal friends helped answer questions about representation and relationships to other communities. Using a combination of autoethnography, research in digital archives, and informal polls in Facebook groups, I was able to build on answers to the previous questions, as well as to examine issues related to affordances and identity performance.

Recognizing that I could be considered an “insider” with this research, I acknowledge that I have my own experiences with homophobia in gaming worlds, and that these experiences have shaped my views and theories as to why the Gaymer community exists and even what a Gaymer is. Keeping this in mind, I have chosen to include my own thoughts, opinions, and
experiences where appropriate, but was careful to only include these in the context of other perspectives from the literature or my contacts, to avoid presenting my biases as fact. On the other hand, I am well versed in the jargon and mechanics of gameplay, so my background likely provided for easier access and a less threatening presence for making contacts and building rapport.

In addition to recoding my observations and journaling my thoughts in my fieldnotes, I also used a voice recording app on my phone while I played video games from June through August 2019. This was done to not only record my own candid comments and reactions, but also to be able to quickly and easily record thoughts while encountering game content that might have been relevant to the study. This served to replace an original part of my research plan, which had been to conduct a more focused autoethnography within the MMORPG, Final Fantasy XIV. Due to the anticipated release of an expansion, many players took a break from the game for the first few months of my project, so it was not an opportune time to conduct this research. When the expansion was released and the players returned, I did not have the funds to purchase the expansion or pay the monthly fee, making it impractical to continue that as a viable option for research. Instead, I played games that I already owned, such as Mortal Kombat 11 and Star Wars: The Old Republic, and free games, such as League of Legends, all of which are social games.

For actual-world ethnography, I conducted two formal interviews within my existing network of Gaymer contacts. These were conducted with Angel_R1ngz, a 21-year-old linguistics student at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and Romeo, a 24-year-old software engineering student at Louisiana State University. These interviews were semi-structured and recorded using a voice recording app on my phone, then transcribed using Nvivo.
I also attended three monthly meet-ups of Houston Gaymers, a community group in Houston, Texas that meets on the last Saturday of each month for gaming nights. The nights I visited were April 27th, June 1st, and September 28th, 2019. The events began at 9 P.M. and lasted until 2 A.M., and I attended for the full event each night. I took field notes using a pen and notebook. The music and crowded nature of the meet-up locations made it nearly impossible to get a useful sound-recording for group conversations and interviews, so I recorded as much as possible by typing elements that particularly stood out to me into the notes section of my phone, which I found less intrusive than pen and paper.

I posted informal polls within two separate groups on Facebook (see Appendix C). The first is called Adult Gaymers. This was chosen because it is a group of over 2000 individuals who have self-identified as Gaymers and are theoretically adults. The other is a group called Geeky Gays, which was chosen because it has over 56,000 members, and because not all individuals participating consider themselves gamers and not all of those who are gamers consider themselves Gaymers. These polls helped me answer my research questions at a broad scale by allowing me to ask about trends in gaming preferences and attitudes. Additionally, as these are two very large groups, the polls also provided me with a bounded space to study, as I observed and engaged in discussion in the comments section on each poll I posted. Finally, these polls allowed me to hone my questions before asking them at my field site, as well as to see how widespread new practices and customs that I encountered at my field site were. While the polls were open to those outside of my selection criteria, I triangulated the data through my other methods and have only included quotes from cis-gendered gay men.

Regarding the naming conventions used in this thesis, both of the Facebook groups have been given pseudonyms, as have all individuals, with a few exceptions: at the request of the
board of directors of Houston Gaymers, I have not changed the name of the organization. Additionally, when board members spoke to me within their official capacity, their names have not been changed as they could easily be identified through the group’s website, Facebook page, and participation in various media. However, they were provided with pseudonyms when speaking to me about their personal thoughts, experiences, and opinions. Additionally, some individuals with whom I was interacting in the actual world preferred that I include them using gamertags, which I have also provided pseudonyms for.

For social media posts and virtual interactions, I have opted to leave quotations intact in an effort to both provide accuracy and to provide a window into how virtual interactions play out. Therefore, I will not be correcting typos, punctuation, or capitalization for these interactions.

**Thesis Structure**

In Chapter 1, I examine pre-#GamerGate issues surrounding gay gamers and Gaymers, which I argue attached a more personal meaning to the Gaymer label, beyond a cute and convenient portmanteau. I begin by examining gaps in academic literature around Gaymers and gay gamers and discuss some ramifications of these omissions. Next, I discuss two important and well-publicized (at least in the gaming world) events that were pivotal in the development of the Gaymer identity, while discussing the historical context in which the identity began to emerge. I then examine the label of Gaymer itself, showing that not all gay gamers identify as or want to be called Gaymers, and that scholars should avoid applying the label to individuals out of convenience. I end the chapter with a discussion of the reasons that current usage of the term Gaymer in gaming scholarship has been problematic, demonstrating how a more unified scholarly definition and usage would be useful.
In Chapter 2, I ask to what degree representation, either within games as playable characters or within the industry as game producers, is important to Gaymers. I open the chapter by examining the current state of the relationship between Gaymers and the gaming community, primarily in virtual spaces. Then, I examine how current and historical cases of representation have been received by Gaymers before examining what may be considered “good” representation.

For Chapter 3, I shift my focus from the virtual world to the actual world, examining the relationship between Gaymers and other members of the gay community. I start by sharing personal narratives from both myself and my contacts that demonstrate ways in which gaming has led to conflict with the mainstream gay community. I then examine how systems of homonormativity, dating apps, and targeted marketing strategies have converged to create a kind of hegemonic homosexuality. Finally, I explore how this hegemonic homosexuality has combined with gay pornographic material to create conflicting sexual scripts, which then form one basis for the exclusion of Gaymers from the rest of the gay community.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how the themes of the previous chapters have interacted to help form the Gaymer identity. I begin with a deeper review of literature about the interplay of virtual and actual worlds, then examine how gay spaces, both actual and virtual, have been repurposed for gamer usage. I also examine how the development of a sexual field has been disrupted in these spaces due to the processes that formed this identity. Finally, I examine how gamer spaces have been transformed for gay purposes, including a look at the usage of modding and in-game Pride events.
Finally, I end with a short conclusion where I discuss larger conclusions from my research, and the implications those hold beyond my thesis. I also examine how my methods aided my research, as well as their limitations.

**Significance**

As technology continues to be connected to more and more aspects of our daily lives, individuals will increasingly turn to technological means to connect and form their own groups. It is important that we understand how these groups are formed and their members connected, as well as what it means to possess an identity that is dependent on the existence of facilitating machinery. In this section, I discuss how this research is important on a broad scale and for the discipline.

First and foremost, I hope this thesis will provide visibility to the Gaymer community, who to date have largely been overlooked or ignored amongst studies of virtual homosexuality, actual homosexuality, and gaming studies. This omission means that they are often not recognized as legitimate members of the gay community, rarely included as a separate community, and are still fighting to be seen as legitimate gamers.

Gaymers will likely not be the last multi-reality identity, straddling the virtual and actual, to emerge in our technological world. The ways in which individuals are shaped by the convergence of the virtual and actual could inevitably lead to new issues regarding class and race, as well as contribute to the further segmentation of our society. Understanding these issues as these processes emerge may allow for prediction of not only underserved members of societies, but future fringe elements in the vein of antifa and the alt-right.
The global video game market is rapidly expanding, in some cases far surpassing expectations. In 2016, The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment (Ukie) estimated a total of $91 billion in global video game sales, which at the time would have made the video game industry the world’s 59th largest economy if it were a country (Muriel and Crawford 2018). At the time, they estimated that the global sales of video games would reach $118 billion in 2019, a number that was already surpassed when global sales reached $137.9 billion in 2018. The largest market is the Asia-Pacific region at $71.4 billion dollars, with the North American market and the European, and Middle Eastern and African markets coming in at $32.7 billion and $28.7 billion respectively. Even the smallest market, Latin America, accounts for $5 billion dollars, and its 13.5% year-over-year growth is the second largest of all regions, only behind Asia Pacific’s 16.8%, with third being North America at 10% (Ukie 2018). Despite this growth in diversity among the global gaming population and efforts to acknowledge that a large number of gamers are female or past their teenage years, the North American gaming community continues to have a problem with a toxic culture directed at individuals who are not white, heterosexual men (Nagle 2017; Evans and Janish 2015; Condis 2018). Women and LGBTQ+ identified individuals also report widespread harassment throughout the other global markets (Reymann-Schneider 2019; Kang 2018).

My research will also enter into current and ongoing discussions within the United States about representation. Since the rise of the #metoo and #oscarssowhite movements, discussion about diversity in the entertainment industry has increased. Some of the issues that have been raised are whether or not putting women in higher positions of power within the film industry is enough to stop systemic sexual assault, whether or not having more diverse actors and film crews matters in changing public attitudes about race, and if either of those solutions would increase
viewer ratings and box office draws. The gaming industry has been embroiled by the #metoo movement as well, with numerous news articles being written about the “broculture” of various developers and gaming groups, and about how for years the main protagonists of games have been straight white males. My research will provide perspectives on how Gaymers feel the gaming industry can become more inclusive.
Chapter 1. Name Your Avatar: Defining Gaymer as an Identity

Though I have been gaming since I was at least six years old and have considered myself a gamer since I was fifteen, the idea of identifying as a Gaymer did not occur to me until roughly around when #GamerGate was taking place, when I was about twenty-five. The term began popping up more frequently in the social games I was playing, no longer as an insult but as a form of self-identification. I remember realizing that this was a community that seemed to fit for me, where other gay subcultures and even at times the gamer community did not. I told one of my straight gamer friends that I now identified as a Gaymer and had found this new community, to which his response was, “Why can’t you just play? What can’t you leave the gay out of it? What does it even matter, it’s just a computer game?” My response was something along the lines of “Well why don’t you leave your straightness out of it instead of me marrying the princess?”

Unknowingly, I had entered into a larger discussion surrounding the place of queer gamers in the gamer community. But what exactly is a Gaymer? In this chapter, I explore how this question has been answered both in the academic literature and by people using the word for themselves and others. I begin by examining studies of virtual worlds and gaming to both build upon prior research and identify the gaps in literature surrounding queer gamers and Gaymers. I also examine how a pattern of studying heterosexual cross-gender play may have helped downplay the existence and importance of queer gamers, an issue that still continues.

Similarly, the terms Gaymer and gay gamer should not be used interchangeably in the way many scholars have, as there are many who do not choose to identify as such and assigning the label to them arbitrarily becomes problematic. I discuss the problems that arise when
researchers assign the Gaymer label to their subjects, rather than allowing them to self-identify. I ground this discussion historically using two cases that were pivotal to the development of the Gaymer identity pre-#GamerGate, particularly in terms of the adoption of Gaymer as an identity label. Both cases were greatly documented and reported on within the gaming world at the time, and include instances of resistance in which gay gamers and Gaymers fought for their very right to openly exist.

The Academic Invisibility of Gay Gamers

Journalist Julian Dibbell’s book, *My Tiny Life*, is an oft-cited source among video game ethnographers, being one of the first journalistic and ethnographic accounts of life in a virtual world. He chronicles his time spent in the text-based Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) *LambdaMOO*, covering virtual issues as diverse as politics, economics, and romance, while simultaneously discussing how playing the game affected his actual world life. He even ventures into questioning whether sexual acts performed in game against the wishes of another player could constitute rape, expressing that in a world where speech is action and people have intense connections to their avatars, the line between crime and free speech is murky (Dibbell 1998).

Despite the wide range of topics covered by Dibbell, one topic he does not cover is that of homosexuality within *LambdaMOO*. This is not due to a lack of data or opportunity. In his chapter on gender, Dibbell begins by discussing how he had made a female persona, Samantha, and wanted to show her off to the first friend that logged in, which happened to be his gay friend, Sebastiano. He notes that he had been meaning to pay this friend a visit as the location in which Sebastiano made his home “had been conceived in part…as a sort of subcommunity for Lambda’s queer contingent, a realm where the sympathetically oriented could build their homes
and fill in a landscape together, and I was curious to see how this experiment in creative
sociogeography was working out,” (Dibbell 1998:126). Ultimately, he becomes too focused on
how he was feeling while inhabiting a female avatar to give us any details about that part of
LambdaMOO and uses the rest of the chapter to discuss straight people experimenting with their
sexuality through cross-gender play. He never revisits the topic of the queer players or queer
community within the game.

In 2000, psychologist Nick Yee began a three-year project to study MMORPG players,
studying everything from demographics to gender, personality, motivation, and addiction. In
2003, he created The Daedalus Project, a website where he could organize and share his
findings, which he did over the course of seven volumes until 2009. Eventually, his research
culminated in the publishing of his 2014 book, The Proteus Paradox. Despite there being an
entire chapter dedicated to issues of gender, including sections about heterosexual males who
gender bend in game, women who feel marginalized in gaming, and how an overabundance of
masculinity reinforces negative stereotypes about female gamers, once again there is almost no
mention of gay gamers.

Again, it seems unlikely that this was due to a lack of data. After conducting surveys and
gathering information from 25,000 different MMORPG players, including data on their
relationship status and who they game with, Yee (2014) was apparently unable to come up with
even a single first-hand account of the experiences of a gay gamer. In fact, the only time a gay
player is addressed in the book is in a single paragraph near the end regarding players who game
for escape and freedom. The account is a second-hand story from a woman about a gay man who
was able to come out in game (although not in real life) after eventually finding other gay
players. Yee then dismisses this story as being “uncommon” (Yee 2014:210).
Several problems arise from the way this story was included. For one, while it is possible that homosexuals who play for escapism from their closeted lives in the actual world may be uncommon, from personal experience, I doubt how true this assertion is. More importantly, this being the only reference to gay players in the book implies that gay players themselves are uncommon. After surveying this many players for a book about the motivations and impact of games on players’ lives both virtual and actual, and given that the project aimed to dispel the myths surrounding players who are female or of various age groups, the lack of inclusion of queer gamers sends a signal that they are unworthy of study. This is particularly true given that events such as those examined in the next section were happening while Yee was conducting his research, research which was in part conducted in World of Warcraft. Finally, like Dibbell, Yee limits his exploration of gender to straight individuals, ignoring the issues that gay gamers were facing for simply daring to exist within these virtual worlds.

Even anthropologists with a portfolio full of queer studies have conspicuously focused little attention on queer players. In 2008, Tom Boellstorff published his book, Coming of Age in Second Life. While his earlier work was focused on male homosexuality in Indonesia, Boellstorff turned his focus toward the virtual for this project. The book offers an introduction to conducting virtual ethnographic fieldwork, introducing theories and methods that could be used to study a virtual world the same way one would study the actual world. Like Dibbell and Yee, Boellstorff covers a wide range of topics, including chapters on personhood and intimacy. Also, like Dibbell and Yee, Boellstorff provides a disproportionately low amount of space to gay gamers, once again not due to a lack of opportunity.

In the chapter on intimacy, Boellstorff follows a lengthy description of straight couples exploring various versions of cybersex within Second Life by noting that not all sexual
relationships were heterosexual and that it only makes sense to talk about cyber homosexual relationships as well. He also notes that “since homosexuality has been the primary focus of my research in Indonesia, I could have written an entire book on queer second life—which, as one resident noted is ‘queer along axes we don’t even have in first life.’ Since this book aims for a more holistic perspective, I here provide only a preliminary analysis,” (Boellstorff 2008:165). What follows are two paragraphs, totaling less than a full page, in which Boellstorff vaguely acknowledges the existence of queer communities in Second Life, that not all queer people in the game participate in those communities, and that sometimes they experience issues from heterosexual “griefers” (trolls). While his reasoning for including only a short overview of homosexuality may seem reasonable at first, it is worth noting that he spends the rest of the intimacy chapter on heterosexual cybersex and romantic relationships, as well as five pages of the personhood chapter on heterosexual players involved in cross-gender play. In this way, his analysis reflects a kind of heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is part of the “holistic” or general and queer is particular.

In the post #GamerGate environment, more books on the topic of gender in gaming have been written, though these, too, often lack queer voices. In 2018, games researcher Megan Condis (2018) published her book Gaming Masculinity. This work provides a look at the toxic culture of masculinity surrounding gaming culture and how this impacted players who were not straight white males before, during, and after #GamerGate. Her book does a great job of examining the many different player bases and how gaming was built around the idea that only straight white males were its core market. She also includes multiple voices of women and stories about how they responded to the misogyny they faced in gaming. Importantly, she also
included a chapter on the issues LGBTQ+ gamers face. Yet, while an improvement from earlier works, she too falls short when it comes to truly sharing their experiences.

Despite the diverse array of viewpoints Condis presents throughout the rest of the book, her chapter on homosexuality includes only two short quotes by LGBTQ+ gamers. Both were from a message board for *Star Wars: The Old Republic (SW:TOR)*, a board in which terms such as gay and lesbian were banned. As the game was still in development, the two individuals were arguing for why they should be allowed to post about these banned topics, as they were hoping that options for same sex relationships would be included in the finished game. After this point however, Condis focuses her chapter on the dialogue between homophobic gamers and game developers as they discuss why issues of queer representation should be left out of gaming. Rather than queer voices, she uses the voices of the dominant group to discuss the struggle of the minorities, essentially pushing them to the background of their own battle, and ultimately portraying the inclusion of these terms on the message board as being the result of beneficent developers rather than the activism of the queer players.

These researchers and their work have done a lot for gaming studies and issues of gender within gaming. Rather than dismiss their contributions, my intention is to draw attention to the relative lack of in-depth analysis of queer gamers. In particular, there appears to be a preference for studying heterosexual cross-gender play (which may or may not involve some form of sexual exploration) over a focus on those looking to express their affirmed homosexual gender and sexual identities, the issues these individuals face, and the meanings they ascribe to the games they play.¹

¹ This preference may be due to some form of exoticism, and the idea of sexual exploration through cross-gender play has recently crossed over into popular culture. In the first episode of the fifth season of Netflix’s popular Sci-Fi anthology series *Black Mirror*, two long time male friends who identify as heterosexual begin an affair in virtual reality when one of them plays as a female character. What follows is a complex and thoughtful examination of
As technology changes and games continue to take on new and more immersive formats, issues of cross gender play will take on new complexities, as will other issues. It will be important for both gaming studies and sexuality studies researchers to explore and examine how these technologies play a part in the exploration of gender. But these studies should not come at the cost of overlooking issues related to queer gender and sexuality expressions.

The inclusion of queer voices in gaming should not be seen as somehow detracting from other forms of gender studies. The inclusion of Sabastiano’s queer community would in no way have been a detriment to Dibbell’s book. For Yee and Boellstorff, the inclusion of queer voices would have added significantly to the holistic approach they were trying to achieve. For Condis, a more complete picture of the dialogue that was taking place would have included more queer voices, which would have also helped give credit for rule changes to those queer individuals who refused to remain silent, rather than to the developers.

In the next section, I shift my attention to those researchers who have taken on the important work of studying gay gamers, with a particular attention to the way in which the term Gaymer has been used. In particular, I problematize the way researchers have not ascribed a self-identified label meaning to it while building towards a useful definition of Gaymer as an identity.

**The First Battles for Recognition**

The term “gaymer” has been in common usage on usenet boards at least as far back as the 1990s (Sheldon 2017). Its usage, however, has been far from consistent. My own first contact with the word was while playing the game *Guild Wars* in 2004. At the time, it was an insult

sexuality as the two realize that they feel extremely fulfilled when having virtual sex, however neither has the same feelings of attraction towards each other in the actual world (Harris 2019). As more of these stories begin showing up in popular culture, future researchers may become more interested in studying this topic as well, further amplifying the apparent bias towards this question.
people would throw around in online games if there was no way to get the word “faggot” through censorship filters. Indeed, to this day three of the six definitions for “Gaymer” on UrbanDictionary.com are insults. #GamerGate helped propel the identity label into the mainstream, as many found this to be an identity they could claim as their own and form a community around. This reclamation transformed gaymer into a transgressive identity label and an act of resistance against the stigma that many gay gamers carry from both gay and gaming communities. Reclamation in this sense is similar, albeit on a smaller scale, to the way members of the LGBTQ+ community have reclaimed the word “queer” into an empowering self-determined identity. It is also similar in that the meaning behind the term will likely not remain static, and even now means different things to different people, as will be examined later in this chapter. Before diving deeper into that discussion, however, I turn first to two pre-#GamerGate cases to provide context for the historical environment in which the identity was formed and adopted.

The first case I highlight does not specifically relate to those identifying as Gaymers, but it does mark a point before popularization of the term when LGBTQ+ gamers fought for their right to exist and play games in the same way as heterosexual gamers. In January 2006, Sara Andrews was playing Blizzard’s World of Warcraft (WoW), using the game’s text chat system to recruit members to her guild, Oz. This was, and remains currently, a common practice in virtually any MMORPG. Suddenly, she received a message from one of the game’s administrators letting her know that if she continued to use the language she was using to promote her guild, she would be banned for violating the prohibition against insulting speech set out in Blizzard’s policy about sexual harassment. What exactly was Andrews saying to recruit
people to Oz that was so offensive? She was advertising that the guild was lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender friendly.

Andrews attempted to appeal the warning, even pointing out that homophobic language was used prolifically within the game and never prosecuted, but the company did not back down on their decision. She took her case to message boards frequented by other WoW players, and the discussion garnered a mostly unfavorable opinion of Blizzard’s actions. Eventually, they relented and emailed Andrews, apologizing that the situation ever took place. They said that they would be sending all of their administrators to get more training on these issues, and eventually set up a separate chat channel specifically for recruiting guilds. In perhaps the most interesting part of their response, they defended themselves for the prior action and, rather than tell Andrews they would look into curbing the homophobic language she described, they let her know that “the policy was designed to keep members of such a guild as Andrews’ from being harassed by other players” (Terdiman 2006) as “information about players' real lives can lead to harassment in the game and its warning was only intended to limit such harassment” (Ward 2006).

The above response suggested that WoW was welcoming to LGBTQ+ gamers, so long as they didn’t talk about it publicly, while heterosexual players were free to discuss whatever they wanted. This was the general unspoken rule of the internet during this timeframe, where users “came to be read as straight white men by default, and reflects a similar logic of inclusion-with-silence to that of the U.S. military’s ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy, which was still in effect during this time. Thus, those who experienced racial or gendered discrimination online were blamed for their own abuse. After all, if they didn’t want to be harassed, they could simply choose to pass as a member of the dominant class” (Condis 2018:8). While WoW has continued
to be filled with homophobic slurs, Andrews’ victory was one of the first times, if not the first, that LGBTQ+ gamers stood up and refused to remain invisible.

The next case was a battle fought over who has the right to use the word “Gaymer.” In 2003, blogger Chris Vizzini founded the website Gaymer.org, a series of message boards in the pre-social networking era in which gay gamers could congregate and discuss topics and issues that mattered to them in a safe place. Gaymer.org may have been forgotten about, like many other early message board sites on the internet, had it not been for several missteps by Vizzini. These would not only bring about the site’s eventual shutdown in 2013, but also forever cement its existence in the history of gayming.

Vizzini’s first mistake came in 2007, when he filed an application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) to trademark the usage of the word “Gaymer.” This set off a series of heated debates on multiple forums over whether or not this was something that should be done (Sliwinski 2007b). Vizzini was granted the trademark in March 2008, after which the debates quieted down and four years passed where it seemed that the trademark would end up not being an issue. Then Vizzini made his second mistake. In August 2012, he sent a cease and desist letter to moderators of the subreddit r/gaymers, alerting them that they were in violation of his trademark holding and demanding that the name of the subreddit be changed. Fearing that their identity was under attack, the Gaymers of reddit fought back. They filed a petition with the USPTO asking them to cancel the registration. They were aided in their fight by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), who represented them pro bono. The petition argued that the term had been in common use for years and that, “for petitioner’s members, many of whom have been politically and/or socially marginalized, the term gaymer represents a community based on a common purpose and activity” (Bonner 2013).
In a post on the subreddit, one moderator wrote a letter to Vizzini, emphasizing the importance of the term to the community and their identities:

Mr. Vizzini, you keep using the word ‘gaymer,’… I do not think it means what you think it means. To the rest of us, it means community. It means pride in our differentness and our small community. It means inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. It means banding together and using a common hobby – games – to unite a sub-set of our community that otherwise has nothing substantive in common. It bridges the gap in the gay community of an arbitrary characteristic with an activity that allows commonality, of purpose and activity. In short, it is the antithesis of a claim of ownership and threats to exclude or demands to capitulate. (Bonner 2013)

On August 22, 2013, a year after the battle began, the EFF sent out a press release stating that Vizzini had decided to surrender the trademark and it had officially been revoked, saying "Gaymer is a term that everyone can use – including Vizzini – and we're pleased that there is no legal question about that now," (EFF 2013). Following the loss of his trademark, Vizzini shut down Gaymer.org, citing that the situation made him feel disconnected from other gay gamers. Throughout the process, he maintained that all he had wanted was for Reddit to change the name of the subreddit, not that he wanted to shut it down.

Although there are undoubtedly more examples of pre-#GamerGate gay gamers fighting for fairness and equality, these stories are rather difficult to find. In fact, I was only able to find these two stories because I had a vague recollection of the events taking place and embarked on several Google searches, which included linking through a few different news articles until I found the initial events. Still, these two stories demonstrate that collective action was being taken by LGBTQ+ gamers before #GamerGate. The r/gaymers example also shows that Gaymer is an identity that people connected with on a deep personal level, to the point of being willing to fight over its usage in court.
Gay Gamer ≠ Gaymer

Because the identity is still emerging, it is difficult to identify who is and is not a Gaymer. A solid definition has yet to be determined in either common usage or within academic works. Often, scholarly studies use the term Gaymer as simply a portmanteau for any individual who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community that also is a gamer, or at least occasionally plays video games,² treating the terms queer gamer or gay gamer as synonymous and interchangeable with Gaymer. There does seem to be some support for this in common usage. Two of the individuals I met at Houston Gaymers meetups expressed this sentiment. Jason, a white, 30-year-old research data coordinator told me that “if you are gay and a gamer then ipso facto you are a Gaymer,” while Reaper, a white, 28-year-old bartender told me that he “just think[s] it’s a cute term.”

After asking both Facebook groups whether all gay gamers were Gaymers or if they needed to self-identify as such, there was a fairly even split in opinion on whether or not all gay gamers were, in fact, Gaymers. What is interesting to note are the margins of this response. In Geeky Gays, roughly 54 percent of the fifty-four respondents felt that all gay gamers are Gaymers, however in the already self-identified group of Adult Gaymers about sixty-seven percent of respondents felt that all gay gamers are Gaymers. This is interesting because it is the group who have self-identified themselves as being Gaymers that have the higher percentage. In the comments left on the Geeky Gays poll, a different conversation played out. While there were some responses in this group that support the idea that Gaymers are just gay gamers, even those provided further insight. One respondent added a degree of usefulness to the label by saying “Gaymer are just gay people who game. It’s use is mainly user online in groups or twitter and

Instagram hastag to find other people who are gaming and just happen to be gay, to game with online.” Despite this respondent saying that the term is a simple label for gay people who game, he further goes on to note how people can choose to use this label to seek out and play games with other people who choose to use the label. I emphasize the choice here because the label would cease to be useful for finding gay gamers who opt not to use it, indicating some element of self-identification for the purposes of group identity and interaction.

Further comments on the Geeky Gays poll demonstrate that not everyone chooses to identify as a Gaymer. One respondent asked, “am I the only one who can’t stand the term ‘gaymer’?” with another stating “my gaming has nothing all to do with being gay. I personally will never be a ‘gaymer’. I always correct people when they call me one.” This second response is an excellent example of the only response on the Adult Gaymers poll in which the respondent stated that they felt “gaymers must self identify as there are a lot of people out there who play videogames but don't identify as a gamer. I also feel it has a lot to do with how you view your sexuality. i.e wether you see your sexuality as part of your personality or not.” The idea that the choice to identify as a Gaymer is dependent on how one sees their gaming and sexuality intersecting, if at all, was also discussed with some of the individuals I spoke with at Houston Gaymers meet-ups. During a conversation with Jacob and Cherry-licious about identifying as a Gaymer, Cherry-licious mentioned that their friend “doesn’t want to be called a Gaymer, because he doesn’t want to be associated with gamer culture.” A similar sentiment was expressed by Will, who said, “I don’t feel like I am a Gaymer, because I don’t think I qualify as a gamer. I like and play games, but might go for months without playing a game, and so I don’t think its fair to people with the dedication and commitment to play at least every other day for me to take that identity from them. But then someone else might have a different definition of “gamer” so they
might call me a Gaymer. It’s subjective I think.” Both of these responses illustrate that there was a calculation on the part of the individual as to whether or not they felt they identified enough as a gamer to be considered a Gaymer.

Although there is still no consensus, there are indications that increased contact between Gaymers outside of games may be shifting attitudes about the idea that Gaymers are self-identified. When I asked my contacts the question about whether all gay gamers are Gaymers, most everyone had a strong opinion either way. Jacob said that, had I asked him a few weeks prior about whether all gay gamers were Gaymers, “I would have said yes, but then when we were at PAX South recently, there was a big Twitch streamer there, who is gay, and he asked why we felt the need to include the Y in our name.” This moment for Jacob changed his view to a recognition that not all gay gamers choose to identify as Gaymers.

During my interview with Angel_R1ngz, he brought up an interesting point about whether or not one must self-identify as a Gaymer. He told me that he thinks “that it’s an identity that somebody takes on. In the gaming community, at least in the games I play, I’ve never seen someone say, like, ‘Oh you’re gay, you must be a Gaymer.’ It’s always those people within that community that self-identify as a Gaymer, so I think it’s an adoption.” From my own experience, this seems to be the case. Other than when the term Gaymer has been thrown around as an insult, generally without actually knowing the sexual identity of the target, no one has ever told me I am a Gaymer or said that due to my sexuality I must be one.

Yet there has been a pattern in scholarship to label all gay gamers as Gaymers, extending back to the first “Gaymer” study. As will be discussed in the next section, and to an extent in Chapters 2 and 3, this method of forced labeling has led to several debates and problems within queer games studies.
The Problematic Conflation of Gay Gamer and Gaymer

In 2006, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign social science student Jason Rockwood conducted what he called “The Gaymer Survey.” This study holds a particular significance in both queer game studies and general game studies, as it is often hailed as the first study of gay gamers with institutional backing (frank 2006). Possibly more importantly, it was also the first academic study of an individual gamer group, as there had yet to be any academic studies around female gamers or gamers identifying as an ethnic minority (Sliwinski 2007a).

After taking a class on videogames, Rockwood realized that gay gamers wanted to know more about each other and saw the opportunity for future studies, but felt that the survey needed to come first, stating that “the main purpose of the survey was to be a census. Before we can ask more intelligent questions we need to know who we are dealing with. First we need to prove that homosexual gamers even exist. Yeah it sounds ridiculous, but that's where you have to start on something like this. This survey is an attempt to quantify the existence of an invisible minority" (Krotoski 2006).

The survey did indeed show that gay gamers existed. The finished product, however, ended up being a survey of gamer sexualities, with respondents selecting their sexuality based on the Kinsey Scale. All of the data was then compiled together, meaning that the results were not broken down by sexuality, other than the one question that asks about it. In other words, all of the responses on gaming opinions are presented as a whole of the participants, so we do not know how each sexuality group responded. This makes calling it the “Gaymer Study” problematic, as it really was a survey of all gamers but has led to other researchers erroneously using the data to discuss only Gaymers and gay gamers. Rockwell’s decision to use the term
Gaymer at all was relatively arbitrary, saying that “I Googled ‘gay video gamers’ and up came Gaymer.org. That's (for me) where the term came from” (Cooper 2007). Rockwell himself had no connection to the term and does not appear to have looked further into how it was being used, rather, he arbitrarily assigned it to all of his respondents that identified as anything other than exclusively heterosexual.

In 2009, Full Sail University game design student Paul Nowak decided to build upon Rockwell’s survey by releasing his “New Gaymer Survey.” He stated that he wanted to conduct this survey because, unlike Rockwood, he had experience in design and had been a gamer for over twenty years, meaning he could focus more on the details of gaming preferences. He felt that his survey would also have the opportunity to dig deeper, saying that “since Jason Rockwood's survey in 2006 was the first of its kind, it got stuck with the burden of proving to the academic community that the gay gaming community even existed. Now that he's been successful at that, we can make a more in-depth study of what exactly gaymers want from their games” (Sliwinski 2009). Again, calling it a “New Gaymer Survey” is a bit misleading, as Nowak also had his respondents place themselves along the Kinsey Scale.

Nowak does improve upon Rockwood’s survey by looking at the gaming preferences of gamers and breaking the results out into their selected Kinsey scale sexualities, providing a more detailed look at responses. That being said, Nowak does not describe who in the survey is considered a gaymer and seems to once again use the term to describe anyone who selected something other than exclusively homosexual. Nowhere in his survey did Nowak actually ask whether or not individuals identified as a gaymer, or how they identified in general (Nowak 2010).
Beyond the issue of somewhat muddy statistical results by lumping all non-heterosexual players into one category, the arbitrary assignment of gaymer to any LGBTQ+ gamer has led to several misconceptions and academic debates over usage of the label. In 2007, game design student Blair Cooper (2007) wrote an article arguing against the usage of gaymer in academia. He begins by stating that gay is not only not an all-inclusive term but also that it creates a binary between gay and straight. He argues that assigning this term to those who identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community other than gay may not be appreciated and has the potential to be exclusionary.

Cooper draws upon the work of gender theorist Judith Butler (2004), arguing that the placement of gay before gamer, and by extension the word gaymer, implies that they are somehow less than heterosexual gamers. The gay in front of gamer does make Gaymers a marked category. However, absent from this argument is a recognition that the gamer behind gay also makes Gaymers a marked category in the gay community. As I discuss throughout this thesis, adoption of the Gaymer identity is often an acknowledgement of a position that does not fit in with either group and an effort to form community around that recognition. Again, there is an element of choice in taking on the label that should not be overlooked.

Finally, he uses the following part of Rockwood’s survey to note that there are people who do not like the term:

“The term ‘gaymer’ is often used to describe gay and lesbian video gamers. What are your feelings about this term?”

Very Positive: 06.5%
Generally Positive: 13.0%
Neutral: 39.1%
Generally Negative: 17.6%
Very Negative: 11.1%
Unsure: 12.7% (Cooper 2007)
Due to the fact that results are not broken into how they responded about their sexuality, it is entirely possible that those who had a negative response to the term gaymer were part of the exclusively heterosexual demographic, unhappy with the thought that homosexuals were encroaching on their territory. Simply put, these results do not demonstrate anything about how gay gamers feel because we cannot discern which of the responses are actually coming from gay gamers. Certainly, there are those in the study who have positive views of it as well, and those individuals may be those who actually identify as gaymers.

Cooper’s ultimate conclusion is that because some people may like the term, gaymer can be used but should be placed in quotes so that the author “can take advantage of its positive qualities while informing the reader that she acknowledges the word’s imperfections” (Cooper 2007). Yet this argument is the one that seems most problematic to me. Indeed, often times in the same articles that conflate gay gamer with gaymer, you will see the term written either in quotes or as ga(y)mer. There is a danger in this method. The jarring insertion of (y) into the middle of gamer gives the impression that it does not belong there. Further, when dealing with a historically exclusionary identity such as gamers, the use of “gaymer” can signal the ironic usage of quotation marks, stripping the word of its legitimacy.

On a broad level, Cooper’s assessment that gaymer is a problematic term was confirmed by my research, but only when assigned to individuals by others. However, my results differ in the idea that allowing others to self-identify as such holds the same problem. To begin with, while those who identify as something other than gay may not appreciate having the label assigned to them, the label of gaymer is in and of itself not exclusionary to those who choose to adopt it. As one Facebook respondent said “I'm bi and identify as a gaymer. To my knowledge and from my experience, despite it having the word gay in it, gaymer is seen as an umbrella term
that includes both gay and bi gamers. Which is a good thing because bimer doesn't really work.”

Several members of the Houston Gaymers board also told me that whenever they are questioned on whether their events are “gay” events, they try to make it clear that they are for everyone.

In addition to the continued conflation of queer gamers with gaymers, researchers also have had a tendency to create a hegemonic view of Gaymers, assuming they all have similar backgrounds and want the same things from gaming (Shaw 2009; Shaw 2012). Rather, researchers should acknowledge that the Gaymer community is vast and diverse, both in terms of personal identity and in terms of what they want. Additionally, it is impossible for anyone to study Gaymers. It should be acknowledged by researchers that their research is being conducted either through the study of individual Gaymers or the study of a Gaymer community or communities, lower case C. This will be the framework that I operate within for the rest of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter established that Gaymer is more than just a label and examined how the topic has been studied in the past in an effort to provide a foundational background for the rest of this thesis. Long before #GamerGate, queer gamers and Gaymers were fighting not only for their right to be open and included within games and in discussions surrounding games on message boards, but also for their right to identify as Gaymers without fear of copyright infringement. While these stories are often left out of queer games studies, they show the very real and meaningful connections people have to the Gaymer identity and to being allowed to express their sexuality openly within a virtual world. By not recognizing this past, it becomes easier for
researchers to arbitrarily label their subjects as Gaymers, without considering whether this is how they identify themselves.

There also exists a large gap in the literature, in which researchers who have conducted large scale studies of virtual worlds have made the choice to leave out queer gamers, often in favor of studying cross-gender play among heterosexual gamers. The result is a perception that queer gamers are less important, or even that they are somewhat of an anomaly. Additionally, there are most likely many queer stories, including those of Gaymers, from the formative years of virtual worlds that are lost to history now, which could have helped shed light on how the identity has come to be more than just a word.

While common usage is still split over whether or not all gay gamers are Gaymers, my research demonstrates that not everyone identifies with the term, and in fact some people are extremely opposed to having the term applied to them. Furthermore, the past conflation of gay gamers and Gaymers has led to misleading and murky results. In the future, these issues may be avoided if researchers are more conscious of their decision to use the term Gaymer, using it only for those who have self-identified as such and with care not to paint them as a homogenous group.

Those who choose the Gaymer label for themselves sometimes have strong reasons for doing so, which I examine in the following chapters. To emphasize the importance of the Gaymer identity to some individuals, I end this chapter with a quote. On a post by user nUbzd3l3t3, r/gaymers moderator ozuri provided a paragraph-by-paragraph reply to the farewell note Chris Vizzini posted when he shut down Gaymer.org. Under the paragraph in which Vizzini insisted that all he wanted was for Reddit to change the name, ozuri responded with “Reddit
didn't create this community, its community did. And asking them to change our names is, in part, to ask us to change our identity” (nUbd313t3 2013).
Chapter 2. Insert 1 Token to Play: Queer Representation and Affordances in Game

The Mortal Kombat series of fighting games has been a major part of my life as a gamer, having played every game in the series starting at least as far back as 1994, when I was around seven years old. Over the years, the game has been a bonding device with my male cousins and countless friends. Like any good fanboy, I had pre-bought a copy of Mortal Kombat X before its release in 2015. The day it was released, I had the day off of work. I got up early, drove to my local GameStop, picked up my copy, and raced home to play. I knew very little of what was in the latest edition of the series, other than that it was a Mortal Kombat game and would be introducing us to several children of the original characters. After playing a few practice rounds, I dove into the story mode. The story mode is comprised of twelve chapters, each chapter centering around a different character and consisting of four battles.

As I began the fourth chapter, I assumed the role of Kung Jin, the newly introduced younger cousin of Mortal Kombat regular, Kung Lao. He came across as a typical tough guy with a chip on his shoulder, tired of being expected to live up to both his ancestors and his cousin. The third section of Kung Jin’s chapter takes place in a flashback set five years prior. Kung Jin is making his living as a thief and is attempting to steal treasure from the thunder god Raiden, another series regular. Raiden catches him in the act and a fight ensues. Upon being defeated by Kung Jin, Raiden is impressed with his fighting abilities and the following dialogue takes place:

Raiden: Join the Shaolin.
Kung Jin: I can’t. They won’t accept…
Raiden: They care only about what is in your heart, not whom your heart desires
(Boon 2015)
When I read this dialogue, my jaw dropped. Surely, I was misinterpreting this.

This game is clearly targeted at the stereotypical male gamer, with its manly men and women in skimpy clothing, and its violence and gore so graphic that it played a major role in the development of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) by the United States Government in 1994 (Crossley 2014). Did they really just casually introduce a gay character, I wondered, one devoid of all the stereotypes and tropes that usually accompany them in media representations? Other people had noticed too. The theory grew and began spreading across the internet, especially after the discovery of another set of dialogue which takes place in non-story mode battles. In these, when Kung Jin is matched against the character Tanya, she begins the pre-match dialogue by excitedly exclaiming that he is a cute Shaolin, to which Kung Jin replies “you’re barking up the wrong tree, sister” (Boon 2015). By the end of launch day, the story and voiceover director for Mortal Kombat X, Dominic Cianciolo, confirmed that Kung Jin was indeed gay by tweeting “I see people are picking up on the subtle exposition contained in Kung Jin’s flashback. Glad we have observant fans!” (Cianciolo 2015).

I was ecstatic! This was the first time I had ever felt represented by a video game character outside of an RPG, and the only one in a game series that spanned my entire life from the earliest stages of my gaming. While I had liked Kung Jin before, he quickly moved into the spot of my favorite Mortal Kombat character. Others were equally excited and were praising not only the inclusion of a gay male character, but also the way in which he was depicted. Comments on Cianciolo’s original post include: “SOOO happy about this! Thanks very much for including a character I can finally relate to! Minus the kombat part lol,” “This is awesome! Something like this gives me the warm fuzzies! (^-^) And subtly and tastefully handed too! :D,” and “Thank you for this. It was a wonderful surprise.” IGN News, a major platform for gaming news, posted a
YouTube video about the announcement, with reporter Luke Karmali stating that “subtlety in writing should always be praised, and it’s more representative of real LGBT people. Sexuality is a spectrum and should be depicted as such, avoiding the pitfalls of stereotypes” (Karmali 2015).

Predictably, less supportive comments also began to appear on both Cianciolo’s tweet and IGN’s video. “Couldn't it be erron black??? Cuz Kung Jin is awesome :()”, “That's messed up. And it's in a MK game, no that's not cool,” and “THAT SUCK THEY MADE KUNG JIN A FAG,” are just a few of the replies to Cianciolo’s tweet. IGN’s news report currently has 404 dislikes and 964 likes, meaning negative sentiments account for about 30 percent of its overall ratings. The page also contains a wide range of negative comments, from tame complaints such as “I'm not picking him no more,” “This kinds ruined the game for me,” and “wel...not buying the game, is not going to happen,” to more sexually motivated comments such as “FagJin,” “They should show some x-rays of him reaming his boyfriend,” and “I wonder who will catch HIV from him first,” to apparent glee at being given the opportunity to kill a homosexual man such as “He will be the least played, most murdered character,” and “Even more incentive to learn your fatalities and use them on him. Lovely” (Karmali 2015).

Given the praise Netherrealm Studios had received for Kung Jin, he was conspicuously absent from Mortal Kombat 11 when it launched on April 23rd, 2019. He is referenced in a few pre-match dialogues, however his absence from the story and game go unexplained, surprising because he was one of the four characters at the center of the story in the previous game. Kung Jin’s presence is not the only conspicuous absence; there has also been virtually no discussion about his absence online since the launch of the game. Despite all of the praise and vitriol that arose out of his original inclusion, both sides have been silent now that he is gone.
This case illustrates an attempt by the gaming industry to become more inclusive, while also showing ways in which the gaming community reacts. It also demonstrates that the environment immediately following #GamerGate was still one in which LGBTQ+ gamers faced hostile exclusion. But what does the silence around Kung Jin’s absence four years later tell us about how the relationship between Gaymers and the gaming community have changed? What can it tell us about Gaymer attitudes towards representation?

In this chapter, I begin by examining the current state of the relationship between Gaymers and the gaming community. This includes examples of both in-game relationships and message board activity as examples of broader dynamics. Then, I examine Gaymer attitudes towards representation, including the roles that affordances and queer reading can play in creating good representation. Overall, the relationship between Gaymers and the rest of the gaming community is still strained, but there are signs of progress.

**Exclusion of Gaymers and Gay Gamers from Gaming Communities**

Gender-based exclusion in the gaming community goes back to at least the beginning of the modern gaming era, in part due to a lack of understanding surrounding player demographics. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was assumed that girls were not playing video games because those with Barbie themes, shopping themes, or other traditional “girl” things did not sell well. In reality, these games were just poorly made and girls were playing the same games as boys (Condis 2018). A similar phenomenon took place after the rise of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). For years it was believed that few to no women were playing these games, such as *World of Warcraft*, and that anyone playing a female character was in fact male. The truth was, women were playing the games but selecting male avatars to avoid
the sexual harassment that came from playing as a female (Yee 2014). It was not until roughly the era of #GamerGate that both the industry and scholars began to take note of the toxic culture in gaming and how diverse the player community actually was. Even then, it would take years before major companies would address the issue.

In May 2019, Microsoft’s head of Xbox, Phil Spencer, wrote an op-ed regarding his initiative to crack down on the amount of toxicity in the Xbox Community. His statement was one of the first put forward by a major game developer alerting the world that a change in gaming towards inclusivity is needed. He stated:

If you imagine gamers as predominantly men and specifically teen boys, think again…We are a 2.6 billion-person strong community of parents playing with our kids, adventurers exploring worlds together, teachers making math wondrous, grandmothers learning about their grandchildren through play, and soldiers connecting with their folks back home. Most gamers today are adults; nearly half are women. (Dedmon 2019)

An interesting note here, however, is that even while he states that the community needs to be more inclusive, he makes no mention of non-heterosexual players, racial minorities, or any other form of human diversity beyond age and binary gender. Even in a high-level call for unity in the gaming community, minorities were left out. This could be forgiven, if it was not within a community in which straight and white is still considered the default player unless noted otherwise, an assumption which contributes to discrimination (Condis 2018) and allows for serious missteps on the part of developers, which I will explore more in-depth in the next section.

In addition to calls for diversity that do not actually mention diversity, there are other elements that make one wonder how genuine these statements for unity or apolitical gaming actually are. During an interview on CNBC in November 2019, CEO of Activision Blizzard, Bobby Kotick, touted the fact that more than half the players of their games were women and that diversity was increasing through expansion into other global markets. He was then asked
about whether or not companies should be involved in political matters and gave the following response:

Well, you start with, our mission as a company is “Bringing the World Together Through Epic Entertainment.” You know, that’s a big mission. It has some similarities to, let’s say, a Facebook. But, you know, we’re not the operator of the world’s town halls. We’re the operator of the communities that allow you to have fun through the lens of a video game. And you know, I -- my responsibility is to make sure that our communities feel safe, secure, comfortable and satisfied and entertained. And so I don’t -- I don’t -- that doesn’t convey to me the right to have a platform for a lot of political views, I don’t think. (Kotick 2019)

This statement is ironic, as anyone who even remotely follows video game news would have to wonder whether Kotick was unaware of activity within his own company.

Less than one month before Kotick’s interview, Activision Blizzard was in the midst of two scandals. The first was when the company suspended a competitor from future matches of their Hearthstone tournament and rescinded his previous winnings after he sent a message of support to Hong Kong protestors in a post-win interview. This sparked massive protests and calls for a boycott within the global gaming community. Less publicized was an event that points to a longer history of oppressive behavior by Blizzard. In a similar case to that of Sarah Andrews, discussed in Chapter 1, another LGBTQ+ guild found themselves being punished, apparently simply for existing.

On October 11, 2019 (coincidentally also National Coming Out Day), the creator of GAY BOYS, a WoW-based guild, logged in to discover that his account had been temporarily suspended and the guilds name had been changed to “Guild ZFXPK.” The reason given was that this was the result of a thorough investigation after his guild name was reported repeatedly by players who found it offensive. Members of the guild questioned how thorough the investigation really was and one member released the following statement:
If you reviewed my chat logs, you would see multiple messages from individuals through my recruitment process of getting us to where we are today, with individuals messaging "Fuck the gays, reported," amongst other extremely hateful and discriminating comments... These are the individuals that find our name inappropriate. Giving in to their demands only means that you are siding with them as a company, which, after a decade of playing your games, is a surprise to me. To say there is anything inappropriate about the words GAY or BOYS is, in and of itself, inappropriate, childish, and discriminatory. (Machkovech 2019)

Eight hours later, the account suspension was overturned and the guild name restored, but not without a warning that it could happen again because “there isn't a way to stop people from reporting this name, as some find the way the term is used offensive. If you get actioned again, you can appeal like this, and we can look at it once more” (Machkovech 2019). Further investigation by the science and technology news site arsTechnica revealed that this was not the first time a WoW guild named “GAY BOYS” had been given a forced name change. In 2016, a different guild by the same name posted in a Blizzard forum asking why it had been changed. They were first chastised for disputing the name change in a public forum and told by a forum moderator that “picking a name that you can identify with without also using words that would illicit a reaction from other players would be far more beneficial” (Machkovech 2019). The message in both responses is clear: even almost fifteen years after the Andrews case, any discrimination LGBTQ+ players may face is their own fault for being open.

This reality of being openly non-heterosexual in gaming spaces is neither unique to World of Warcraft nor a secret to LGBTQ+ gamers. In a post to the website, Medium, transgender gamer BFoundAPen describes their experience participating in spaces meant for public discussion amongst gamers:

Madden is paused on my TV as I’m typing this. However, I don’t feel comfortable in the gaming community at all. I watch gaming streams, but I don’t talk much in the chats. I read the forums about games I’m interested in, but I don’t post in them. I share screenshots of my gaming experiences, but I don’t reveal that I’m transgender on my gaming Instagram. I did post a pro–LGBTQ picture one time,
and I got so much negative backlash that I decided not to do it anymore. 
(BFoundAPen 2018)

Much like in other spaces of their lives, gamers who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community have to weigh their safety in deciding whether or not to ‘come out’ in certain situations.

Gaymers are no exception. Upon asking several of my contacts whether they make posts and participate in discussion in forums, I received very similar answers across the board. Myriad, a 31-year-old, self-described “redneck-Asian” who attends the Houston Gaymers meet-ups, told me that he rarely posts in forums about LGBTQ+ issues in gaming because “it isn’t safe. Other issues are fine but broadcasting that you are a Gaymer can open you up to all kinds of hate, and I would rather just avoid that.” Reaper, a white 34-year-old Houston Gaymers attendee, and Angel_Ringz, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, both stated they post as Gaymers on LGBTQ+ issues “only when [they] know it’s safe.” In other words, Gaymers still feel they are unwelcome in many parts of the gaming world.

While further research into actual-world interactions between Gaymers and straight gamers is needed, my research does suggest there are issues of exclusion at conventions as well. Jeff, one of the board members at Houston Gaymers, told me that when they had first approached the organizers of the Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) South 2019 about creating a diversity lounge so that LGBTQ+ gamers had a safe space, they received pushback. The organizers felt that the event was already diverse and already safe, simply by nature of advertising that the event is for everyone. Eventually, PAX organizers allowed Houston Gaymers to host the diversity lounge, which was so successful they were invited back and received prominent billing in the event program for 2020. This indicates both that there was a perceived need for a safe space like this, as well as that the industry may not be aware of the hostility Gaymers continue to face.
More than five years after the end of #GamerGate, many Gaymers and LGBTQ+ gamers still report feeling shutout by gaming communities. Further, and more importantly, they describe particular areas of the gaming community as being unsafe. This feeling extends beyond in-game interactions into message boards and actual world spaces. It would not appear that much progress has been made, despite public initiatives to make gaming more inclusive. As representation is often posed as a solution to these problems, I next examine the current state of LGBTQ+ representation within gaming and how Gaymers feel about it.

**Gaymer Attitudes on Representation**

While there appears have been an increase in LGBTQ+ representation in gaming, that does not seem to have changed the environment for Gaymers much. This seems to contradict those who say that representation in media (Andersen 2016; Hall-Stigerts 2017; Wilson 2019) or by writers of media (Davis 2017) is a key step in ending exclusion. Social Psychologists Catherin Happer and Greg Philo (2013) found in a study that inclusion of minorities and the way they are depicted can shape public perception, while seeing someone like oneself positively depicted in media can increase self-esteem (Nagayama Hall 2018). All of this would depend on several factors of course, among which are whether the minority group wants the representation, and whether the representation they get is actually “good” in terms that are meaningful to them. In this section, I examine how important representation is to Gaymers and what they would consider “good” representation.

After the silence surrounding the exclusion of Kung Jin from *Mortal Kombat 11*, one could get the impression that representation is not that important to Gaymers. Shaw (2014) concluded in her study that queer people who play games were not particularly concerned with
identifying with video game characters, nor did they think that sexuality was necessarily important for video game diversity. However, it is important to note that Shaw’s fieldwork was conducted pre-#GamerGate, as later research conducted during and after, such as that by Evans and Janish (2015), demonstrated that sexual minorities were pushing for more representation in gaming. Additionally, Shaw noted that she “focused on play that was not primarily social and players that did not necessarily identify as gamers” (Shaw 2014:15).

In contrast, my research with players who do identify as gamers and who either play social games, or at least play games socially, suggests that many Gaymers do want to be represented. This became very evident during my interactions within the two Facebook groups I engaged with. When asked if he would be more likely to purchase a game with gay representation over one without, one respondent on the Adult Gaymers blog stated that “a game with gay character options gets extra consideration for that reason alone; it can be the difference between passing on a game or giving it a try,” while one of the respondents in Geeky Gays said that “it is not a defining factor for me, but I would be more likely to buy it if it has representation.” In fact, almost all the individuals I spoke to said they wanted to see more LGBTQ+ representation in games, although what that representation meant was different to each individual.

My research also indicated that the genre of a game may have an impact on the degree to which representation matters. A respondent on Geeky Gays noted that his desire for representation was stronger in some genres than others expressing that, “with games where romance is a large factor, I'd prefer playing a guy if it allowed me to chase one too - but with your typical FPS [First Person Shooter] or story-based game where you're not playing someone very customisable (sorry Link) it doesn't really matter to me.” Certainly, Mortal Kombat would
fall into the category of games in which romance is not a large factor and the characters are not very customizable beyond various cosmetic clothing and weapon choices, and yet some Gaymers do have strong connections with characters in these games.

At one of the Houston Gaymers events where people were playing the 1995 *Super Nintendo* version of *Mortal Kombat 3*, one attendee, Tyrell, discussed with me his feelings about Kung Jin’s absence.

**K:** So, you said you have played all the *Mortal Kombat* games?

**T:** Yeah, it’s been one of my favorite fighting games most of my life.

**K:** How did you feel about Kung Jin being gone from the new game?

**T:** Honestly, I think his inclusion in the first place was nothing more than pandering. Straight up pandering. It’s really been disappointing that he’s gone and I feel like they only included him because they wanted my money, but they would have had it anyway, so now I feel kind of betrayed and that they don’t see me the same as other gamers. It makes me think twice if I want to continue with any of their games until they fix this.

Tyrell’s answer emphasizes a point that Gaymers do not, in general, want to feel like they are being set apart from other gamers or that they are being pandered to. In my interview with Angel_R1ngz, he pointed out that this is the exact opposite of what he wants in a game, saying that “if it felt forced like you just put a gay character in there to have the stereotypical trope of putting a gay character in there, I probably wouldn’t [be more likely to play]. That’s like marketing to the trope.” Reaper, too, stated that “it can’t feel like they are doing it for the sake of doing it. It needs to make sense to the story and not be forced.” The unfortunate reality is that it is often difficult to determine whether the inclusion of a character is pandering. Tyrell liked Kung Jin’s inclusion and it was not until the character was excluded that he felt it had ever been pandering. By that point, he already felt betrayed, that a game series (and the developers behind it) that he had played almost his entire life had broken his trust and had left him disappointed.
Equally difficult is knowing whether a character feels forced without playing a game for oneself. Jacob expressed his frustration with the disappointment he felt with a recent game, and with how some games are both received and reported on:

**J:** *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* is a good example of a company saying what great LGBTQ representation they have and then it turns out really disappointing.

**K:** I haven’t had a chance to play it yet. I heard it had gay options though.

**J:** It does but it doesn’t. Girls have an okay amount of options. Guys don’t though. You only get three choices for romancing a male character. One is someone you flirt with while he is your student, so that’s problematic, but then there’s a time jump and he just wants to be friends. Another one ends up with a family after the time jump and wants nothing to do with you. So, you really only end up having one option at the end.³

**K:** That sucks. So, was it just the company saying it was great representation or did you hear that in other places too?

**J:** See, that’s the thing. It was also blogs and gaming magazines. So, to me, it feels a bit like early 2000s gay cinema.

**K:** How so?

**J:** Well, take *Brokeback Mountain* for example. At the time it came out, everyone talked about how great it was for gay representation and all these gay groups were praising it. I even liked it then. But watching now, now that we have actual good representation in mainstream films, the movie is shit. It’s terrible. These two guys can’t come out, so they sneak off to fuck in a tent every now and then, and in the process they ruin their families’ lives and make questionable choices about their own and in the end its all for nothing because one of them dies. That’s a terrible story and its horrible representation. But at the time we were all just desperate and craving for any kind of mainstream representation at all, so no matter what it was we were going to praise it. That’s where I feel games are at right now.

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³ Since this interview, I have had a chance to play a little of the game. Although not clear in the conversation, Jacob is referring to three different characters. The first is the one that is your student (the one you can end up with at the end), then the one after the time jump is a different character, and the third is the one that has a family. It is important to note that most relationships in the game, straight or gay, begin while one person is a student, but do not really take on a romantic twist until after the time jump. The gay male relationship is unique, however, because it involves very overt flirtation before the time jump and this student/teacher relationship is the only one that is successful.
What Jacob is expressing is how difficult it is to trust even other Gaymers in their reviews and recommendations, because when there are so few examples of representation, any representation may be perceived as “good”. This includes representation that may be problematic or send problematic messages to those outside of the gay community, such as that homosexuals ruin families or that the only successful relationships they have are with those who they recruit at a young age (implying pedophilia).

These “disappointing” developments in games are unfortunately not isolated incidents, or even outside of the norm. On December 4th, 2018, developer Ubisoft released the first expansion (a continuation of the story that can be purchased after the game has been released) for *Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey*. Prior to the expansion, players were able enter into multiple same-sex relationships if they chose to do so. The ending to the second story arc of the expansion changed that. Players were forced into a heterosexual relationship in order to continue the game, after which they earned an achievement called “Growing Up.” Intended or not, the name of the achievement implied that anyone who did not want to enter into this relationship was either a child or going through a phase, something that is often leveled at young adults as they begin coming out of the closet.

The examples of *Mortal Kombat, Assassins Creed*, and *Fire Emblem* make good examples of efforts that started out well with regards to representation, but eventually missed the mark, even becoming examples of what not to do when trying to make games more inclusive. The result of these situations was Gaymers feeling like they were somehow duped, or that gaming companies were less than genuine and added the gay options in an attempt to stave off criticism of exclusion without real engagement with the LGBTQ+ community.
Strategies for Queering Games

So, what exactly does “good representation” mean to these Gaymers? Theoretical tools from science and technology studies, including affordances, can help us understand different viewpoints and strategies that Gaymers employ to feel included. Coined by psychologist James J. Gibson, affordances are what the environment “offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” which “have to be measured relative to the animal” (Gibson 1986:127). Translated into discussion about virtual spaces, one could think of it as what one can do given the constraints of the coding, whether or not it is what was originally intended by the coder. Here, too, the affordances are relative to the user. Consider the example of a Role-Playing Game (RPG) in which players have the option to play as either male or female and are able to enter into romantic situations with non-playable characters (NPCs) of the opposite sex from the one which the player chooses. In this example, those who identify as heterosexual in the actual world are granted the affordance of playing a character and pursuing romantic interests that match their sexual identities. Those who identify as homosexual are not granted this affordance. While it may seem an overly simplistic and basic example, it is a situation that Gaymers commonly encounter.

In our interview, Angel_R1ngz told me that in games involving romance where he can pick his gender, he will almost always pick a female “just because a female will probably have the other protagonists or the antagonist be more aligned with how I feel, so if I choose a female character my love interest will be a male which then makes me feel closer to the character than if I chose a man or a male character who had a female love interest.” What is clear in this example is that he is not choosing to play a female character because he necessarily identifies with one,
rather he chooses female characters because he does not identify with the default-heterosexual male option.

When discussing the idea of representation in games, Will, a 22-year-old man of mixed black and white heritage, told me that “I like when it’s there, but at the same time I feel like representation of people of color and women is more important. You can always play a straight character and pretend that they are secretly gay, but you can’t pretend a character is black or a woman.” One of the respondents on a Geeky Gays poll offered up a similar tactic for queer reading when the option is not overtly available:

Sometimes, if the game offers ambiguity, I play it through a queerer lens. The representation is nice -- better if it intersects with other aspects of identity that doesn't always fall into white, cis male, gay character. games that provide you a main character where you can fill in their personality traits (think Elder Scrolls, Final Fantasy XIV, Pokemon, The Sims). For me, it's nice having an avatar that I can fill in the blanks and acknowledge and interact with players or NPCs with the mindset that I am not straight, but I have my own sexual preferences. But I think even having characters/storylines that acknowledge or mention more (positive) queer representation is also nice (the Borderlands series does good work with this).

I now provide one final example of a game to show how an increase in affordances through ambiguity can work, in fact, it is one of the games mentioned by the previous individual. Final Fantasy XIV (FF14) is an MMORPG set in the world of Eorzea. Players are able to choose from a variety of species, genders, and races when creating their characters, which are then further customizable through facial features, body types, and hair styles. The game has developed a very large and healthy LGBTQ+ community, in part due to the affordances it offers players. While there are no romantic story line options for players, they are able to get married in “bonding” ceremonies. These ceremonies take place between two players, and same-sex bonding is not only permitted, but frequent. This leaves the rest of the gameplay open to being played
through a queer lens, as the respondent above put it, with no need to choose specific paths or shut out romance options.

Like all MMORPG’s, FF14 hosts players on multiple different servers, spaces created to separate the millions of players into smaller groups to reduce pressure on the backend systems and provide a smoother gaming experience. Beyond relationships, FF14 offers players the ability to dye and customize their armor. In one of the game’s unofficially gay servers, I observed multiple players wearing rainbow colored armor, dying each piece a different color to represent their identity as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, there are numerous LGBTQ+-centric guilds, which, after joining, allow players to add tags to the end of their name such as [LGBT] or [gayz]. The Final Fantasy development team’s support of the LGBTQ+ community has also extended beyond the game. In March 2019, FF14 became the first video game to have a float in a gay pride parade, when they worked with Sydney Gaymers and marched in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade (Duffy 2019). In these ways, FF14 creates not only an inclusive environment, it allows players to be who they are and play their characters in a way that is true to their actual world selves.

Conclusion

As the video game industry continues to grow and become more integrated into society, there will be a growing need for games to become more inclusive to minorities. The Gayming community continues to be one which finds itself shut out, despite public statements by gaming

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4 Like all MMORPG’s, FF14 hosts players on multiple different servers, spaces created to separate the millions of players into smaller groups to reduce pressure on the backend systems and provide a smoother gaming experience. Many server-based games end up with a server that gay players tend to congregate in. FF14 has two, each claiming to be the gay server. The one I chose to visit, somewhat appropriately named Faerie, is the one many at Houston Gaymers and on my own server often refer to as being the actual gay server. An opportunity for future research exists in what makes a server the best for a gay community.
companies about diversity or apolitical frameworks. A toxic culture of harassment and abuse leads Gaymers to feel unsafe within games, while posting on message boards, and possibly even at gaming conventions and events.

While representation does seem important to many Gaymers, the gaming industry does not yet appear to able to provide much positive LGBTQ+ specific representation, so one of the best ways to increase inclusivity for Gaymers is to provide them with as much ambiguity and flexibility as possible in games. This includes not limiting what NPCs can be romanced by gender, leaving romance options open and player based, and including other options for self-expression such as armor modification and guild tags. While I recognize that the ability to have all of these aspects is dependent on genre, even small inclusions go a long way to help. For instance, the recently released *Gears of War 5* allows players to fly banners behind their avatar pictures, among which are 19 different LGBTQ+ pride flags. Maximizing the flexibility of built-in affordances and allowing players to read their characters however they want creates a better playing environment for all, and also helps to avoid the missteps of the past.
Chapter 3. Player Vs. (Non)Player: How Hegemonic Homosexuality Excludes Gaymers

My second night of work with Houston Gaymers was on June 1st, 2019, was a special event meet-up, as the group was celebrating its tenth anniversary. Rather than the normal space at Guava Lamp, the meet-up was held at a larger event space the group had rented for the night. The building appeared to have been a garage or warehouse originally, with one large room and two smaller rooms off to the side. Despite the difference in venue, the overall layout remained the same, with games arranged around the outer walls. Although the building was air conditioned, the sheer volume of people congregating inside made it feel just as hot as outside, which was humid and still above 80 degrees when the meet-up started at 9 P.M. As such, I soon found myself sitting in a circle on the ground in a side yard with four other attendees, Reaper, Myriad, Noah, and Ian, where we could catch an occasional cooling breeze. After exchanging introductions and telling them that I was there for research, Noah finished telling a story he had started about recently breaking up with his boyfriend, mainly because his boyfriend had not approved of him gaming. Everyone chimed in with some form of affirmation that they had been in that situation previously, and, eager to join in the conversation, I shared my own story of conflict from dating a non-gamer.

It was sometime around 2015 and I was living with my now ex-boyfriend. At the time, I was working both a full-time and a part-time job, as well as taking classes part time at a local technical college. I had a rare day off and my partner was out with friends, so I decided to spend the day playing Final Fantasy XIV. Several of my online friends and guildmates asked me to join in to help complete one of the new raids that had recently been released. The raid consisted of three teams of eight players each, working together to complete various objectives. Raids can
take anywhere from fifteen minutes to over an hour depending on the skill of the team, how new it is, and how hard it is. Having not yet completed this particular raid and thinking I had nothing but time on my hands, I put on my gaming headset, joined the discord group for voice chat, and entered the raid queue with my team. The server was not particularly full that day, so we had to wait about fifteen minutes before a full team was assembled and we were allowed in. About ten minutes into the raid, my partner returned and, without giving me any heads up, had brought one of his friends that he wanted me to meet (the collective “oof” at this point from the Gaymers signaled they knew what was coming next). Being mid-raid, with twenty-three other people depending on me, I was barely able to look away from the screen and could only give short answers and responses when spoken to. After about fifteen minutes they left, and the raid lasted another twenty minutes or so after that.

When my boyfriend returned later that day, we argued about the fact that I had not stopped playing to converse with his friend. I tried explaining that had I known they were coming I would not have started the raid, which only led to him saying that “real people” should be more important than my online friends. No amount of explaining could make him understand that my online friends were also “real people” and that me backing out would have meant that twenty-three other people would have to fail the raid, get back in line to join again, and would jeopardize my own ability to join teams in the future as I would be seen as unreliable. I could have been reported to the game moderators by players on the other teams, again affecting my ability to continue playing. There was much more behind it than simply not wanting to stop playing.

Trying to date non-gamers came up many times in conversations with my contacts, often revolving around their inability to understand gaming etiquette or motivations. During one
conversation, Will told me the story of a date he had at a mall in Houston: “He changed the subject anytime I tried to talk about games or anything gaming related. I still wanted to stop into GameStop while we were there, and he picked up a game and was like this should be a good game. I asked him why he thought that, and he said, ‘well the guy on the cover has big muscles.’ It took me a couple seconds to realize he wasn’t joking.”

In this chapter, I focus on the relationship between Gaymers and the non-gaming gay community. The examples of homophobia given in the previous two chapters show why Gaymers often feel they are unwelcome in the gaming community, and this topic has been extensively studied over the past several years. In fact, this seems to be one of the only topics discussed regarding Gaymers. If gaming scholars are ever to truly understand the importance that the Gaymer label has to the community that has adopted it, we need to begin looking at the academically neglected relationship: between Gaymer and gay communities.

In general, many of my contacts felt that they were rejected by the mainstream gay community, whether socially or sexually. Throughout this chapter, I examine some factors that lead to this feeling, as well as the role that several social processes may play in how Gaymers are rejected. I begin with an examination of how an idea of monolithic “Gay Culture” has led to a pattern of exclusion towards groups who do not “fit,” Gaymers included. I then turn to focus on the ways that Gaymers have been sexualized, with outgroups writing the rules they are meant to follow without including them in the conversation. Currently, many Gaymers are being excluded from the gay community.
The Development of Hegemonic Homosexuality

Despite the relative absence of any in-depth academic or journalistic studies regarding the rejection of Gaymers by the larger gay community, it is by no means a new problem. One of the reasons Rockwell gave for conducting his 2006 “Gaymer” study was the idea that gay gamers were marginalized on two fronts. In an interview, he noted that "Gay gamers experience a double-edged sword of prejudice…The mainstream gay culture and media is not supportive of video games. Then you have the video game culture that is not supportive of gay culture. So you have these people stuck in the middle who have this double-edged prejudice” (Sliwinski 2006).

An example of the prejudice faced by Gaymers from the gay community was shared with me by Romeo during our interview. I had asked him whether he ever had a negative experience with the gay community after telling someone he was a Gaymer and he said:

When I’m on Grindr or Tinder, or other apps, when someone is talking to me about media, like what kind of shows do you watch, movies, stuff like that, what do you do for fun, etc. I’ll say, ‘hey I play video games, do you?’ And six times out of ten I get a ‘no.’ And generally, conversation just kind of dies out after that or they stop responding. I’ve even gotten backlash from it where someone will say ‘why would you do that? That’s such a waste of money, why would you waste money like that?’ You know, like, instant judgement without knowing any more about me.

Another example was shared with me by a member of the Adult Gaymers Facebook group “my first rejection was from not a single person, but a group of college students who staffed a safe space. They bullied me for being a gamer. Months later they were found out and never apologized to me. This was my first experience being in an lgbt+ environment.” The use of “first rejection” in this comment implies that it was not the last time this Gaymer felt rejected for gaming. It also implies that the “safe space” was only safe for certain members of the LGBTQ+ community. While not a universal experience, it is far from uncommon. Across both Facebook groups, 45% of respondents felt that they were rejected by other parts of the gay community for
being a Gaymer. While the prejudice against Gaymers by straight gamers is easier to understand, as homophobia is an unfortunate reality in many communities, the processes at work in the rejection Gaymers face by the mainstream gay community are less obvious.

Why would mainstream gays, themselves marginalized, further marginalize Gaymers for playing video games? There was a consistent answer given to this question at the meet-ups. Jacob told me that “they think we are childish,” an opinion shared by Reaper when he said, “they think we are weird. Maybe childish.” Myriad elaborated further by saying, “they think we are weird. Immature. Like we should either be making money or out at the clubs and being social, not staying at home playing games.” There are several assumptions embedded within these responses. The first is the assumption that mainstream gays see Gaymers as representative of the socially awkward nerd sitting at home playing by themselves, despite the fact that many of the Gaymers I spoke with actually play in groups, or at the very least are playing social games. This could explain the “weirdness,” but it does not seem to be a strong enough argument for rejecting an entire social community.

The second assumption is that Gaymers are rejected by mainstream gays because video games are for kids, and therefore those that play them are childish. This was unsurprising to hear from Jacob, Reaper, and Myriad, as all three of these men were either near or over thirty years old. What was surprising was hearing it from younger Gaymers I spoke with, those in their early twenties, like Romeo and Angel_R1ngz. Playing video games would be expected behavior for college boys, they are the target audience for many games, after all. At least, it would be expected behavior for straight college boys.

What constitutes acceptable behavior for gay men may have a strong basis in what type of consumer they are. Both Romeo and Myriad mentioned that non-gamers told them video
games were an unacceptable way to spend money, which implies that there are certain things that gay men *should* spend money on. This is a fact that Gaymers are constantly reminded of, as evidenced by one thread in the Adult Gaymers Facebook group when a member of the group posed the following question: “Is it okay for a gay person to not like gay things? I am strictly dickly but for reasons I can't understand since I don't like drag or feminine things at the slightest or don't follow all the latest fashion tips I always get constituted as not being gay enough.” The majority of responses on this post were ones of encouragement, although there were also posts of people who have gone through the same experience. One member posted, “Yeah I’ve been called a broken gay and I even like some of that stuff lol,” while another posted, “People look at me weird because I listen to Spanish music and am a huge geek.” Others posted about the problem of a “right” way to be gay more generally, such as one who posted, “I hate it when our community perpetuates negative stereotypes. I especially hate it when we pigeonhole each other into being ‘gay enough,’” and another who wrote, “Lady Gaga ain't gay. The lead singer of Judas Priest is gay. People have this shit all fucked up. Then they turn around and try to gatekeep gay.” Most of these examples point to certain “things” that gay men are supposed to consume, whether it be drag shows, media, fashion, or the type of music one listens to. But the exclusion of Gaymers from this “right way” to be gay, and why video games cannot fit, is not obvious.

To describe new developments in gay politics after the rise of neoliberalism, Duggan (2002) coined the term homonormativity, which she defined as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002:179). This movement was pushed by gays who claimed to represent a responsible center and mainstream form of
homosexuality. Originally this included a sort of blending in with the straights, such as through gay marriage and access to the military then evolved into ideas such as having a more masculine and a more feminine partner, much like a heterosexual relationship would have a man and a woman.

Sender (2005) describes a gay culture anchored in consumption resulting from marketers’ false narrative of the white, upper middle class, style guru, effeminate man that gays “should be.” Similarly, Clarkson (2008) notes that this market-created image has caused a lot of infighting within the gay community over what is the correct form of representation and, by extension, the correct way for people to display their gayness. As evidenced by the examples above, those who do not fit this model are treated as outcasts. This certainly plays a large role in the marginalization of Gaymers, although there are a number of important exceptions which show that there may be other processes at play.

While Sender’s marketing model and the media representation of the stereotypical gay do make up the core of the mainstream gay community, some groups of individuals who do not fit this model have found a level of acceptance. One need only look at the “tribes” section of a profile on Grindr, a popular gay hook-up app, to see what some of these groups are (figure 3.1). Grindr’s tribes are the categories that users are supposed to place themselves within, with the option to select up to three. Gaymers are expected to place themselves under “Geeks.” (Undoubtedly, there are other groups missing from this list as well as Gaymers, who would be expected to similarly choose an umbrella group.)
Grindr is the most popular gay hook-up app in the world, with an approximate 27 million total users and 2 million active daily users as of 2018 (Wilken, Burgess, and Albury 2019). As such, it would be difficult to argue that the app does not have effects in the gay community in terms of legitimizing the groups it includes while delegitimizing those it leaves out. Of note, most of the included categories have to do with bodily appearance, clothing choices, or the health of the body, as well as a certain type of common behavior within that group. The exceptions are discreet, sober, and geek categories, which are more singularly about behaviors.

Homonormativity helped facilitate hegemonic masculinity, the idea of a “correct” way to be male in the gay community. To explore the process of exclusion that Gaymers have gone through, I use the term “hegemonic homosexuality” to combine aspects of homonormativity, gay consumer culture, and technology. On the surface, this concept could seem strange. In our heteronormative society, what hegemonic power does the gay community have over other groups? But hegemony only requires that a dominant culture exerts its will over a marginalized culture. This is played out when mainstream gay media, such as gay news sites, TV channels, and dating apps pick up and incorporate other marketing messages into the gay identity, sometimes altering it for their own market. This in turn is then picked up and incorporated into
senses of identity with gay communities, which begins the cycle again by informing marketers outside of the gay communities, in a never-ending game of identity performance telephone. This results in an idea of a “correct” way to be gay, where those who violate the rules are punished. This is where we can find a major difference between groups near the center of the mainstream community, like bears, and those further towards the margins, like Gaymers: strict adherence to expectations of appearance and behavior.

**How Gaymers Go Off Script**

If one were to meet someone who identified as a bear, they could reasonably expect they would be larger in build, hairy, and older (possibly with a younger companion known as a cub). In a sexual encounter with someone outside of their group, they would be expected to take on a more dominant, active role. Conversely, a twink would be expected to be a lean, young, hairless, man, generally under the age of 30, at least slightly effeminate, and into all things stereotypically considered gay. When engaging in sex with someone other than another twink, they would be expected to be submissive and passive. Both are basically walking embodiments of Sender’s marketing model. In short, almost all “tribes” accepted by the mainstream gay community have a more or less predictable pattern of personal presentation and behavior that dictates their role in social and sexual situations within the gay community, what Simon and Gagnon (1986) called sexual scripts. Those who do not follow their assigned script are subject to ostracization from the mainstream gay community. This is the difference between these groups and Gaymers: Gaymers do not follow a script.

One of the difficulties that Gaymers encounter in trying to follow these mainstream scripts is that the scripts are contradictory. During several conversations regarding how Gaymers
fit into the gay community, some of the guys felt they were theoretically gaining sexual, if not social, acceptance. Angel_R1ngz thought acceptance in the gay community was rising:

…but only because I feel like it’s a fetish. I feel like, for them, Gaymers has turned into this kink, this fetishizing of this community. Like people, when I’ve always talked about Gaymers, they all get this type of person that they see in their head. It’s become this like fetish to sexualize over having this bro masc dude who is going to play a video game while having oral performed on them or something so they can live out this fantasy of being with a straight boy.

In this quote, Angel_R1ngz notes an assumed correlation between video games and straightness. With this correlation comes the expectation that Gaymers should be masculine, embodying the straight “bro” culture of a frat boy. This often conjures up the image of a white, lean-to-muscular man, into sports and drinking with his buddies. AngelR1ngz’s thoughts on the subject are in stark contrast to Terry, who said “they think we are all just cute, skinny, submissive, nerdy guys. Once they find out we aren’t they stop being interested.” This image is the opposite of the one that AngelR1ngz described. Rather than a “bro masc dude,” Terry used the terms “cute” and “submissive.” Both of these Gaymers described these as the perceptions of Gaymers based on what others in the gay community had expressed to them, but where did the gay community get their ideas?

The descriptions provided by Angel_R1ngz and Terry do not match those in mainstream media. In a very broad, general sense, if the main protagonist of a story is a gamer or nerd, they tend to be the underdog. They may be attractive, but they will be working to somehow thwart the “masc bro dude” who serves as at least a secondary antagonist, if not the main antagonist. If the gamer or nerd is a sidekick or supporting character, they generally serve as more of a comic relief, and are usually depicted as overweight and/or unattractive. What other media would be widely seen by a gay audience that could shape views and create a new sexual script for Gaymers? Angel_R1ngz’s use of the word fetish suggests that the answer may be pornography.
Gaymer Porn

A google search for “gay gamer porn” or “gaymer porn” returns some enlightening results. Some simply have gamer in the title but then involve a more masculine individual and a more effeminate individual engaging in sexual acts, with no visible connection to gaming. These titles include “Gamer Blowjob” or “Fucked by a Gamer,” in which we are to assume that the more masculine, insertive partner is the gamer. Another theme is one in which two presumably straight gamers get into some form of argument, real or friendly, and someone begins filming. The guys then end up wrestling, usually with one or both ending up shirtless at some point. Despite being hosted on porn sites, these do not end up having any sexual activity. Most common are videos that involve both sexual activity and video games, which can generally be split into two categories.

The first category fits the description given by AngelR1ngz. These tend to be (or at least appear to be) amateur videos. They involve a naked, muscular man with a game controller in his hand, although more often than not they appear to just be holding it or are button mashing so aggressively that it calls into question whether they are actually playing anything. The second man is usually much slimmer in build and enters as if he had just set up the camera. The second man then begins either performing oral sex on the player or, in some cases, even inserts the players penis and begins sexual intercourse. In these videos, the players continue playing their game, almost as if they are unaware of the acts being performed on them. Not only do these videos fit with AngelR1ngz’s description of what he feels is the script the mainstream gay community expects them to follow, it also echoes sentiments that Gaymers have shared revolving some of the difficulty of dating non-gamers.
In real life as opposed to pornographic fantasy, however, this script plays out differently. One example of this was when Reaper stated that “there are definitely things and aspects to our life they don’t understand. Like you can’t just pause a lot of games anymore,” or when Terry said, “it’s almost impossible to date someone who doesn’t game. They don’t get it and aren’t usually that understanding that there will be times where my attention is not on them.” These porn videos play out as if the receptive partner is attempting to gain the attention of their masculine player partner, but the player is too wrapped up in the game to stop. This works in a staged video, however in my experience and the experience of my contacts, if there is something in the game that requires so much attention and focus that the player is unable to step away from it for anything, including sex, these advances would be seen as annoying and unwelcome—leading to conflict rather than sexual pleasure.

The second major category seems to come from professional porn studios. Many of these videos consist of the same plot device, although the approach is different. The general formula is that there are two men who make a bet over video games, which ends in intercourse. In the first approach, it involves a more masculine, “straight” individual playing a game, with a more effeminate and slender individual watching. The watcher makes a bet with his “straight” friend that if the watcher can beat him at the game, he gets to perform oral sex on the player. The player is hesitant because he’s “not gay,” but eventually takes the bet. After thirty seconds of intense button mashing, the watcher wins and begins performing oral sex on the original player, who then decides he is into it and becomes the insertive partner for intercourse. While not identical to the amateur-style videos, these still follow a fantasy of seducing a straight boy. The other approach to this type of video begins with both actors playing a game, button mashing in an unbelievable manner (in one case they were playing with controllers to two different systems,
which doesn’t work), complete with some awkward or misused gamer jargon thrown in. Both of these actors are typically slim, young, and effeminate. One of them makes the bet with the other, the game ends, and the sexual activity begins. This is more aligned with the description Terry gave, minus the submissive part. Yet once again, the obvious mistakes, such as misused jargon or mismatched controllers, make it clear that these are not actually gamers, and would probably take any actual Gaymer out of the fantasy.

In all these cases, one thing is clear: Gaymers are meant to be the object of these pornographic fantasies, not the audience. In his work with a gay porn studio, Burke (2016) describes how continued casting of young, muscular, white, well-endowed men contributes to the furtherance of hegemonic masculinity. Here, I add that the same formulaic approaches applied to an emerging identity, like Gaymers, not only contribute to hegemonic homosexuality, but also shape the identity in the actual world by helping write the sexual script that members are supposed to follow.

Diversity Among Gaymers

Stereotypes are problematic enough, especially considering that, like most groups, Gaymers do not play a role in the formation of ideas about their own identity. This problem gains further complexity for groups such as Gaymers when there are competing scripts that they are supposed to follow. In reality, Gaymer meet-ups draw a wide range of people who do not conform to either of these extremes, from a few extremely muscular, very slim, or overweight individuals, to a majority falling somewhere in the middle, average range. All ages were represented as well at Houston Gaymer meet-ups, with some individuals in their 50s and several as young as 18 (most of their Gaymer nights are 18+, with the exception of the special
anniversary night, which was 21+ due to the venue change). Most individuals I interacted with were between 25 and 35, too old to be represented in the twink version of the script.

On the one hand, these pornographic films set the expectation that Gaymers should be masculine, muscular, “straight acting,” white, and to some degree dominant. Yet this is almost the exact stereotype that Gaymers cannot adequately live up to in the gamer community that makes them unwelcome there. On the other hand, they are expected to be young, slim, cute, submissive, white, and effeminate. In short, the stereotypical twink with an added video game controller in their hand. Within the gay community, Gaymers are trapped between two extreme scripts of who they are supposed to be, while in reality being neither.

At the busiest part of the first meet-up I attended, I would estimate there were about 60 people present, twice as many the other two nights. The crowd was made up almost equally by white, Asian, and Latinx or Hispanic individuals, though I counted only four African Americans. While the White and Latinx or Hispanic equivalency would be somewhat expected (they make up 37.8 and 36.3 percent of the Houston population, respectively), the number of African Americans is surprisingly low and of Asians surprisingly high, given that they represent 16.8 percent and 7.2 percent of the population (Egan 2018). These ratios seemed to hold true across all three nights I attended. A more focused study would be required to unpack the implications of the racial make-up of this group, however, within the limitations of this thesis the data at least shows that the almost universal depiction of Gaymers as white is far from the truth, though perhaps exclusion of black Gaymers is more true. Here again, we see a piece of criteria used to

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5 Attendance on the first night was impacted by a major event in the geek world, the opening weekend of the movie Avengers: Endgame. It is evident that there is a strong overlap between Gaymer and geek communities, however a more in-depth study of those relationships fell outside the limitations of my research.
exclude minorities from the gaming community used against Gaymers who cannot meet the expectations set forth by the mainstream gay community.

Through pornography, hegemonic homosexuality has created two very different scripts that Gaymers are expected to follow. In reality, most Gaymers fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, which has led to a marginalization of their identity within the larger gay community, if not outright rejection.

**Conclusion**

Nearly half of the Gaymers surveyed in the Facebook groups said that they had faced some form of rejection from other parts of the gay community based solely on their playing of video games. Tensions between Gaymers and the mainstream gay community were also evident in my conversations with my external interviewees and with attendees of the Houston Gaymers Meet-ups.

The development of homonormativity away from being about rights and political stances towards a more consumption-based focus has led to a marketing model that lays out what gay men should be. Over the past two decades, those who follow this marketing model have formed the dominant social group within the gay community, more recently employing new technologies, such as dating apps and the easy ability to create, upload, and view mass quantities of pornography for free, to write sexual scripts that groups are supposed to follow. All of these forces have combined to create a system of hegemonic homosexuality, which excludes Gaymers based on the relative unpredictability of what a Gaymer is.

Rather than fall neatly into either of the two scripts the mainstream has decided for Gaymers, they often fall much more in the middle. The typical body shape and age of Gaymers
at the meet-up were, in fact, average. They ran the full spectrum of masculinity and femininity, but again, most possessed elements of both. They also comprised a diverse racial mix, not just the usually depicted white men. When they are dominant and straight acting, they are perceived as not being submissive enough; if they are cute and submissive, they are not acting straight enough. All of these traits mean that they do not follow the sexual script laid out for them, keeping them excluded from hegemonic (straight) masculinity by nature of being gay and from hegemonic homosexuality for not being gay enough. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it is this very idea of existing between two hegemonies that has helped to create the Gaymer identity and shape its actual world spaces.
Chapter 4. Merging Servers: The Fusion of Gay and Gamer in to Gaymer

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which gay and gamer elements are merged in Gaymer practices, how these fusions emerged out of rejection, and what this may mean for future identities that straddle the virtual and actual.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Gaymers are far more diverse than the hegemonic vision of the affluent, trendsetting, white man that gays are “supposed” to be (Sender 2005). As such, they often find themselves relegated to the margins. Scholars have documented how marginalization and a lack of social fulfillment in the actual world has been a major driving factor in individuals seeking out and forming new groups and identities, increasingly in virtual spaces (Campbell 2004; Nagle 2017; Rigby and Ryan 2011; Slater 2002). Some of these identities, such as belonging to the group Anonymous, operate entirely in the virtual world they can enact actual world changes (Coleman 2012). Despite this acknowledgment, scholars often think of the actual and virtual worlds as two distinct places to study, with people inhabiting different identities or personae while moving between them.

While there may be multiple aspects and different qualities of the self, perhaps even a more fractured self, I align myself more with scholars like Hongladarom (2011) who argues that the line that distinguishes virtual and actual identities from each other is arbitrary. This means that rather than try to study and make sense of the “separate” pieces, scholars should pay attention to how they fit together to create a more holistic view of an individual (Palfrey and Gasser 2011). This idea is supported by empirical studies in both gaming and sexuality, such as one that showed avatar attractiveness had lingering effects on actual world psychological processes, like self-esteem (Yee 2014), and Gupta’s (2015) recognition that asexuality as a
sexual identity category was largely defined in online communities before being widely recognized in the actual world. Further, gamers are likely to choose their games based on personal motivations and personality traits, meaning that video games are a type of identity management tool (Kolo and Lüst 2019). I build upon these studies’ findings to explore how gaming creates a fertile environment for virtual identities to form and develop, one that allows for them to later cross the digital boundary to be performed in actual spaces.

At the core of all gaming is play, so it follows that play helped shape the Gaymer identity. Huizinga (1950) theorized that all play has meaning and can drive the creation of culture, however he contained play inside of what he called “the magic circle,” a designated space and duration that separates play from real life. The rise of pervasive gaming, or games that have no set area or time limit, calls into question whether or not the magic circle truly exists (Stenros, Montola, and Mäyrä 2007). For example, augmented reality games, such as Pokémon Go, could be viewed as an endless game not bound to any one place that people can play together. Muriel and Crawford (2018) take this idea one step further by introducing the idea of the videoludification of society, an ongoing process through which video games pervade most aspects of reality, such as job training, education, and play, blurring the boundaries between each. There is no reason that videoludification should not also apply to issues of sexuality, and Gaymer identity is an example of this process.

Gaymers are marginalized within two groups, gays and gamers, and it is precisely this multiple marginalized identity that helped drive them into virtual spaces where Gaymers met others in a similar position. From this, a virtual identity was formed, one that was every bit as authentic as nonvirtual identities. The way in which games have the ability to manage these identities, and the ways they are increasingly tangled in all parts of society, created the perfect
environment for the Gaymer identity to freely move between virtual and actual worlds. In the rest of this chapter, I examine how Gaymers have appropriated gay spaces for gaming use and gamer spaces for gay use.

**Repurposing Gay Space for Gamer Usage**

One of the ways that Gaymers perform their identity is through the repurposing of traditionally gay spaces for use with gamer practices, including both the actual-world settings of the Houston Gaymers meet-ups and gay virtual spaces. One might expect that the Houston Gaymers meet-up would offer a prime example of Green’s (2008) sexual fields, in which participants seek to find sexual partners, similar to behavior in specialized gay bars, like bear or leather bars. In this section, however, I will show how a combination of a marginalized virtual-actual identity and the videoludification process disrupt the formation of a sexual field.

![Figure 2. Entrance Side Games Layout](image)

The most obvious space that has been repurposed is the one in which the meet-ups take place. On any other night, The Guava Lamp Lounge is a typical gay bar. On Gaymers night, the space is transformed. Not only are all of the television screens around the perimeter of the bar
attached to gaming systems, some of the Houston Gaymers board members also bring their own TVs to set up in the booths. Some of the games set up for the nights included *Soul Caliber VI*, *Super Smash Bros.*, and *Mortal Kombat 11*.

On the far side of the bar was a stage, usually only in use during karaoke nights or drag shows. On Gaymers night, the space was primarily used for virtual and augmented reality games. For the virtual reality games, players strapped on headsets to play games such as Beat Games’ *Beat Saber*, in which a single player uses motion controllers as swords to slash according to directions displayed across the screen to the beat of popular songs. In these cases, the screen behind the stage allowed spectators to see what the player saw. For augmented reality, the stage created a social space where Gaymers could play together. The screen in these circumstances served as the guide, while motion capture cameras set up around the space recorded the movements of the players for the game to grade and give a score.

![Figure 3. Gaymers Playing Just Dance](image-url)
These games, such as Ubisoft’s *Just Dance 2019*, allow for up to four players at a time. With the exception of the solo game *Beat Saber* and *Just Dance 2019*, which has a solo option, all of the games available to play at Gaymers required at least two players. According to Jeff, this was done by design in an effort to both encourage social gaming and offer the option of solo play for more introverted participants. When asked about the importance of having the solo player and multiplayer games he responded:

> This is so important. For the most part, socializing isn’t part of the gamer personality, so there really is a need for an event like this. Go walk around in there and talk to people. Most of these people aren’t going to go out unless you give them a reason like this, and they aren’t going to interact unless you give them a tool. At the same time, it can be a bit overwhelming for some people so having the solo play option makes sure that everyone feels like they can participate and belong without being made uncomfortable.

There are three things going on in this statement. The first is an assumption that many Gaymers do not feel a sense of belonging in other spaces, so even if they do go out to clubs or social gatherings, they may not interact. The second is an emphasis on making sure everyone feels welcome, not just in terms of physical expressions such as clot

ching or in terms of gender and sexual identity, but even regarding how outgoing they are. The third is an acknowledgement of the stereotype that gamers avoid actual world social events, preferring to socialize in the virtual world. There is an important distinction to be made between the social aversion mentioned by Jeff and the social ineptness that is often a stereotype about gamers. While playing the game *Soul Caliber VI*, I had several people that I did not know join in and play and converse with me, even ending up with a whole group surrounding the screen for a while. Certainly, many conversations with new people started by discussing the types of games, often followed, in the case of MMORPG players, by discussions of what role they played and what server they were on. Once the ice had been broken however the conversations almost always became the same as
those in any other social setting. Indeed, Cherry-licious told me that the meetups are almost exclusively social functions for him, as he socially plays online with many of the participants or at the other events Houston Gaymers holds throughout the month. For these reasons, he doesn’t usually play any of the games available and instead uses the meet-ups as a way to hang out with his online friends in person, with their conversations here rarely being about gaming.

Another traditionally gay space that Gaymers have added their own spin on is that of the drag show. At midnight during each Gaymer meet-up, drag performers, both queens and kings, take to the stage for an hour-long show. While not an uncommon sight by any means in gay bars and clubs, the show at Houston Gaymers has a twist unique to Gayming events: the performers are all in cosplay.

Between the different nights that I went, there were drag queens performing as Princess Daisy from the Super Mario franchise, Ariel from The Little Mermaid, Mother Gothel from Tangled, a gender-bent Spider-Man, and a gender-bent Punisher. While I only saw two drag king performances, one as Gambit from The X-Men and one as Harry Potter, I was told that there are quite a few more that perform at their annual spring drag fundraiser. Cosplay drag shows appear to be a mainstay at Gayming events, even outside of Houston Gaymers. On the May 20th, 2019 episode of the Gayme On podcast, hosts Steven Garcia and Adam Noel discussed going to a launch party at a gay bar for Mortal Kombat 11, at which there was a drag show with performers dressed as characters from the game (Garcia and Noel 2019).
I had the opportunity to interview one of the performers, Olivia Hercules, to discuss the significance of performing drag in cosplay at the Gaymer events.

**K:** How do you see performing drag in cosplay different here than at gaming conventions or other events?

**O:** From my experience you have a different kind of gender play at conventions. Usually there, you see people make the character fit their gender. For instance, you will have guys dressed as a male version of a Disney princess or girls dressed as female versions of anime characters. You don’t usually see drag as much.

**K:** Why do you think it’s different here?

**O:** I think here there is more of a feeling of acceptance. You can be yourself here and it’s fine. Take him (gestures to someone at the other side of the bar). That guy is dressed in head to toe baby pink with pink cat ears and still presenting as male. This is probably the only space no one is even going to notice.

**K:** So, you’d say this place is more accepting than other places, including other gaming and nerdy spaces?

**O:** Yeah, I’d say that’s a fair statement.
Again, there is an emphasis on an idea of acceptance and belonging, and a freedom to express yourself in the meet-up space in anyway that you choose, free of collective judgement. The feeling of being accepted is extremely important to this space, especially when one takes into consideration that Gaymers have spent years facing rejection from both gamers and the gay community. This space allows them a place where they can be both gay and gamer, free from having to suppress one side and express only one or the other. This point was articulated as I continued my conversation with Olivia.

**K:** What does it mean to you, personally, to have this space and to perform drag while in cosplay?

**O:** On one hand it lets me express a part of myself that I normally don’t get to, you know? I can be a drag queen and a gamer at the same time and let my nerdy self out. I also think it gives something to these guys as the audience that’s different and kind of just for them, so it’s more special.

The idea that the cosplay drag shows were somehow special is one that was echoed by several individuals during and after the shows. After the show on my last night of field work, Kevin, 31, stated:

> These cosplay shows are so much better than regular drag shows. I think it’s because they have to put in the extra work. At normal shows you see so many drag queens just phoning it in and going through their routines, but here they can’t really do that. I don’t think they normally perform to a song about gun control while dressed as the Punisher, so there is obviously more thought that goes into it, and they don’t repeat routines here. I think it just makes it more fun overall.

The feeling of “I can be both” is one that leads to a greater sense of freedom, manifesting in both more planning and higher energy during the show on the part of the performers, and more receptiveness on the part of the audience. On a greater scale, being able to be both gay and a gamer is what leads Gaymers to adopt the label. The acceptance that comes out of being rejected
by both gays and gamers is the first factor of the Houston Gaymers meet-up that interferes with the formation of a sexual field.

Green (2008) describes three features of a sexual field: structures of desire, tiers of desirability, and distribution of erotic capital. The structures of desire include objects indicating that a space is specialized or aimed at a particular group, as well as a “front,” a type of uniform fashion, posture, body type, and speech pattern that are supposed to define the field. The total emphasis at the meet-up on people being themselves, however, prevents this front from occurring. There was a wide range of clothing styles, languages, skin colors, accents, and body shapes freely mingling among each other. Without these fronts, there is no standard with which to create tiers of desirability, nor is there any set form of erotic capital to be distributed. In fact, despite being held in a gay bar (where, unusually for a bar, I did not see anyone get visibly intoxicated to the point that someone would be able to tell they were drunk by sight or speech alone) the meet-ups were actually a very desexualized space. Throughout all of my visits, I did not notice any of the overt flirtation that usually takes place in gay bars. Rather than create a sexual field, the Gaymers at the meet-ups actually did something far more unique: they brought a game space into the actual world.

In any given MMORPG, there are numerous outposts for players to gather. While there may be mini-games or quests to complete within these outposts, there are no monsters to fight and they generally serve as a social space or a place where players can buy items from NPCs. This is exactly what the Houston Gaymers meet-up is, just taking place in the actual world. Attendees (the players), in all forms of clothing styles (customized armor), come to this space to socialize and make friends (finding a group to quest with) and play games (quests and mini-games). In addition, they can buy alcohol from the bartenders, food trucks, or clothing vendors at
the event (NPC vendors). All of this can be done free from the judgement of outsiders (fighting monsters). The appropriation of digital gay spaces also contributes to this example of videoludification in process.

During the discussion about dating with Myriad, Reaper, Noah and Ian (see Chapter 3), the topic shifted to the gay dating/hook-up app, Grindr. While discussing their frustrations with the app, the following conversation took place:

**M:** Honestly, the only thing I use Grindr for anymore is guild recruitment.

**K:** How does that work?

**M:** Basically, I just scroll through, find people who have Gaymer or gamer in their name or mention games in their profile, sometimes I even use the distance feature. Then I find out what they play, if they play any of the same MMOs as me, I see if they wanna meet in game and then see if they wanna join my guild. If we chat a bit and they seem cool and we don’t play the same games I might give them one of my guest passes to see if they want to.

**R:** I’ve never done that, but I have definitely used Grindr for the sole purpose of finding someone to game with.

While this was the first time I had heard of someone using Grindr to recruit for guilds, it was not an idea entirely foreign to me.

While I lived in Wisconsin, I too had used the app as a means of finding other Gaymers and gay gamers to game with. As a consequence, I did end up forming a guild in *League of Legends* entirely out of individuals I had found on Grindr, but that was by chance and not design. Despite all living a short distance away from each other, under a 15-mile radius by best estimate, none of us ever met each other in person. We played together daily and chatted through the Discord client, but no one ever brought up meeting.

The conversation with Myriad, Reaper, Noah, and Ian, along with my own personal experience, led me to wonder how widespread of a phenomenon this actually might be. I decided
to pose the question “Have you ever used a dating app (Grindr/Tinder/Etc.) to find people to game with or recruit for a guild?” to both Facebook groups (see Appendix C). Of the 137 people that responded, 27 had used dating apps for the purposes of finding someone to game with. I was surprised that a respondent on the Adult Gaymers page also responded that he had used dating apps to recruit for a guild. These results tell me that, while it may not be an extremely common occurrence, it is far from unusual for Gaymers to use dating and hookup apps to find others to play games with, and that Myriad is not alone in using the apps to recruit for guilds. If a similar survey was conducted amongst Gaymers separated out by the types of games they play, it might show that among certain types of cooperative games this activity is fairly common, even if it is not among the larger Gayming community. This usage is also analogous to elements found within MMORPGs: dungeon finders and dedicated chat tabs for looking for groups. Dungeon finders are for when players do not have any friends available to help them complete a dungeon, so they can be randomly assigned a group comprised of other players using the dungeon finder. Similarly, if a player has certain conditions they would like other players to meet, they can post in a “looking for group” tab and have other players apply to join them. This is a very similar process to how Gaymers are using Grindr.

The second night that I attended was a tenth anniversary celebration for Houston Gaymers. The event on this night was held at a rented out communal space that appeared to once have been some form of warehouse. This space had a much larger area; however, the screens were still set up around the outside and there was a large open space in the middle with a DJ against the back wall. This middle space was filled with people conversing, as the music played did not lend itself to dancing. The songs being played were technically the same songs you would hear in any gay bar: Britney Spears, Carly Rae Jepson, Lady GaGa, etc. The difference
was in their format. All of the songs had been converted into 8-bit sounds, transforming them into songs reminiscent of the soundtrack to original Nintendo games. Though this in and of itself is not unique to Gaymers (I have heard it done at various gaming and anime conventions), it was the particular types of songs being played that seemed to lend itself more towards the gay side of things. More importantly, not only has this music been converted into a video game sound, but the sound then functions as background music to the event, rather than an integral part like at other clubs, just as the soundtrack to a video game is generally in the background.

Through the conversion of a sexualized actual world place into a desexualized actual world version of a virtual place, the Gaymers have created a space that they can be both gay and a gamer. The movement of a virtual space into an actual space is not one way, however, as Gaymers also move elements of the actual world into the virtual.

**Gamer spaces for Gay Purposes**

While the Houston Gaymers meet-up desexualizes an erotic space and converts part of the actual world into a game space, video games are increasingly spaces where Gaymers either transform sexuality or insert it where it previously did not exist outside of an implied heteronormative system. This is achieved through multiple methods, with varying degrees of success and visibility. In Chapter 2, I discussed some of the ways Gaymers work through the affordances provided by games to increase representation of queer identities. Here, I will provide examples of Gaymers asserting their agency to create new affordances through modifications, commonly called mods. I also examine how more traditional gay methods of resistance and transgression, such as pride parades, are used in games for the same reasons.
Modding, the act of creating and/or using mods, is enacted when players “hack” the coding of the game and rewrite scripts and algorithms to create a more personalized experience. Mods can range from the cosmetic, such as changing blood color or loading screen images, to changing a game’s entire genre. Lauteria states that mods “reflect occupation and reappropriation of spaces of possibility in the digital age” (2012:14). In his work on queer modding, Lauteria (2012) demonstrates these occupations and reappropriations through examining several mods. One mod is in *The Sims II*, in which players queered the space by altering the code of the game to allow teenage boys to get pregnant and give birth to baby humans. Originally, human-resulting pregnancy in the game was limited to adult females, while adult males could be abducted by aliens and give birth to green human-alien hybrids. In another example from *Dragon Age II*, players hacked the game to change the gender recognition algorithm that determined which NPCs players could enter into a relationship with, based on the gender of character they chose to play. By rewriting the code to set their characters as both male and female, these players were then able to enter into romantic relationships with any of the romanceable characters, regardless of gender. Similarly, players of *Mass Effect* found that an option in the original coding, which switched off the ability for same-sex romances between their character and the NPCs Ashley Williams and Kaidan Alenko had been turned off. By switching these options back on, players were able to romance these characters regardless of their chosen gender and thus view an erotic cutscene in which they have sex.

While Lauteria frames these examples as resistance by the individual to heteronormative frameworks in games, it is worth noting that the results of modding are almost always private and continue the tradition of not being openly queer in gaming. To begin with, the games that he examined were all single player games, none of which had online capabilities. Additionally, even
in MMO’s the mod is only visible to the player who inputs it, with rare exceptions where games allow mods to be visible to other players who have installed the same mod. For these reasons, the modding itself is still somewhat like being in the virtual closet. The open act of resistance and transgression is within the dissemination of the mods, generally on public forums, and through the showcasing of what players are doing with them through videos and images posted online. Moving these private erotic transformations into a public setting is not only what showcases their ability to break the heteronormative path set out by game designers, but also creates the community in which Gaymers can connect through common practice.

More visible transformations of virtual space are in-game Pride parades. Like actual-world pride events that can serve to protest state power and/or cultural attitudes (Bruce 2013), virtual-world Pride parades often began as a form of protest to power and the heteronormative attitudes of the general player base. One of the earliest, and most well-known, virtual Pride parades is the Proudmoore Pride parade in World of Warcraft. The Proudmoore-US server is home to two metaguilds, The Spreading Taint and The Stonewall Family, comprising multiple smaller LGBTQ+ guilds. In 2005, they held the first Proudmoore Pride event to increase the visibility of queer players, as well as protest the heteronormative constraints the WoW community embodied. A year later, Proudmoore-US became the unofficial LGBTQ+ server, a process many have argued was catalyzed by the banning of Sara Andrews (Skardzius 2015), the details of which were outlined in Chapter 1.

As the Proudmoore Pride event has continued over the past 14 years, it has grown and evolved. It now consists of an entire month of events and giveaways hosted by the metaguilds, culminating in a Pride celebration. The celebration consists of nude duel championships, an Azeroth’s Next Top Model competition, the Pride parade (complete with floats), and a dance and
pool party (Glasser 2009). Many of these events can be viewed on YouTube, as the metaguilds and players have created recap videos (RoughTradeGaming 2009).

Other virtual pride events were born out of celebration rather than protest. When introducing the marriage system to Final Fantasy XIV, developer Square Enix (SE) was originally planning to restrict player marriages to heterosexual couples. Just before the feature was released in 2014, SE announced they had reversed this decision, with Director Naoki Yoshida saying:

People within Eorzea will be able to pledge their eternal love and or friendship in a ceremony of eternal bonding. And this will be open to people regardless of race, creed, and gender. Two players, if they want to be together, in Eorzea, they can…We discussed it and we realized within Eorzea, why should there be restrictions on who pledges their love or friendship to each other? And so we decided to go this way (SquareEnixPresents 2014).

With that RoughTradeGaming, the meta-meta-guild to which both The Spreading Taint and The Stonewall Family belong, planned a celebratory Pride parade in the game as a thank you to Yoshida. Gaymers dressed their avatars in rainbow colors and ran through the entirety of the game world. This virtual world event took place one year prior to the legalization of marriage in all fifty states through the Supreme Court decision in Oberfell v. Hodges, and demonstrates a blurring of lines between the two worlds. In reporting on the parade event, journalist Joe Bernstein remarked “The celebration is a reminder not just that attitudes towards same-sex marriage are changing throughout the world, but that online gaming communities can be places of enormous personal significance for the LGBT community” (Bernstein 2014).
Conclusion

Gaymers have found ways to make gay spaces and gamer spaces work for them, creating spaces of their own. These practices represent an identity that is emerging, if it has not already emerged, distinct from other areas of both the gamer community and the gay community.

Unlike in other cases, the results of being marginalized in multiple communities that Gaymers identify with leads to a strong sense that people should be individuals, rather than conform to a set social script. This has led to a disruption of the process that would normally lead spaces like the Gaymer meet-up to become a sexual field. Having previously been prevented from expressing their gamer side in the gay community, they have transformed gay spaces into game spaces. As a further act of resistance, Gaymers have found a way to express their gay side in video games by turning gamer spaces into gay spaces.

Spaces like the Houston Gaymers meetups play an important role in the formation and adoption of these identities. While Gaymers are able to create avatars and play characters that allow them to express their gay side in game, the meetups allow them to embody the identity in an actual-world setting of like-minded individuals who identify in the same way. Furthermore, there is no sense of a wrong or right way to be a Gaymer in these spaces, allowing an added level of freedom of expression.

What really stuck out to me was the sense of belonging people felt in the space. Whether a drag queen in cosplay, someone coming out to see friends they game with online, or an organizer of the event, many individuals expressed the idea that “Gaymer” meant they could be both gay and a gamer. With that, I got a sense that people felt this was one of the few spaces they could practice multiple facets of their identities at the same time without judgement. In other
words, if the word Gaymer allows people to *feel* like they can be both, spaces and events like the Houston Gaymers meetups give them a place that they can *be* both.
Conclusion. Endgame Content

Over the course of this thesis, I have explored how Gaymer identities are shaped by the interplay of actual and virtual worlds by describing how rejection from the gay community and gamer community, in both virtual worlds and actual. I have also described how this has contributed to the adoption of the Gaymer identity label as a form of resistance and community creation. It is my hope that I have also demonstrated a side to the Gaymer community that has been less covered elsewhere: that Gaymers are neither perpetual victims of homophobia nor passively waiting for the gaming industry to give them equal representation. They are not socially inept individuals, unable or unwilling to function in instances of face-to-face communication, bitterly rejecting all elements of the gay community they do not always feel welcome in. Rather, Gaymers are taking an active role in shaping virtual worlds and the actual world to create a space for themselves in both.

In this conclusion, I begin with a reflection on my research methods. I then present my conclusions thematically, rather than by chapter. These themes are the virtual and actual roles of community, technology, and representation in the shaping of the Gaymer identity. These themes pose a particularly challenging area for researchers because, just as they are impossible to disentangle from various aspects of the Gaymer identity, they are also interwoven amongst each other. I begin by discussing my findings on community, which largely addresses my questions about the relationships Gaymers have to the rest of the gaming community and the rest of the gay community. I then discuss technology, which addresses my question surrounding affordances, although it also helps answer questions about the formation of Gaymer communities and representation. Then, I discuss representation in general, which primarily focuses on my final
research question. Following discussion of my findings, I offer suggestions for future research, before discussing the significance and contributions of my research to academics, the gaming industry, and Gaymers themselves.

**Reflection on Methods**

In this thesis, I used several different methods to study the gayming community. My methods were all complementary, and in many ways helped answer each question. Further, they helped to triangulate my responses, letting me approach the same questions in multiple ways.

Overall, the most effective method for this project was the ethnographic fieldwork with Houston Gaymers. Conducting this research allowed me to study facets of the Gayming Community that had previously gone unexamined, such as the relationship of Gaymers to the gay community and how Gaymers build actual-world community. Additionally, it was an extremely useful method in examining videoludification in practice, which I do not think would have been possible without participant observation. I say this because the process is not one that can simply be gleaned from discussion or interviews, it is much more performative.

In general, the two interviews I conducted with friends from my existing network were useful and provided good information. My original intent in these interviews was to gain some understanding of the experience of Gaymers outside my own and outside of Houston. I had intended to include a third individual, but he was unexpectedly relocated out of state for work and I was unable to find a time to interview him prior to his departure. These interviews did provide both confirmation of, and counter-examples to, stories I obtained at Houston Gaymers meet-ups, which I further triangulated with my Facebook polls.
The Facebook groups themselves proved extremely valuable but were also somewhat unreliable in effectiveness. I often found myself at the mercy of luck with a variety of factors. Polls posted during a time of relatively little activity often received a large number of responses and lots of discussion, while polls posted during periods of high activity were often pushed down the feed of the group and would have a window of about an hour before all responses stopped. I was never able to discern any form of opportune time to post, as even if I attempted posts at the same time of day on a particular day of the week, I could end up with wildly different results from week to week. I also found that having my polls accepted to the group was based on which moderator saw it. While some were more than happy to approve the posts and even participate, others would deny my post and label it as spam. I also learned that several topics were off limits and would always be denied, primarily those asking opinions about specific events or developers, as well as those regarding thoughts on general authenticity of marketing in the gaming industry. That being said, when my posts were approved, they did provide valuable data, and allowed me to both test questions before Houston Gaymers events and confirm observations I made there.

One area that did not work as well was my in-game ethnography. I learned that when planning to do research in a specific virtual world, one has to be extremely mindful of any in-game events that could impact population. In my case, the launch of an expansion significantly lowered the player population during the first half my research period, and then moved the population during the second half into areas that could only be accessed by purchasing the expansion, which I was unable to afford.
Discussion

Community

Whether related to rejection or creation, community plays a key role in almost every aspect of the Gaymer identity. To begin to understand the Gaymer community, however, there needs to be a clear definition of who is a member. The Gaymer identity rose in part due to many who adopt the label feeling rejected by both gay and gaming communities. Often, this rejection came in the form of being told that they did not fit in because they were neither how a gamer “should” be, nor how someone who is gay “should” be. This is a problem that seems to be adding a new level as some in the non-gaming gay community are forming their own ideas of what a Gaymer “should” be, with little input from Gaymers themselves.

Gaymers are not the only community to have been shaped by both virtual and actual worlds. Arguably, both Gaymers and the alt-right followed parallel paths from the virtual world into the actual, with very different results. Whereas Gaymers felt they were being rejected by the virtual-world community of heterosexual gamers and the actual-world gay community, so too did #GamerGaters feel rejection in both virtual and actual worlds. In their case, they felt that women and minorities were pushing them out of gaming, and that their desire to maintain a white, masculine presence made them unwelcome. Similarly, their often extremely conservative, misogynistic, and racist views made them feel that the more liberal trend in the United States was making them unwelcome in the national community. Whereas Gaymers reacted to dual exclusions by merging the virtual and actual into a new community, #GamerGaters would eventually combine with other groups to form the alt-right, generally writing off the gaming world as a lost cause and attempting to change the actual world through the election of Donald Trump to the United States presidency.
Other initially virtual groups have also crossed into the actual world, many growing increasingly dangerous. One such group, incels (involuntary-celibates), began on the message boards of 4Chan. Members of the incel community blame women and society for their inability to form meaningful relationships, often proposing violence as retribution. Notable members of the incel community include Elliot Rodger, perpetrator of the 2014 mass shooting in Isla Vista, California (6 dead, 14 wounded); Nikolas Cruz, perpetrator of the 2018 mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas Highschool in Parkland Florida (17 dead, 17 wounded); and Alek Minassian, who rammed his truck into a Toronto crowd in 2018 after posting praise for Rodger on Facebook and claiming the incel uprising had begun (10 dead, 14 wounded). Several additional incidents have taken place since, usually with plots being thwarted by law enforcement before they could be carried out. In January 2020, the Texas Department of Public Safety placed incels just behind white supremacist groups as an emerging domestic terrorism threat, stating that “the violence demonstrated by incels in the past decade, coupled with extremely violent online rhetoric, suggests this particular threat could soon match, or potentially eclipse, the level of lethality demonstrated by other domestic terrorism types” (Texas Department of Public Safety 2020:3).

All three of these communities started in the virtual world and through various paths crossed into the actual world, to extremely different ends. While further research with the other groups would be necessary, I suspect that a reason for such different ends lies in how their relation to privilege and power. For Gaymers, they feel rejected by groups they are trying to enter (or be recognized by groups they have always been part of) and therefore gain some form of access to privilege, while incels and the alt-right felt as if they were being forced out of their own territory by people wanting to take their privilege from them. Understanding the motivating
factors and processes that these groups and others have gone through could aid in the prediction of new groups, as well as the trajectory that they may follow.

Technology

Bridging the gap between the themes of community and technology is an examination of how technology affects community. On a basic level, without video games, there would be no Gaymers. Taken a step further, it was not until the rise of online social games and social media that the Gaymer identity truly began to take shape into a community. Yet this is only a surface-level account of the role that technology has played in the formation of the Gaymer identity.

In a great display of irony, conservative-leaning older generations, mass media, and social media memes alike often decry the rise of technology and mobile devices as leading to the erosion of interpersonal communication and society. In an almost neo-Durkheimian fashion, news outlets frequently report studies on the loss of community, although now the culprit is the internet and not a move to Urban centers. My research with the Houston Gaymers group and both Facebook groups, as well as my own experiences and the other examples of other groups straddling the actual/virtual divide, show that this may not be the case. Rather, my research seems to confirm that, for good or ill, technology has indeed helped (at least some) communities both grow and thrive.

Boundary crossing is the next topic in which technology plays a role. Popular science fiction works, such as Steven Spielberg’s 2018 movie, Ready Player One, imagine a future in which the majority of human interaction takes place in the virtual world. These pieces seem to come from an idea that the more sophisticated technology becomes, the more people will turn to it to escape their physical realities. This idea is supported in some academic works, such as those
by anthropologists Whitehead and Wesch (2012), while others, such as Campbell (2004), argue against the idea of a completely disembodied internet. One thing many of these works seem to suggest is that the only direction that humanity will flow is from actual into virtual. My investigation of the interactive and immersive world of gaming, a world one could logically assume is most conducive to this sort of flow, has demonstrated the concept of videogludification in practice. In other words, the blending of the virtual and actual by groups such as Houston Gaymers in the actual world demonstrates that this flow is, in fact, quite multi-directional.

Finally, technology has shaped a role in the development of the Gaymer identity in an unexpected way. Namely, the identity has emerged in a time in which outside narratives (such as pornography created by non-Gaymers for non-Gaymers) are simultaneously shaping expectations of Gaymers’ social and sexual roles, many of which may be at odds with how Gaymers view themselves. Further, gamers are likely to choose their games based on personal motivations and personality traits, meaning that video games are a type of identity management tool (Kolo and Lüst 2019). In both of these ways, technology is actively shaping identities.

**Representation**

Representation of LGBTQ+ gamers within the gaming industry of LGBTQ+ gamers still leaves much to be desired. When presented with characters that provide poor representation, some Gaymers may be excited that there is any representation at all, while others will be disappointed. Similarly, there is a sense of betrayal and having been pandered to when gay characters are introduced, only to be removed in subsequent updates or games. Ultimately, these actions can lead to a loss of trust in the gaming industry, and even in other Gaymers who may hail any representation as good.
Although representation means different things to different people, my research allowed me to consider criteria that could both cover the widest range of representation issues and could prevent the missteps that game developers have made in the past. The first criterion is that when minorities are represented, it should not feel forced and it should be permanent. The second is to provide ambiguity or flexibility in self-expression through the maximization of affordances and allowance for queer readings.

**Future Research Directions**

The diversity of Gaymers provides much fertile ground for future research. Due to limitations of scope, I was unable to answer, or even ask, all of the questions that this research presented to me, leaving much to explore.

The intersectionality of race and gayming is one such area that requires further exploration. Not only is there opportunity to examine how racial identity merges with Gaymer identity, but also how it may interfere in the decision to adopt the label “Gaymer” or attend actual world events. Additionally, further research could be done outside of the United States to see how the Gaymer label is being adopted and transformed in global contexts, and to see how different contexts affect the meaning ascribed to the label.

Class is another area that could be examined further, as this may impact one’s ability or decision to identify as a Gaymer. For example, an individual who can only play in a public setting, such as an internet café, may be less likely to identify or play certain types of games if they feel that it would not be safe to do so. Additionally, this would provide insight into the meanings associated with spaces like the Houston Gaymers meet-up, if that is the only place
someone feels safe identifying publicly as a Gaymer or the only place someone has the opportunity to play games.

Recognizing that the virtual can also be manifested in the actual opens up possibilities for future research of other processes that may exist beyond just videoludification. There is yet another side to technological influence that I was unable to explore in this project that warrants further investigation. We currently live in an age of targeted, if not fully predictive, advertising. Undoubtedly, this form of advertising has an impact on how Gaymers perceive themselves and how they are shaped by consumerism and capitalism.

Significance and Contributions

Academics

In addition to the research conclusions and new research possibilities offered above, my research demonstrated that there are gay gamers who do not identify with the label Gaymer, and do not wish for it to be placed on them by others. This indicates a necessity for those who research gay gamers and Gaymers to ask their interlocutors how they identify and, just as important, to make clear in their writings whether they are dealing with self-identified Gaymers or if they are studying gay gamers. There is value in studying gay gamers, Gaymers, and gays who game, though it is important to recognize that each group may have a different relationship with video games and, I suspect, with both the gay community and other gamers. For this reason, any conflation of the groups could lead to confusing contradictions in results, such as that Shaw’s (2014) research with non-social queer people who sometimes play games also indicates that Gaymers do not care about being represented.
As a result, I propose that the term Gaymer (capital G) should be used within academia to refer only to those individuals who self-identify with the label. This would help avoid the implication of illegitimacy that putting quotes around “gaymer” suggests, the image of forcing a new identity into a group where it does not belong that ga(y)mer evokes, and to set future writings apart from previous works that refer to all gay people who play games as gaymers. Furthermore, researchers should take care not to present Gaymers in their work as a monolithic group, instead approaching them as a community as diverse as the games they play.

**Gaming Industry**

The theme of representation is one that carries a great deal of possibility for applied anthropologists who might work together with the game industry. A key aspect of marketing is understanding what your consumers want. For anthropologists, marketers, and developers alike, a key aspect to serving Gaymers is understanding that the community is not monolithic. For marketers and developers, another aspect is the realization that traditional methods – like focus groups or discussion boards – may not be as effective at gauging whether or not you are doing a good job representing minorities, especially when speaking out publicly has historically been met with hostility by the gaming community. Games that provide for flexibility in affordances, and maintain that flexibility permanently, are one of the best ways to avoid past mistakes of representation.

Developers should take note that forums are not always safe for everyone to post on, as described briefly in Chapter 2. As a result, public feedback and surveys may not always be the best indicator of how well a game is received. It is within the space left by both public feedback and traditional market research methods that ethnography can be a useful tool. Ethnography
allows the researcher to actually observe Gaymers, whether in game or out, in settings or situations where the participants feel safer to speak their mind. Additionally, there is often an extra layer of trust built between the ethnographer and the participant, one that does not exist in basic focus group scenarios.

**Gaymers and LGBTQ+ gamers**

In changing the way both researchers and the industry look at issues surrounding LGBTQ+ gamers and Gaymers, I hope to bring recognition to the fact that just because people are not speaking out (often due to safety concerns) does not mean that they are happy with the state of things. Ideally, this will result in their voices being heard more by the gaming industry, in a more meaningful way than the industry already currently engages these groups.

I also hope that this research can allow Gaymers who have not yet found a group like Houston Gaymers, or indeed any group in the actual world to know that they are not alone out there, and that Gaymers are working to change both virtual and actual worlds to make a place for everyone. Again, ideally, this would lead to a safety-in-numbers effect, where activism is more likely because there is less fear in speaking up.
Appendix A. IRB Approval Form

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Kyle Bikowski  
Geography and Anthropology

FROM: Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 20, 2019

RE: IRB# E11513

TITLE: Not All Fun and Gaymes: Technology, Transgression, and Representation Among Gaymers


Review Date: 2/20/2019

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 2/20/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 2/19/2022

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
Appendix B. Sample Interview Questions

Do you identify as a Gaymer?

When did you first begin gaming?

When and where did you first hear the term Gaymer?

When did you start identifying as a Gaymer?

What genres of games are you most likely to play?

Are you more likely to play a game if it has the option of a gay character?

In games that do not have an option for a gay narrative, are there ways you design your character to display your identity as a Gaymer?

Do you feel Gaymers are accepted by the larger gaming community?

What are your experiences with this?

Do you feel Gaymers are accepted by the larger gay community?

What are your experiences with this?

Do you feel some games/platforms offer a more gay friendly experience?

If so, what features promote this?

How important is the Gaymer label to your overall identity?

How have the social connections you have made within games shaped your daily life, if at all?

What features do you look for when designing a character? (human/nonhuman, customizability, attractiveness. Etc.)?

When outfitting a character, either through skins or armor pieces, is there a particular aesthetic you tend to lean towards?
Appendix C. Facebook Poll Questions and Results

Are all gay gamers Gaymers, or do they need to self-identify?

Geeky Gays:

- Yes, all gay gamers are Gaymers
  - Added by you
  - +26

- No, Gaymers need to self-identify
  - Added by you
  - +18

- I'm confused
  - Added by

Adult Gaymers

- Yes, all gay gamers are Gaymers
  - Added by you
  - +34

- No, Gaymers must self-identify
  - Added by you
  - +15

+ Add option

Are you more likely to buy a game that allows you to play a gay character or follow a gay story line when making a choice between games, or does this not factor into your decision?

Geeky Gays:

- Yes, I am more likely to play a game if it offers me the choice to play a gay character
  - +86

- No, this is not something that factors into my decisions
  - +55
Adult Gaymers:

- Yes, I would be more likely to play a game that offers me the option of playing a gay character (+28)
- No, this does not factor into my decision making

Have you ever felt rejected by other parts of the gay community for being a Gaymer or playing video games?

Geeky Gays

- No, Added by you (+37)
- Yes, Added by you (+5)

Adult Gaymers

- Yes, Added by you (+32)
- No, Added by you (+9)

Have you ever used a Dating App (Grindr/Tinder/ETC.) to find people to game with or recruit for a guild?
Geeky Gays

- I have never used a dating app for these reasons  
  Added by you

- I have used dating apps to find people to game with  
  Added by you

- I have used dating apps to recruit for guilds  
  Added by you

Adult Gaymers

- I have never used a dating app for these reasons  
  Added by you

- I have used dating apps to find people to game with  
  Added by you

- I have used dating apps to recruit for guilds  
  Added by you
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