The "Reality" of Misogyny in Online Gaming Communities: A Qualitative Study on Female *Minecraft* Players

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Abstract

This study explores the implications of misogyny in the virtual and physical worlds. The 2014 GamerGate scandal shed light on the immense violence to which female gamers and gaming entertainment consumers are so frequently exposed to. Minecraft is the most played mass online multiplayer game in the world with over 100 million copies sold. The open gameplay mode of Minecraft and the non-linearity of the objective of the game has grown into a lush ground for violence, as there are seldom physical or virtual repercussions for verbal violence online. Gendertrolling has become a pastime within the gaming world on its own and focuses on specifically targeting women and ranges from benign jokes to violent threats of rape and murder. There seems to be a feeling of lack of physical world consequences for those that keep women from fully participating online. By drawing upon the concept of digital dualism, this study discusses the implications of being exposed to online threats online and women's self-regulation and ways of navigating the hostility of the online gaming world.

Keywords: misogyny, gendertrolling, Minecraft, gaming, digital dualism, GamerGate, gender

1.1 Introduction: Are women excluded from participating?

We have a very broad amount of agency when engaging in entertainment media and identifying as members of a fan group. The world of mass online gaming, and gaming in general, has traditionally been dismissed as a predominantly male activity, with women who enjoy this pastime often deemed as outsiders (Taylor, 2003). Many video games have been designed with a targeted gender in mind, with the assumption that men are the largest audience for this type of media, and naturally, games that are marketed to a particular demographic have more successful revenue. Additionally, market research for PewResearch written by Maeve Duggan has shown that the concept of "gamer identity" is predominantly linked to the male population, regardless the fact that women make up a nearly equal share of players, 48% (Duggan, 2015). Equally, video gaming is no longer synonymous with childhood. PC Gamer's research of trends in 2015 showed that the average age of a game player in the USA is 35, and with thousands of online games available on the market, there is something to fit everyone's interest (Messner, 2016). This calls into question of where the diversity of audience, particularly of women within the gaming community is and why they are not heard from more often to proclaim their "gamer" identity. This study is about exploring women's self-representation and identity in the social context of Minecraft, with regards to the omnipresence of misogyny across multiple online social platforms.

Entertainment Software Association's 2016 Essential Facts has indicated that there is, in fact, a more diverse group of game consumers than led to believe with, with a significant 41 percent of women represented in the consumer community. They identified a clear gap in the self-identity of gamers between men and women, which brings forth the need to understand why men are more inclined to proudly declare their hobby as a lifestyle, and women lean towards justifying their gaming as a casual pastime. It is important to look at the entire social aspect of gaming to understand engagement. Adrienne Shaw describes that the transcendence of gaming activities to other parts of the internet create a society is what creates a "gamer culture" (Shaw, 2010). It is a community with real, meaningful relationships and purpose beyond game consoles, and within the hostile environment of the internet, with an unrepresented population of female gamers. An increased exposure to harassment online is what can potentially exclude women from their freedom to fully participate online.

Women's reluctance to fully participate in all aspects of online games has been commented and analyzed by many. Amy O'Leary (2012), in her New York Times article, discussed the backlash that has grown over the past years. In her work, she describes how the severity of harassment faced by female players, particularly professional gamers, is finally getting wider attention from the industry, quoting Anita Sarkeesian's statement that "The gaming industry is in the process of changing" (O'Leary, 2012). The problem is all but invisible. Game companies sanction those who are reported for harassment by blocking or suspension, yet the rate at which women are exposed to violence is simply too quick to keep track of. O'Leary reported on professional gamers' forfeit of tournaments due to the harassment, but the abuse is much more widespread than just expert players and has implications to disproportionately and intentionally exclude the women from their right to participate in all online activities. The sexist abuse that women are exposed to was almost exclusively perpetrated by male gamer counterparts.

Karla Mantilla (2015) collected and described women's negative "gendertrolling" experiences that they encountered online. Among them was a user who, reportedly at the time, was only 11 years old and described the verbal sexual violence encountered and stated that it was "basically raped on Minecraft" with other users threatening her in case she logged off or had her parents turn their internet connection off (Mantilla, 2015:52). The gamer described her feelings of helplessness at the fact that the maltreatment she encountered was indirect and thus impossible to reprimand by authorities. Further descriptions of abuse reflected on the consistency of rape threats above all (Mantilla, 2015). The prevalence of this type of abuse is necessary to study to understand not only how the gaming realm functions, but how to make this confined space safer for everyone. Gender abuse online has been studied as a whole or with reference to gaming, but it is important to note that not all gaming platforms are the same. Minecraft has been a game with among the highest reported gender abuse instances, yet the female population of Minecraft has not yet been researched with regards to their personal experiences.

In their exploration of cases of misogyny and gendered discourse in gaming communities, Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett (2012) described the instance of hyper masculinity in another incident dubbed the "Dickwolves incident". They argued that the

exclusion of women from participation is also rooted in the exclusion of women in other gaming aspects, including the lack of female avatar heroes (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Women have traditionally been supplementary rather than central to the platform altogether. Salter and Blodgett concluded that with regards to rape culture and female marginalization, women have come to shy away from revealing their identity online (2012). Likewise, research on the society of online gaming, in context of marginalization of women gamers online, has shown that the gender violence online does not have the perception of transcending into the real world, with no actual consequences (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). It sheds light on the gap of understanding female participation in gaming and the transcendence of physical world consequences in a male dominated digital culture of video gaming.

Through understanding how women engage in *Minecraft*, this research aims to understand how women play *Minecraft* and how the women of the gaming realm perceive their role within the virtual *Minecraft* world with regards to their exposure to either passive or active misogynistic attacks. What this research seeks is to understand how women conceptualize the implications of online violence and what effect it has on their behavior in the *Minecraft* world.

This study follows a grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of a grounded theory approach to qualitative research is to construct a theory on the basis of the data collected, or to aid the construction of a theory in the making (Creswell 2007: 67). The framework of this study will provide data for the continuation of the development of theory on digital dualism in context of misogyny in online gaming. The structure of this thesis will firstly give a brief overview of the topics that are discussed in order to give a better insight into the context of this study. Firstly, the GamerGate scandal will be described as this is one of the most prominent online gender crises in recent history and will help shed light on the discourse of misogyny in online gaming. Secondly, there will be a brief overview of *Minecraft* and the interface and playability of the game, as well as an overview of literature on the social aspects of the game. The thesis will then continue on to giving an outline of previous research conducted on the topic, the theoretical framework, the methodology that was used, and finally move over to an insight into the results. The study will be, as protocol entails, completed with a discussion and a conclusion.

Research questions for this study are explained and justified at a later chapter of the study. The research questions that this study aims to answer are:

RQ1: How do women engage in the Minecraft community?

Sub-question 1: How do women justify their motivation to play Minecraft in any of the provided gameplay modes?

Sub-question 2: Do women use Minecraft as a platform for personal entertainment or social interactions?

Sub-question 3: Do women feel a sense of belonging to a community through their participation in Minecraft?

RQ2: What are the implications of misogyny in the Minecraft community?

Sub-question 1: How do women present themselves online with regards to their gender?

Sub-question 2: What impact do misogynistic attacks (if any) have on the women's experiences with the Minecraft community?

Sub-question 3: How do women explain the occurrence of misogyny in the Minecraft community?

1.2 Gender Harassment and the GamerGate Scandal of 2014

The United Nations submitted a reports on titled *Cyber Violence against Women and Girls* and found that 73 percent of women are targets of violence or harassment online, most often in the form of sexual violence (UN Women, 2015). The report by the UN broadband commission for digital development conducted a discourse analysis online that showed that "female" usernames receive significantly higher verbal abuse than "male" usernames. Further, the study found that geographically, countries of northern Europe had the highest percentage of reported victims of violence of women online. A critical reflection of this would be that due the culture of northern European countries, gender-based violence is a bigger part of discourse than elsewhere, and citizens of other locations might have a reluctance to report verbal abuse and violence.

The absence of female presence online is explained by a lack of empowerment felt from the female population, resulting in enhanced reluctance to fully participate in the online community. The starting point of this inquiry was the GamerGate scandal occurring in 2014, which shed light on the threat that women are faced with in the virtual and physical dimension and has opened a discussion of online abuse that women face online, which is nearly three times as high in occurrence and intensity (Romano, 2014; Lee, 2016). From the occurrences and coverage, it is clear that the implications for violence online are not deemed as worrying as they should.

The motivation for this research came from personal interest, when I noted that what is in discourse often dismissed as a firm line between the "real" and the "virtual", in fact easily flows between the two and our online experience breathes along our physical one. What will help interpret results is Nathan Jurgenson's "digital dualism", a term that suggests the digital and physical "realities" are mutually exclusive (Cyborgology, 2011). Jurgeson negates the validity of this theory, as online occurrences now have credible implications in the physical realm, much like the occurrences during the GamerGate scandal. What was most alarming during the GamerGate scandal is the length to which threats directed at female gamers needed to go in order to generate real attention. Anita Sarkeesian, a game blogger, critic, and feminist writer was massively targeted with online abuse after a public dispute with her former partner after he accused her of indecency in interest of self-promotion (Totilo, 2014). The online backlash began to question the authenticity of the "gamer" identity and the validity of female presence in "gamer culture". The dispute resulted in several prominent video game developers and bloggers fleeing for their safety after online threats from "trolls" proved credible (Totilo, 2014).

The choice of *Minecraft* comes from the amount of media attention that the game has had in reference to the entire society of the game itself. Christopher Long (2014), in his critical essay for *Medium*, discussed his disenchantment with the game when his young daughter was exposed to an alarming amount of swearing and attacks while playing the game in multiplayer mode with the chat feature. His daughter was a target of both gender and racial violence due to the appearance of the skin avatar that she chose to play with. He continued describing how they were forced to "flee" and create a safe environment on a safe server meant only for her and her friends. He stated his disappointment in the need to "flee for safety" on the internet, while the

abuse that his young child endured had real consequences on her self-esteem and her willingness to continue to freely participate in the internet.

Dan Golding and Leena van Deventer (2016) compiled a detailed look into the entirety of the GamerGate scandal and the cultivation of severe violence against women and girls online, forcing them to stop participating. Besides giving direct insight from a practical, rather than an academic point of view, they discuss the interpretation of *Minecraft* that people had to categorize it as a game or not. It was because of the extensive usability of the game, that being a "Minecraft" player meant different things to different people (2016). Due to the games' non-linear story approach and lack of clear direction that bases the direction and the purpose on the gamer itself, including creating worlds and skins (avatars), the game could be potent for research in multiple ways and in multiple contexts. Having a long immersion in the gaming worlds, Golding and Deventer (2016) discuss the GamerGate scandal and general implications of not only misogyny but anti white heteronormative pillar that we have so grown accustomed to accepting as the status quo. Although not an academic text, their work gives valuable and personal insight into the minds of gamers during a vulnerable time in this section of the entertainment industry.

Gamers who play online mass videogames interact within a common online fictional universe, often depicting or reminiscent of real world situations. *Minecraft* is currently the most played mass online open world game and the second most sold video game of all time, trailing behind the timeless classic *Tetris* (Callaghan, 2016). The game itself has been sold in over 100 million copies, with at least one half of a million users in active gameplay at any given time over different consoles (Makuch, 2014). Other styles of games, predominantly formats of mass online role-playing games such as *World of Warcraft* have generated revenue upwards of $1 billion dollars and also over 100 million accounts created to date, according to the website Statista.com in 2015.

2.1 Background information on Minecraft: Population 100 million

Minecraft is a mass online video game released in 2009 (Peckham, 2014). Its following grew quickly and it soon became one of the most played online video games in history. As of

2016, over 100 million units have been sold, meaning that 100 million people are part of the *Minecraft* world. To put this into perspective, if *Minecraft* were a country, it would be the 12th most populated country in the world by the number of registered accounts to date (Callaghan, 2016). The design and the distribution of the video game was a demonstration of how the social aspect plays a vital role in the creation of a community.

Image shows Minecraft avatar in ambient. Image by Miia Sample. Retrieved from Flickr.com

There are different ways to play *Minecraft*. The "sandbox" style game means that players use in-game "building blocks" to construct their interface themselves. The graphics of the game are very simple and "grainy", which is indicative of sparing on complex graphic quality encountered in most modern game. A user can choose to play in either single mode or in multiplayer mode. Objectives of the game are broad in both modes, giving that the single player mode does not give the opportunity to play with other *Minecraft* players in real-time across servers. Players join different "worlds" on *Minecraft* servers and decide on the level of difficulty. The simplest objective true across all gameplay is the goal of survival. Naturally, in easier modes, the players will not encounter as many threats, often in the form of zombie avatars, called "creepers" and lack of resources, as they would in harder modes. The simplicity of the graphics also provide an easier code for players to modify their own world. The wide scope of ways in which *Minecraft* can be played adds to the appeal of the game. The multiplayer mode also includes a feature for interactive chat with other players on the same server.

There are four main gameplay modes: survival, creative, hardcore, and adventure. The followings sections will briefly touch upon the main objectives within each mode, as well as give a brief overview of terminology used in *Minecraft*.

2.2 Overview of Minecraft Gameplay Modes

Survival

The player, in first person mode, must search for different resources to build shelter, find food, and armor. The player collects items necessary, for example coal and stone, in order to reach these objectives and make it through the "day" in the game. The world is also in a hostile environment with creepers, or zombie-like avatars within the game, attacking the player. In turn, the player must defend themselves while continuously building their world.

Creative

The creative mode is the safest mode to play in *Minecraft*. The player's objective in this mode, is to utilize the unlimited resources to build their world or "map". Players immersed in this mode often find ways to create elaborate structures within the game in a non-threatening environment. The objective of survival is completely eliminated and no threats to the player's avatar exist.

Adventure

The adventure mode is rather similar to the creative mode with the exception of limited resources which are not directly made available to the player. A further benefit of engaging in adventure mode is the games' protection against *Minecraft* players who destroy buildings, appropriately dubbed as "griefers". The world is not fully editable and requires the player to interact and build on their own.

Griefers

In gaming terminology, griefers are players whose main objective is to competitively wreck other player's progress. Players who engage in griefing find excitement in ruining the enjoyment for other players and are extensively frowned upon within the *Minecraft* community. Touching upon the objective of this research, much attention was given to the women's interpretation of griefers and will be discussed in more detail in a separate chapter. Griefing is a utilization of *Minecraft* that is provided by the limitations and possibilities of the game and engaging in the game in this matter directly impacts the social aspects of the game. Griefers,

often in groups, intentionally disrupt the development of other *Minecraft* players and in other internet terminology can be dubbed as "trolls", with the exception that "trolls" often act alone. Findings of this research will demonstrate the negative implications of griefers on the gaming community.

The open-world design of the game allows the user to independently discover and create the purpose to advance within the game in which the world is automatically and infinitely generated. The simplest objective lies in the player's personal ability to modify the world which they themselves create by breaking and building blocks, interacting with other players, and avoiding potential enemies. The simplicity and appeared "roughness" of the visual code is compensated by the amount of freedom the players have which includes exploring their individual or multiplayer environments, survival mode, in which the player's objective is to maintain his or her avatar alive and well in a hostile environment of *Minecraft*, as well as a creative mode which allows users to infinitely build replicas or their own creations of cities and environments with the abundance of resources the game has to offer.

"Minecraft Castle" by Mike Cooke Retrieved from Flickr.com

2.3 Social Aspects of Minecraft

Players are encouraged to interact, contributing to databases on websites and physically modify the gameplay through personal coding endeavors, dubbed "modding". The experience of playing *Minecraft* in its entirety did not solely rest on the action of engaging with the game directly, but on the entire social media community experience dedicated to the pastime. The

contribution and regular engagement with the game resulted in projections of the characteristics of the gamers' physical self to their online avatar personality, a frequently discussed topic in game research. Social conformity established in the physical realm transcended into the gamer personalities. The projected social norms created within the sphere of *Minecraft* created a society within the game itself. Each player has a perceived role and purpose within the game community. The individualistic yet collective nature of the game, coupled with the possibilities of adapting the game to fit the users' own needs makes it a very lush environment for the study of online gaming societies and assumed roles within that environment.

Minecraft is chosen due to three main reasons. The first reason is the immense influence that the game has had on the mass online gaming world. The game has over 500 thousand active users worldwide at any given time, making it one of the most active social entertainment platforms, and it was the most sold mass multiplayer online game of 2015 (ESA, 2016). The second reason is the playability of the game and its interface. As previously stated, the structure of the game is very open and players are free to choose their own objectives and style of play. This also allows for a discussion in the community of players. The third reason behind researching *Minecraft* stems not from the game itself, yet from the social position of women in physical form and the perception of female gamers in the online world. Recent occurrences built the realm of online games into a hostile one for outspoken female gamers, ringing discourse on misogyny in gaming culture worldwide (Mantilla, 2013). Although not targeted specifically at *Minecraft* players, GamerGate saw the open launch of misogyny towards women identifying with the online gaming culture. Bloggers' and gamers' safety was openly threatened with the awareness of female presence in the gaming community. A more detailed context of the scandal will be provided in the chapter on theoretical framework below.

In the frame of the research question, it is important to keep in mind that the women interviewed for this study were aware of the scandal and their answers were framed in the terms of the aftermath of the event. Gender studies and gaming has long been a controversial topic of research due to the vast amount of conflicting information found. Studying the self-perception of women's roles, particularly in today's times of internet connectivity should be approached with caution and within a very narrow scope. Further, this study was conducted on a limited sample of a population of western European and North American women, and can thus not be generalized

to the entire female population of *Minecraft*. This is a very important limitation of this thesis, but a motive notwithstanding for future studies of comparison of women of different cultures and languages, particularly in terms of understanding their gender and social roles. Therefore, although this study is an international one, it cannot be accounted for as an intercultural study in its respective right.

The structure of this study was deduced from the GamerGate scandal and a preliminary idea of misogynistic implications with physical consequences that happened in the summer of 2014, proving that interaction in online realms has a clear possibility of transcending and affecting the physical world. Therefore, much of the research was done in light of these events, including a preliminary pilot study in 2014. Although the pilot study was conducted as a participatory research, the results still indicated a reluctance of women to disclose their gender fully online and thus to participate fully online. Interviews were chosen instead of participatory research in order to gain a better, more holistic understanding behind the women's thought process of the socialization within *Minecraft*. Finally, this study was limited in terms of time and space. Online recruitment has the obstacle of being time consuming and possibly lacking a distinct focus. Due to the fact that the study was conducted on an international scale with limited quantities of respondents from the respective countries, the results of the responders cannot be generalized to the countries as a whole and should be viewed strictly from an international perspective.

3.1 Research Aims and Questions

The 2014 GamerGate scandal has shed the most light on this issue in recent history, with several prominent female video game players, developers, and bloggers threatened aggressively online with promises of physical violence including murder and rape through the use of social media. This research strives to fill the gap of scholarly work on the socialization of women in gaming. Instead of understanding gender differences, this work will explore the personal interpretations of women's own perceived roles in *Minecraft*. The aim is to understand the uses and gratifications in context to the social aspect of the game of female *Minecraft* players with reference to the gamers' experiences with misogyny in relation to their gaming activity. The study will explore reasons of women for engaging with the *Minecraft* community, and their

stances and responses to situations that arise. Through taking the first step in understanding the social structures and perceptions that emerge among the players, the study will seek to find recurring patterns of behavior and online interaction through a qualitative ethnographic approach. The following section outlines the overarching research questions that were sought through the duration of this study as well as justifications and thought processes that arose.

3.2 Research Questions:

RQ1: How do women engage in the *Minecraft* community?

Sub-question 1: How do women justify their motivation to play *Minecraft* in any of the provided gameplay modes?

Sub-question 2: Do women use *Minecraft* as a platform for personal entertainment or social interactions?

Sub-question 3: Do women feel a sense of belonging to a community through their participation in *Minecraft*?

The unit of analysis of the research are women *Minecraft* players. Through this set of research questions, women's motivations and gratifications were noted, as well as their involvement with the game beyond *Minecraft*'s interface. Patterns in behavior such as preferred play mode, as well as the justification behind it were sought, including any verbal implications that the reason behind their choice was their gender. Further, these questions pursued a more detailed understanding of the women's media use regarding their favorite pastime. Also, questions within this research question group explored whether women who engage in other games more were more active across different platforms than those who use the game recreationally. The research question aimed to understand how difference in usage of *Minecraft*, in combination with other social media led to a feeling of empowerment. The focus of the research questions were not on the technical aspect of women's use of the game and preferred gameplay modes, but rather on their explanations of the social aspect, be it solitary or with regards to the entire *Minecraft* community.

RQ2: What are the implications of misogyny in the *Minecraft* community?

Sub-question 1: How do women present themselves online with regards to their gender?

Sub-question 2: What impact do misogynistic attacks (if any) have on the women's experiences with the *Minecraft* community?

Sub-question 3: How do women explain the occurrence of misogyny in the *Minecraft* community?

This research question strives understand the women's perception of misogyny, the prevalence of misogyny, and the possibility of being reclusive to disclose their gender online. With regards to these questions, what was sought were distinct patterns or statements expressed by the interviewees that suggested any part of their habits were regulated due to their gender, as well as their interpretations of the GamerGate scandal and personal encounters with "gender trolling" as defined by Phillips (2015). What is sought through this question is the possibility of reluctance to conceal their gender when engaging in discussions regarding the game, or whether their pastime gives them a sense of empowerment. Further, answering this question hoped to show the different interpretations of the intensity of misogyny when coming from either within the game interface such as in-game comments in the chat feature or encounters with "griefing" players, or when encountered in the social media world. Further, any encounters with misogyny were also reported to be either active or passive, with active attacks directed to the respondent itself, and passive attacks to be the respondent's second-hand feelings of threat when exposed to aggressive comments or observing other female players' negative experience.

The purpose of answering these questions lies in uncovering the blurred boundary between the virtual and the physical realities. What was meant to be understood is whether there is a difference in the perceived "realities" with regards to the women's interaction with Minecraft itself versus the interaction and immersion within the online community. Interview questions that were formulated sought to subtly explore the delicate relationship between peoples' ability to deem physical and virtual reality too disparate to fully integrate. Understanding this relationship will help to understand the extent of fluidity between the players' spectrum of realities.

The research questions play on the concept of digital dualism by drawing from the concept of polarity. This research will explore the fluidity between the digital and the physical and describe the roles of gender within the environment of *Minecraft*. Gender, by our social constructs, is a polarizing term, as is the concept of physical reality. With regards to the concept of digital dualism and the term's early stages, this thesis will also aim to contribute to the literature regarding individual gender constructs in the digital realm. It is to understand how those who engage in interactive online media apply a polarized concept of gender to an argumentatively equal concept of duality of the digital and the physical of modern day society. This was done by exploring female mass online game players' thoughts in their pursuit of creating a social role within a mass online interactive community.

4. Limitations

This study will not include a gender comparison of male to female *Minecraft* players or their experience, nor will it attempt to compare nationalities of the recruited research respondents. There will not be an extensive survey comparing the use of different games or the relations of games other than *Minecraft*, but due to the culture that is being researched, the "gamer identity" encompasses the engagement with other games as well. This research will explore the experiences of women of *Minecraft* in context of their socialization, attempting to understand the construction of self-identity and participation within an online society from a female's perspective. What this research will also not do is attempt to understand the influence of *Minecraft*, the game, on the player explicitly, but rather explore the process behind becoming and maintaining a social role on *Minecraft*, and the gratifications that stem from it. A limitation of this research was naturally the time frame and the limited amount of respondents. Due to the fact that all of the interviews, reaching out, and questionnaire was done in English, the study cannot account for the experiences of women whose main language of internet usage is one other than English.

The limitations of this research also lie in the fact that there is no heteronormative perspective on this and no self-proclaimed "trolls" were questioned on their habit. A significant contribution to the validity of this study would be to gain insight into the relationships between women in *Minecraft* through a focus group. Should this thesis prove valuable results, conducting a guided focus group would be a logical next step.

5. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Following up on the statement in chapters above, there is a clear lack of literature and applied research in context of digital dualism, given that this theory is still in its infancy, as well as the topic of misogyny in gaming with this context. It is because of this reason that the following sections will incorporate previous literature with the theoretical framework in order to give both overview and context into this study.

Adrienne Shaw used a play on words to describe that "one is not born a gamer, one becomes one" (2013). Shaw discussed the construction of gamer identity through the form of representation in order to understand whether and in what ways "gamers", either self-identified or not, created and presented to the virtual world. Her extensive work in gender, representation, and gaming studies has also drawn upon the concept of realism and escapism in representation (Shaw, 2015: 148). She uncovered that the gameplay itself is not as particularly important when discussing representation, but in order to research it, the description must come directly from the gamer (2015: 150). Although the topic of representation and gamer identity is very difficult to explain holistically, it is important to study the women's self-representation over a period of time. What Shaw (2015: 156) found was that even if the women she interviewed stopped playing or have not engaged in a game for a longer time, the profound connections with their games were what made them identify themselves as "gamers at heart".

Research on video games regarding consumption most often revolved around the concept of the fragmented demographics and the gender divide (Embrick et al., 2012). Namely, a reencountered result points to the fact that women are generally more inclined to excel and enjoy strategic or puzzle games, while men are more successful at narrative or action games. On the instance of intersectionality with regards to race, discussions have pointed towards a perception of self-awareness that people bring to a digital world while constructing identities and attempt to translate their assigned demographics into their gameplay with uses of gender specific avatars and usernames (Embrick et al., 2012). The results of these discussions pointed heavily to the concept of self-representation as a method of dealing with inequality in the physical world. Although the discussion of gamer participation is still a young one, several researches discuss the concept of community creation through contribution in the very specific area of video gaming. MacCallum-Stewart's research (2013) has discussed the significance of emerging online

communities through a case study on the online community of *Minecraft* itself. MacCallum-Stewart has concluded the importance of self-sustainability of online communities through both online and offline contributions via social media and physical gaming conventions (2013). *Minecraft* is a game design most particularly applicable to the concept of "fan-producers", or maintainers of the gaming community that supplement the gaming experience through online manifests such as webcasts and YouTube commentaries (MacCallum-Stewart, 2013).

Minecraft has created a virtual subculture and ample opportunity for real-time interaction with users all over the globe. This perceivably sudden rush of new developments in interactive media has generated much interest on research on mass gaming. However, the scope of research that was done, was completed with the purpose of quantifying and understanding user gratifications and demographics of gamers. With regards to gender, previously conducted research has often focused on "gender-targeted" games and the prevalence of men or women in each game (Kuznekoff & Rose 2012; Taylor, 2003). Research on this matter has predominantly thus attempted to understand the differences in gender preferences of games as well as the reasons behind it, but seldom attempted to bridge the gaming world into the real social world of the players to understand the socialization of gamers online (Kuznekoff & Rose 2012; Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Taylor, 2003; Kafai, 1998). Significant attention was given to understanding the implications that virtual games have on the physical world, particularly research that attempted to uncover connections to violent behavior, often making a clear distinction between the physical and virtual worlds, but trying to connect them in light of negative influences and impulses (Nielsen, 2015; Martocnik & Loksa, 2016).

Little research has been done on online gamer communities that emerge on social media and the users' interpretation personal roles, often insisting on parting the "real" and the "physical" by taking factors of separation into account. Studies have contributed to literature regarding uses and gratifications as those who play games to use them in a way to "escape" society and engage in leisure time, insisting on a clear distinction between the two. The use of social media and its influence on the self with regards to the physical world has been subject to extensive critique and analysis. In discourse, when referring to online gaming, the term "escapism" is frequently used to describe user engagement, indicating that the only reality in truth is the physical one (Hagstrom & Kaldo, 2014). Research has focused on the negative

implications of gender and gaming and their online presence, much with focus to addiction and health implications, while genders studies tend to focus on the gender representation in the video games or differences in uses and gratifications between the two (Hagstrom & Kaldo, 2014; Martocnik & Loksa, 2016). Feministic approaches to video game studies have focused on women's uses and gratifications with regards to exposure to "male targeted" or "female targeted" games and their escapist gratifications, but not on their personal interpretation of their role within their chosen gaming community. Emese Domahidi, Ruth Festl, and Thorsten Quandt (2014) discussed the issue of friendship transcendence between online and offline and found that immersion in an online game and preference to socialization deemed stronger relationships online and offline. This research will thus, aim to explain women's immersion in online video games in their relation to the physical world and also understand the possible implications of escapism in their use. By employing the concept of escapism, this research will understand whether exposure to online hostility is met by a psychological barrier that implies the absence of real-life implications and the reaffirmation of a dualist reality that results in the withdrawal from full participation online.

With regards to self-representation, scholarly work has observed the roles between the games and the society. Danielle Nielsen (2015) described the identity in mass online role playing games as being closely interlinked with the gamers' personal immersion with the game, but still concluded the importance of reluctance of female gamers in order to avoid being exposed to misogyny. She particularly discussed the concept of creation of avatars and usernames, drawing upon the experiences reported online that suggested that in order to avoid harassment, it's just "easiest" to remain gender neutral (Nielsen, 2015).

The aforementioned discussed the representation with regards to the interaction with the game itself. There is therefore, limited research on the self-representation of women of mass online gaming societies that are created and that transcend into other media. The magnitude of an event such as GamerGate and surveys that show the presence of women in the community have concurred that women are anything but absent in the gaming world (Golding & Deventer, 2016) . However, analyzed in discourse, they account for the most online bullying and online aggression. Discourse analysis has shown what is termed "gender trolling" to particularly be targeted at female video game players and bloggers (Philips, 2015; Mantilla, 2015). Particularly in times of

crisis, with regards to building real, meaningful realities and relationships with their gamer peers, is when the social aspects of gaming should be studied.

Yet still, the real transcendence of digital to physical is too often eclipsed by insistence on the separation of the virtual and physical worlds. The particular concept of "digital dualism" is one that has recently emerged in media texts regarding the increasing polarization of socially constructed concepts which has now transcended into our media use coupled with the concept of "the virtual reality fetish" that are discussed in the theoretical framework of this study at a later chapter.

The purpose of this research is to explore the self-representation and relationships of female players in the *Minecraft* world with regards to their gender. In this light, this study aims to understand women's social uses and gratifications in participating in the *Minecraft* culture as well as explore their role and self-representation in the online society. What will be explored is whether the occurrence of misogyny in the online world contributes to women's reluctance to disclose their identities online, and whether they feel physical threats when exposed to online bullying. The standpoint of the argument is that the physical and the digital worlds are undoubtedly interconnected and belong to one another. Research uncovering the extent to which digital reality effects the physical world is fragmented and often difficult to include in major discourse. What is sought to be understood is how tangible the relationships between women and other *Minecraft* players are, and whether the disclosure of their gender is interpreted as empowering or oppressing.

5.1 Theoretical Framework

The amount of research done on the topic of reality and gender is severely limited. However, much attention has been given to the issue of women and their roles in online environments, as well as within gaming environments. Particularly, the concept of gaming, interactive in its own right, was given much attention in uncovering the habits and the differences in gender when engaging in gaming. Before immersing into the literature background of this study, the theoretical framework will be pinpointed to give a starting point and context of this research.

Social constructions and uses of new media are a very multifaceted topic and can be approach from a myriad of perspectives. This is also true when understanding what constitutes a label of a gamer. Notwithstanding the complexity of the issue, there have been significant approaches of studying people's uses and interpretations of media. For the sake of this research, the following concepts will be defined and analyzed to better understand the context of this study. Firstly, the theory of uses and gratifications will be explained in the context of interactive media as well as previous research done on people's use of videogames from this particular perspective. Secondly, accompanying the uses and gratifications theory is the concept of escapism in media consumption, a very prominent factor in previous research on uses and gratifications. After that, the newly described concept of digital dualism will be analyzed. It is important to keep in mind that the term of digital dualism and augmented reality, in the context of Jurgenson (2011) is very new but very relevant and connected to the topic of uses and gratifications and thus important to observe from this angle.

5.2 Aggression and Misogyny in Online Gaming

There has been significant episodes of misogyny yet little research has peeked behind the veil to uncover the meaning behind misogynistic practices among players until the rise of the GamerGate scandal. Researchers have pulled from the theory to discuss the implications of the scandal on the future of gaming and to shed light on what yet needs to be done in order to advance the gaming community as a whole.

Misogyny in online gaming has been subject to research on aggression with male counterparts. Studies have contributed to understanding of the presence of aggression during gameplay itself when matched against opponents of the same or opposite gender. Eastin (2006) conducted a research on observing the competitive effects of gameplay between genders. Particularly, what he found was that in first person gaming, using an avatar of the same sex generated a higher feeling of "presence" among women and a heightened aggression when playing as the assigned gender avatar faced with the opposite gender avatar in gameplay (Eastin, 2006).

"Gendertrolling" is a term that has emerged in the past several years due to the increased written and verbal attacks against the online female community. The term "troll" was coined in the very rise of the internet, in the early 1990s, when online forums served as the first trail

towards online social communities and societies (Phillips, 2015). The internet environment is a hostile one, and although in common discourse "trolling" can be disregarded as unimportant, those who prefer to engage in this type of behavior online cause serious disruption to the social structure of an online community, often with true, real-life threats (Phillips, 2015). There are multiple ways in which one can interpret the meaning of an online "troll", either in an endearing way of interpreting their jokes as having a sarcastic, comedic effect giving an element of humoristic surprise to topics and providing a comic relief and valuable insight into an online environment. Another interpretation of a troll is someone who deliberately disrupts and destroys the enjoyment of others, which according to Phillips (2015), is *the* major obstacle in the creation and sustainability of an online community. Studies in gaming contributed to online discourse analysis and found a wide-spread abundance of verbal insults and derogatory terms specifically targeted to women (Mantilla, 2013).

Karla Mantilla (2015) described the characteristics of "gendertrolling" and trolling strategies from "bait and switch", which is a form of a more endearing "trolling" previously described by Phillips (2015), that proceeds all the way to a trolling mechanism called "flaming", the one most characteristic of misogynistic occurrences, coupled with raiding, which constitutes troll occurrences to act together (2015: 8). In her extensive descriptions of what constitutes trolling, Mantilla also focused on the women's willingness to take the threats seriously. The women in her work reported that the more physically threatening a troll was in his verbal use, particularly threatening with rape, which is a credible occurrence, the more inclined the women were to take the threats seriously (2016: 56). With regards to the "trolls" motivations of attacking women, she continues that the platform of the internet is not the main place where the trolls spawn and attack, but rather a combination of enabling and conforming (2016: 132).

In recent history, the threat of "doxxing" has raised significant concern among the female online population, particularly the population of women in online gaming communities. "Doxxing" refers to the deliberate and true threats of revealing physical information about a users' (often female) whereabouts and troll group organization and detailed and credible threats of rape, murder, and violence that can be inflicted on a person (Hern, 2014). In recent history, this was often proved by trolls sending orders of pizza and delivery's to physical persons, giving weight and credibility to their threats. Most notable instance of this during the GamerGate

scandal was female game blogger Anita Sarkeesian's flee from home to a safe shelter. The more media attention given to a woman online, the more violent, long lasting, and credible the threats became. Studying gender trolling and the online violence directed to women offline is important in understanding the wholesomeness of women's rights online and the persistent and deliberate actions against women's full participation online.

5.3 Uses and Gratifications: Women as Gamers

The uses and gratifications theory is an approach of study in social sciences that seeks to understand the reasons behind engaging in entertainment media. In video game research, much attention has been given to understanding the motives behind playing video games and the pleasures that derive from gameplay. The uses and gratifications theory provides abundant opportunity in understanding the impact of new communication technologies (Rubin, 1994). The inception of this theory stems from Ludwig von Bertalanffy's established systems theory (1968), which in simple terms, is the pursuit of interpreting the interaction between people and the context in which they find themselves. Systems theory has branched into a myriad of different fields, most notably when understanding the organization and hierarchical social structures of people in context of media. People, in their own right, are believed to be independent agents in interpreting the meaning and their own roles within different confines. Different research on uses and gratifications theory in context of systems theory have concluded that different occurrences, personalities, and factors will always influence the reasons behind engaging in media consumption to reach an "equilibrium" (Lerner, 1987 in Sherry et. al., 2006). To clarify, the equilibrium sought directly corresponds to the deficit of information of a gratification in a person's life. In playing video games, an example would be the gratification of knowing a new skill previously unknown or socializing in a new world online if the individual finds themselves lonely in the physical realm. Although frequently quantified, the idea of the uses and gratifications theory reaffirms the complexity of the human factor in engaging and interpreting the realm of media.

The methodology used in studying the video gaming population was mostly quantified and concluded that the motivations behind using certain kinds of media cannot be deemed universal (Sherry et. al.,2006). Therefore, the research that was previously used on the basis of uses and gratifications focused on establishing a certain spectrum of traits of using a medium

every time it emerges. Furthermore, with the introduction of new platforms that interrelate with media, particularly in the aspect of gaming which is now, as a culture, enjoyed beyond gameplay, a new set of traits need to be defined.

Among the scholars most notable for understanding the uses and gratifications of engaging in videogames was Garry Selnow (1984), the first who developed a set of the traits behind engaging in videogames. Although in 1984, video games were confined to arcades and isolated to areas and predominantly rested on human-computer interaction, Selnow regardless uncovered five overarching factors behind gratifications of use, three of which revolved predominantly around the social aspect of the game while one as rooted in the perception of escapism, and one in physical and mental stimulation from engaging with the console and the interface (Selnow, 1984). He found that the main factors of engaging in video gameplay were knowledge of people acquired through gameplay, engagement's provision of technological companionship, meaning the that the respondents found companionship *with* the game rather than with their human counterparts and that it is in fact, preferable to human companionship, as well as that it provides a sense of independence and escape. What he found as well was a correlation in the time spent with engaging in a certain videogame, but that the physical and mental challenge of accomplishment was the most prevalent among all (Selnow, 1984).

5.4 Escapism

The concept of escapism, as it will be seen throughout this theoretical framework, is often disputed and structured around a negative connotation. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term "escapism" as being "the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy" (Merriam Webster, 2016). To define it so bluntly is important, as the definition goes forth to say that it is the antonym of realism and gives an example of virtual reality as being a form of escapism. As this thesis argues that escapism with regards to the social aspect of gaming is rather immersive than exclusive and avoidant, the following section of the chapter will aim to demonstrate the context in which this theory has been applied to game studies, further demonstrating the essential need for further exploration of this term.

5.5 Psychological and Social Implications of Escapism in Gaming

Escapism in media has been given significant attention in discourse and opinion, yet rarely has it been studied from a personal view when observing a community and an individual's perceived function within that respective community. The definition of escapism is rooted in the position of negativity or detaching oneself from the one true reality, meaning the physical reality so commonly used in discourse. This part of the theoretical framework will reflect upon the reasons for engaging in a mass online game and give a starting point for the results on a population that was previously examined.

One of the simplest way to affirm the existence of digital dualism as such is to view the engagement in media entertainment as escapism. This term has been quite extensively used in discourse, but rarely has anyone attempted to define it in order to gain a better understanding of its implications in the context of gaming. With regards to massively played online games, escapism was most prominently used when describing the reasons behind engaging in gameplay with negative implications rooted deeply in feelings of addiction and disillusionment with the physical reality and psychological and social disorders, while the positive often implicated a sense of relaxation, but almost always with reference to an "escape from reality" (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014; Peter & Malesky, 2008). Most studies mentioned that the virtual and the physical world are very different and that this is where the basis of their appeal lie (Martocnik & Loksa, 2016).

Scholars were also consistent in uncovering the persistence of loneliness and social anxiety among the players, bringing a duality to the reasons behind engaging in online games altogether (Hagstrom & Kaldo, 2014: Martocnik & Loksa, 2016). A repeated discovery in understanding players was the persistent feeling of loneliness in the physical world, a sort of an exile for engaging in a niche pastime, but a strong perception of real, meaningful relationships built online with people enjoying the same pastime. The engagement, belonging, and constructing a role in a virtual environment gives significant base for feelings of contribution to an online society, in helping virtual friends achieve their goals strictly through gameplay. The findings have nearly always concluded a persistence in a double life, confirming the existence of duality in online gaming. It is very important to note, however, that most of the methodologies

used to understand the engagement in online gaming communities and the feelings of social anxiety were administered and analysed using quantitative methods.

Significant studies presented that an increases immersion in online mass multiplayer videogames are directly linked to depression and avoidant personality disorder, yet it is important to critically state that these implications derived from an overindulgence in this pastime and did not focus on the positive implications of self-identity within these roles (Stetina et. al., 2011; Lo & al., 2005). Other research discussion escapism focused on the transcendence of violent behavior from exposure to violent videogames, a topic that is to date still frequently disputed with mixed results (Scott, 1995; Liu & Peng, 2009).

5.7 Digital Dualism

The concept of digital dualism was coined by Nathan Jurgenson in 2011 and is a new and seldom researched topic, yet very familiar in applied philosophy of the modern society. The validity of the term itself is negated by Jurgenson itself, illustrating the two poles of physical and digital realities as the distinct opposite of one another. In truth, the literature which would thus evolve from the theory would set applications of it on a spectrum, much like the polarity of various social constructs including gender. The term argues that our online selves, including behavior and norms, are distinctly different from our offline selves. It insists that the "real" is only what we encounter in the physical realm, while the digital is its strict opposite. Digital dualism illustrates the idea that frequently comes into everyday conversation, insisting that what we engage in online is not a reality in its own right, but rather a projection of our physical, "real", world. It's the "slippery-slope" argument that our online social interactions with "friends" and "followers" are not as real as those we meet with regularly in daily life, and social interaction has stopped altogether due to everyone sinking into their smartphones rather than interacting. The stem of this argument is quite rigid, but makes for ample support for theories challenging it to place different types of online interactions and relationships and is important to study in order to gain a better grasp of the social implications of technology in the future. This thesis will thus aim to prove the validity of realities in a social format. The question that studies approaching digital dualism ask is whether or not our digital interactions are less real than ones encountered in the physical realm. It is important to state that the establishment of the term was

meant to critique the validity of it. Jurgenson argues that our lives are so ingrained into modern technologies that it is simply impossible to claim the concept of reality as "dualistic".

Supplementary to this theory is the "In Real Life" (IRL) Fetish discussed by Jurgenson (2012). Jurgenson discusses the seeming obsession of people to liberate themselves from the omnipresence of digital technology with which they are persistently surrounded with. Relentless check-ins, Twitter feed, Facebook, and Instagram posts have arguably forced the human race into submission to their online technologies. Many have become hyper-aware of their dependence to new media technologies and call for a cease in this behavior, particularly calling upon the youth of today and their absence from the physical world such as the dinner table or the bus ride to school, favoring their digital friendships over participation in "real-life" conversations and experiences. Jurgenson (2012) describes how the hardware and software of communications today have seemingly seeped into our lives by causing us to doubt the reality of something if there is no proof of it online; the only truth that we know is the one that can be backed by proof on social media. Real friends are only true if they are also "friended" on Facebook, photographs are legitimate evidence of a true and glamorous life that we all live parallel to our physical lives. In short, Jurgenson's argument changes perspective on the criticism of this reality stating that it is simply impossible to truly detach yourself from new media and its reality, and doing so on purpose reaffirms the fact that it is so engrained into our lives – so why would it necessarily be untrue or unauthentic? Is it true that we cannot appreciate the physical surroundings and have the best of both the immersion of the social life online and the other reality of true contact? The hipster movement of the 2010s flaunted the adoption of analogue photography, vinyl, public adoration of the "timeless" Nokia 3310 cellphone.

It is unequivocal that the refusal to adopt and evolve along with the new social technologies leads to a seeming need of proof that the person is really renouncing the use of these technologies. This promotion of proof is then taken online to demonstrate the "truth" of life with analogue or "pure" technologies, flaunting the authenticity of appreciating the physical. Jurgenson, in his discussion, points out the double standard of this life: in order to renounce the digital, one must be profoundly immersed into the digital reality already. By purposely avoiding to socialize through online media, one's life is already immersed in online media. He uses his "in real life fetish" as a response to the concept of digital dualism.

Our roles within the physical society are determined by social factors outside our control. As humans, we are born into a demographic and unphysically branded with a set of attributes which hold social values. We act within established social parameters to assume a role and contribute to the situation with our reactions, which stem from a process acquired through our lifetime of self-identifying with groups and situations most appropriate to that role. In turn, the paradigm through which we are viewed by others contributing to that same social situation determines their reaction, which consequently perpetuates the circle of interactions, confined within social structures. In an illustrative way, the fluidity of our physical and unphysical representations of ourselves is the postmodern question of whether the chicken or the egg came first.

The inspiration for this stems partly from the concept of digital dualism coined by Nathan Jurgenson (2011). This newly formed theory suggests that there is an imminent stringency between the digital reality and the physical reality. Jurgenson himself coined the term in order to negate it and the concept of digital dualism serves as a pillar against which studies can base their case studies on. Digital dualism suggests that our physical lives and our online lives are two distinct opposites and that this is the way in which many people of today interpret their internet usage, much to the point of negating and renouncing their involvement with the digital altogether, in what Jurgenson refers to as "the IRL (in real life) fetish" (Jurgenson, 2011).

The theory itself stems from Donna Haraway's classic text of the human cyborg and the postmodern evolution of technology and humans (Haraway, 1983). The discussions of deconstructing reality in terms of modern technologies were best described by Haraway's classic 1983 text, which was a critical commentary on the current and future views of human's interdependence of technology and human physiology both corporal and psychological (Harwaway, 1983). Her metaphor has been interpreted and adapted over decades and scholarly texts on gender, identity, and technology, along with the speed at which viewpoints and research evolved, has paved the way for a research exploring the human aspect after the establishment of the cyborg as we know it. Even our thinking of how to fit into the frames of social norms is an aspect of the postmodern evolution. These theories have been subjected to extensive scholar discussions on the instance of social advancements and social interactions in the dual realities of the digital and physical worlds. The concept of "digital dualism" as such is still in its very

infancy, but with a very keen following. The cyborg is no longer a metaphor and this research will argue to negate the concept of digital dualism by demonstrating the psychological implications of self-identity that mass online gaming can have on women.

One of the simplest categories in intersectionality is the concept of gender. The role of gender is one particularly valuable one to research the issue of the world as an organism. We simplify and polarize all concepts, black and white, male and female, and thus good and evil. One may present oneself as female or male, purposely fitting into a given social frame transcendent from the physical into the digital realm. Online games, those that allow the player to construct their own avatar and interact with the mass community, give players the freedom to present their gender within them as they wish. Although the players themselves may not consciously define their gender online, the current discourse on gender identity is an interesting one to study and contribute to a theory still in its infancy.

Drawing from the uses and gratifications theory as well as the emerging theory of digital dualism stemming from Donna Haraway's iconic cyborg metaphor, this research will attempt to contribute to the literature on game studies and socialization online by using an ethnographic or methodological approach. The following chapters will give background on the game *Minecraft*, research questions and aims, the theoretical framework, methodology and analysis of the data, finalized by a discussion drawing back to the theoretical framework and the results achieved. The respondents' answers will be juxtaposed to the theories of digital dualism to gain a better understanding of their takes on female *Minecraft* players' grasp on misogyny and how the reality of the physical world (their gender) can be translated into the digital (the online *Minecraft* community), or how the online threats of misogyny can affect the physical world. It is important to note that for the sake of the argument, the concept of reality is defines as either physical or digital, disagreeing with the term "reality" to be dual.

6.1 Methodology:

This chapter will describe the data collection that was employed for the purpose of this study. There were three steps to obtaining data, starting with a purposive snowball sampling method, followed by requesting written consent and explanation of the purpose of this study to potential participants, validation of the participants through filling out criteria that deemed them

eligible for participation, to the distribution of a simple demographic questionnaire prior to finally conducting and analyzing individual interviews either in person or via the Skype application.

This study follows a grounded theory approach in qualitative research. Through grounded theory, a researcher aims to construct a theory or conclusions from analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). The method includes categorizing data as it emerges, without previous expectations of knowledge of what that data will entail. A grounded theory method differs from the conventional social research method in the way that instead of proving or disproving a hypothesis, it aims to contribute or construct a theoretical concept through a detailed analysis of discussions (Creswell, 2013). This study will aim to analyze women's text through interviews by understanding what themes and topics emerge in reference to reality, misogyny, and self-representation.

6.2 Conducting a Demographic Survey and Interviews

Through an ethnographic qualitative approach focusing on the player's own perceptions, this thesis will seek to show that the created identity of the outside world can greatly influence your behavior online, in using digital media technologies. Gaining a broader understanding of the concept of escapism as described in previous literature and to open a new ground for discussion that will portray online pastimes in positive light complementing the one reality not excluding or differentiating between the "real" and the "virtual" world of reality but rather as a spectrum of a whole. The norms and values to which an individual is exposed to may greatly be a direct reflection of the digital community world in which stuff is created. The purpose is to contribute to the literature on digital dualism, still in its stages of literary infancy, and apply it in the situation of the online gaming world. The occurrence of GamerGate, although not central to this topic, serves as a pillar of orientation of how events revolving around the concept of the virtual can have real consequences in the physical world in which the representation of gender, also a dualistic term in its own right, serves as a starting point.

6.3 Sampling & Participant Selection Method

This study was conducted via interviews and informative, nominal questionnaires to better understand the habits of participants. The study was conducted on an international audience and thus the participants were recruited, surveyed, and interviewed online. The

population studied were women who were active *Minecraft* players and active members of the online *Minecraft* community. The following sections will outline the methodology used in this study in more detail.

The population of relevance in this study were female *Minecraft* players of all ages who regularly engage in playing the game. The sample did not exclude women who are active on other platforms with regards to the game, for example being active on social media fan pages and blogs, although the amount of activity spent on various platforms that revolved around the game were juxtaposed to understand whether higher involvement culminated in a higher sense of community.

The criteria for "activity" would be that they have played *Minecraft* at least once in the one month prior to the interview. A snowball sample is a sampling method employed when the researcher does not have direct and easy access to the members of the population intended to study, and relies on previously acquired contacts from members of the same population to provide further participants thus generating a "snowball", or an accumulated sample of the given population.

Although differences between the nationalities of the women were not central to this research, it was an important aspect as well as the age group of the women. It is important to note that this research was strictly unobtrusive and thus no interaction was done via the multiplayer mode of *Minecraft* to minimize risk of bias. The study aimed to understand the women's self-perception, and their responses and interpretations of their respective roles were the sole data used for this research.

The samples were collected by contacting the personal acquaintances of the researcher to recruit eligible participants who would be interested in taking place. Further methods of recruitment were via direct messaging on social media platforms *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Dedicated Facebook groups and pages with an active community were scoped and direct messages were sent to those recently active on the social network with a request to participate in the research. The motivation of using Twitter as the starting point lies in the fact that it is a very open platform with profiles easily accessible and often public, while users frequently and easily interact with those sharing similar interest. Through the usage of hashtags and conducting a

simple search through hashtags that included #*Minecraft*, #*Minecraft*girls, as well as any searched tweets to the direct Twitter handle @*Minecraft*. The participants were recruited via the direct message option, asking their interest in participation in a brief questionnaire and interview. Personal contacts were also used in order to gain access to as many respondents as possible. The statement aimed to intrigue the users to participate and they were assured that no personal data will be used without their consent as well as that they may retract their responses at any time. As in qualitative research protocol, confidentiality is of utmost importance. The participants were recruited over a period of one year, with a lengthy intermission in between, with repeated endeavors of sending messages twice per week.

Following the process of sending direct messages provided to be very fruitful and many women were interested in this topic. In total, twenty women initially responded positively to participate in the research, indicating that this topic of research is indeed of interest to the population group. However, to ensure relevance, the need to evaluate the respondents' eligibility was employed. The main criteria was that the respondents identified themselves as fans and as active players of *Minecraft* with sufficient knowledge of the community culture to participate. The evaluation of this criteria was based on the preliminary questionnaire that the participants filled in prior to the interviews. As a result, seven women were deemed ineligible to participate due to the reason of low activity in the game itself. It is important to note that all of them have at some point engaged in the game and those eliminated have been absent from the game for longer than two months, with no indicated intention to return to the player realm.

6.4 Distribution of the Questionnaire:

Following the recruitment of women to participant in the study, a simple questionnaire was distributed electronically to all the participants. The aim of the questionnaire was to gain a starting profile of all the women prior to the execution of the interviews themselves. The answers given in the questionnaire of each individual were used as a reference point when making the analysis to gain a better in-depth understanding of the women's backgrounds, gaming habits, and engagement in gaming in general. Central demographics were sought in the answers of the questionnaire. Firstly, the women's length of engagement in *Minecraft*, their gamer profile which included their XP points, their most preferred gameplay mode, whether it was single player, survival, or multiplayer, their nationality, and the amount of time spent on *Minecraft* weekly. It

was found that distributing the questionnaire prior to the interviews was very useful to shorten the interview process and gain a better understanding of the general profile of players.

6.5 Interviews

Due to the fact that this study was conducted cross nationally, most of the interviews were impossible to schedule in person due to the obvious geographical limitations. Consequently, during the written correspondence online, the research requested that the interviews be scheduled according to the participants' most suited time via Skype video call. Due to technical difficulties, three of the participants could not conduct a live audio video Skype call and were thus conducted via Skype's chat feature. To avoid bias through the use of chat feature and to not distort the results when preparing the collected transcripts for data analysis, those that were interviewed via the chat feature were encouraged to speak as freely as possible about their experiences with *Minecraft*, and urged to not give "yes or no" answers but to wholeheartedly and in detail use as many words as they deemed necessary to truly describe their experiences. Finally, due to favorable geographic proximity, the Belgian and Croatian interviews were conducted individually and in person. It is important to note that all interviews, except for the Croatian respondent, were conducted in English and that there were no restrictions in the data collection process due to language barriers whatsoever. It is important to emphasize that interview excerpts included in the following chapter from the Croatian respondent were translated to English. All the remaining participants from the selected pool were fluent English speakers and were notified to be comfortable with conducting the interviews in that language.

The sample was selected with the purpose of contributing to a theory, following a grounded theory approach of research (Cresswell, 2007). The research was conducted on an international scale, and out of the 13 women who participated, one was Swedish, two were Belgian, three were nationals of the United Kingdom, one was Croatian, two were Dutch, and four were from the United States. The sample did not include women from other countries or regions and did not have the intention of representing the entire world population of women, nor the population of the countries from which the recruited participants originated.

The limited geographic representation in the sample resulted due to time and resources constricts, as well as lack of interest and reliability of interested participants. This research meant

to contribute to the data on women of Minecraft without generalizing to a certain geographic population and the responses from the participants cannot be taken as reflective of the population within the respective regions. The sample of the women was meant to contribute to the data of female Minecraft players with the purpose of describing the data meant for a grounded theory approach. Therefore the responses of the participants, collected from the United States and the European Union, as well as the final results of this study cannot be generalized to the population of any of the countries surveyed, nor be taken as a whole as reflective of gaming practices of women from these regions. The responses and results are credible reflections of the experiences of gaming from only the women who participated. With this in mind, the results of this research are important, being the first of their kind, and they are meant to open the doorway to discussion of mass gaming and women's self-perceptions and roles within them. Collecting the responses from the participants deemed results that proved to be a good starting point for this discussion and to contribute to the theory in the context of digital dualism.

The open-ended interview questions aimed to probe into the gamers' minds as their role of women in the online gaming world. All the interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. The questions which the participants of this study were requested to ask truthfully were divided into themes limited to their self-perception within the gaming world: Self-perception as a gamer and reasons for gaming, their role in the *Minecraft* community and social aspects, reasons behind engaging in *Minecraft*, and their takes on misogyny. The three themes, as seen in the interview guide in the appendix, were structured to understand whether the conversations in the topic deviated from one another. Subtle differences and themes were sought and while every participant was individually interviewed, the responses previously submitted via the questionnaire were also taken into account of the analysis.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, a brief introduction of the research aim was given to the participants, so that they may gain a better overview of the purpose of the study and their role in it. Maximum confidentiality was ensured, as was prior to the recruitment, so that the women understood that the results of the research were strictly for academic purposes and that their information will not be shared without their consent. The setting was very casual and inviting for a casual conversation. Firstly, the women were asked to describe their general gratifications behind engaging in *Minecraft*. The first theme opened with a question revolving

around describing themselves as a gamer with their relationship to their physical self. What was sought was how the women discussed their experiences and whether there were significant themes emerging with regards to escapism or misogyny, or a direct split between virtual and physical relationships. The second theme continued to understand their role within the community and whether and how they interact on other platforms, be in via YouTube videos or discussing the topic within their social circles as well as how they were perceived within their social circles because of their hobby. Lastly, the women discussed the prevalence of misogyny in online gaming. The responses were noted and analyzed to prepare for an adequate data analysis.

6.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews and questionnaires was analyzed on three different levels. Firstly, the responses from the questionnaires were juxtaposed to the responses collected via the interview transcripts. These were then accordingly grouped according to each participant's nationality to ensure order. Secondly, each interview was reviewed extensively to recognize significant patterns or key expressions that the women used throughout the process. Thirdly, these results were compared to each previous step to uncover recurring patterns and gain the final conclusion and refer back to the theory of this research.

The first step of analysis entailed comparing and contrasting the acquired questionnaire responses to the responses of each individual participant. For example, what was sought was whether women who have engaged in the game longer have a stronger identity to the *Minecraft* community and whether their demographics influenced their perception of themselves as a gamer. Their age, profession, and nationality were each contrasted to the respective information given to the interviews. Another example of what was sought through the study is whether an increase in the use of other media juxtaposed to their perceived role of authority, legitimacy of identity, or empowerment when engaging with the rest of the community. Analyzing data collected for a qualitative study indicates the distribution of data into identified themes.

The second step of the data analysis thus consisted of a discourse analysis and the group the conversations into recurrent themes that emerged within the conversations. It is important to note this step, although guided by the structure of the questionnaire, was not exclusive to the themes decided in the questionnaire. The themes emerging from the discourse were spontaneous

repetition of the respondent's statements that could be grouped in order to uncover their perception of reality and their personal roles within the *Minecraft* community.

7. Results and Findings

7.1 Questionnaire Findings

As specified previously, the purpose of the questionnaire was to gather simple, demographic data before proceeding with the interviews. The questionnaire distributed collected the following data regarding the participants' engagement in *Minecraft* as well as their engagement in other platforms with regards to their presence within the gaming community. The questionnaire also sought to see which other games the participants were most likely to participate in and the varying level of activity that the respondents had on social media that supplemented their gaming activity.

The average age of participants was 24 years old. The most preferred gameplay mode was "adventure" in multiplayer and "creative" in single player modes, with multiplayer and survival modes being the second most favored. However, as will be seen in the results below, those engaged most in the entirety of the Minecraft gaming community were more inclined to use multiplayer.

7.2 Reasons for Engaging in the *Minecraft* Community

Throughout the evaluation of the interview transcripts, the research uncovered significant patterns grouped into themes. As described in the methodology and data analysis sections, this chapter will describe to analyze the research findings in the quest of answering the research questions, finally coming to a conclusion about the purpose of women's engagement with the *Minecraft* community.

7.3 Result: Why do women play *Minecraft*: Technical Escapism vs. Social Immersion

The following analysis corresponds to the time frame in which the data was collected. An important way of starting the analysis was the women's reaction to their confirmation to participate in the research. Although the invitation for participation did not explicitly give floor to discuss the theme of escapism, when agreeing on the scheduling of the interviews, eight of the women gave a response indicating their engagement with *Minecraft* as a subtheme of escapism:

> "Not sure how much I can help but it seems interesting and yeah I guess you could say that *Minecraft* is my escape from reality." – Kate, 20, USA Twitter direct messaging feature.

> "Sounds cool! Gamer reality is my kind of reality!" – Elisa, 19, Netherlands, Twitter direct message

> "I spend way too much time away from the real world, [laughter]" – Celine, 23, USA

The quotes above indicate that in outside discourse, players were more keen to initially differentiate the "real" and the "virtual" by making a clear distinction that their engagement in *Minecraft* does not constitute reality. This is to bear in mind that the excerpts of the quotes were taken prior to the interview process itself, but still goes to show that the general feelings of the women corresponded to the research supporting the conscious differentiation of online platforms to every-day life corresponding to the themes of escapism and the confirmation of the consciousness of dualism within the real and the virtual. These initial responses also concluded that the participants, when initially confronted with their pastime, were more inclined to use individualistic pronouns "I", and "my" instead of "we" or "our". This indicated a stronger sense of individualism within the gaming community and reaffirms the fact that each player finds their own particular place and approaches the gameplay on an individualistic rather than collectivist fashion. It is important to note that the guided discussions on questions regarding harassment and misogyny, as will be presented later, deemed rather different discourse results.

Another gratification of engaging in *Minecraft* was the participants' feelings of accomplishment and pride for their learning curve and personal status, apart from the social aspects. A recurring motivation behind playing *Minecraft* was the sense of achievement in completion of a complex building in creative mode or surviving a battle. The responses in this section related strictly to the participants interaction with the game itself and did not take into account the social aspects and climate of *Minecraft*:

> "I just started not really knowing what to do, never played it before and not really a 'gamer' type of person, but seemed simple and a lot of friends were doing it. It's all manual [collecting resources] but once you get into it, it's easy […] don't really have

> time for building you know… Golden Gate Bridge and I don't know… Westeros, like you see on 9Gag. I have a job." – Katherine, 19, USA

> "I've been on it for about a year and a half now but don't go on it as much but I just played in creative at first, not really into the competitive side of it but loved building houses and talking to myself…" – Jasmine, 24, Netherlands

The habits of play between the respondents varied from intense player and active on both *Minecraft* and social platforms, to those who only occasionally played in "creative" mode, accounted by the respondents as the simplest type of game mode. A significant observation between the two different types was that women who were more inclined to be active throughout all the platforms on which *Minecraft* was enjoyed (*Minecraft*, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook pages, Reddit forums) felt a self-explanatory higher sense of "presence". When asked to describe how they relate engaging in *Minecraft* to their everyday lives, one respondent noted how she felt that the playing was more of a "lifestyle" than a way to relax. Her wording suggested a feeling of belonging and dedicated pastime, in the sense that the more she spent involved with the community *beyond* engaging in the *Minecraft* interface, the more she felt accepted. There was less of a sense of recreational escapism and a detachment from the everyday life, as much as *Minecraft was* deemed as part of her everyday life:

> "Well…if you mean about whether it takes up a lot of my time, yeah it does. I don't even play that much as much as I like watching YouTube walkthroughs and those commentaries. […] I like Reddit for that. On Reddit, you can open a topic and discuss, and on Twitter I like when someone retweets what I posted. I don't really go on *Minecraft* on Facebook. […] What I love most about it is that you are a real community and everyone is included and you don't even know if it's a kid you're playing with, but it's nice to be appreciated" – Jasemine, 24, Netherlands

On the other hand, this was different to players who have a lower amount of time spent playing, which on the questionnaire, was up to three hours per week. There was no observed (non-mathematical) correlation with regards to the difference in gameplay, as some players who reported low in-game *Minecraft* involvement, like in the excerpt above, felt an intense gratification in the belonging in a community. However, those with a lower engagement in

supplementary activities to *Minecraft* such as those described above, reported the motivations behind their use as being strictly recreational and for the purpose of relaxation:

> "It doesn't relate to my life. But it's fun! You know, running from creepers (in-game zombies), cutting down trees… brain-slug, but I'm not like hardcore one of those people who only plays that". Amy, 20, USA

The respondent above noted her decline in the engagement of *Minecraft* after her "real life got more serious", thus shifting her interest to her immediate responsibilities. Yet, even so, the respondent's casual use and inactivity in the social platforms of the game indicated a preferred sense of strategy gaming and a resonated a motivation for escapism and simply "detaching from everyday life". The less the women were involved in the social platforms online, the more they fit into the previous theories and studies conducted on the role of women in video games to be more of a casual, preferred strategy pastime.

Observed among the respondents while comparing the results of their informational survey was that women who played a wide array of different genres of video games across different consoles were less involved in *Minecraft* as a community or game itself and were also less focused on the society that emerged in light of it online, and thus less involved with participating in online discussions. Simultaneously, even though they were less inclined to participate in strictly game-related discussions on social platforms, they expressed an obligation to justify their "gamer" identity by following discussions online and staying informed, as well as keeping in touch virtually with those who shared the same pastime. Women who played games on more genres justified their reasons for engaging in *Minecraft* to acquire a more holistic "gamer-identity" than those who played less games or focused on predominantly *Minecraft*.

> "I started playing because, well I like all games and I've always been surrounded by videogames. And I know that I know more about them than those who just play one thing. You know, you see the shelf [turns camera to a vast collection of video games], I know everything about all games since I was little. A gamer isn't just someone who feels like they're part of this community," she stated emphasizing, "you have to prove your worth and knowledge." – Celine, 23, USA

This implication showed the motivation of playing a simple game with multiple ways of using it was deemed as a type of a badge of merit for belonging in the community. Celine shifted away from insisting on being part of only the *Minecraft* community, but suggested that mastering the entirety of the game culture arena justifies her participation within the game and deems her worthy of the title of "gamer" but not necessarily within the niche of "*Minecraft*er". Her motivation lied in the general appreciation for what she calls a "craft" of gaming. This implies that passion and an individual approach is a very notable reason behind engaging in *Minecraft* and reflects on the widespread playability of the game.

> "Can people who listen to only rock music call themselves 'music lovers'? I think some can, but I don't think it's valid. I think you have to know your craft and your hobby entirely before making yourself 'an expert' on something but knowing only a little bit about it. When you see the rest of the gaming world, *Minecraft* is just a little drop."

Others implied the aspiration of mastering the game to justifying the presence of their gender within the online *Minecraft* community:

"Yeah, I do think we girls have to prove ourselves more in the gaming world. You have to be better at *Minecraft* so people don't think you're just casually building like a *Farmville*" – Elizabeth, USA

The respondents intrinsically tied back to their self-awareness of being women in the online world as a deviation from the norm through their responses. All of them reflected on their role as women in the environment by identifying themselves as a collective demographic when asked about their interaction with women online in gameplay. Further, through her responses, Elizabeth expressed frustration about the presumptions that she frequently encounters when others come to understand that she is a *Minecraft* player. She emphasized "proving herself" as being proficient in game modes other than creative or adventure, stating that these are "safer" modes of play that are not highly regarded in the eyes of the most critical of fans. Mastering the interface is a key factor in being validated as a true "gamer" within the *Minecraft* community.

The results from the interviews that aimed to answer the question of how women engage in *Minecraft* provided the following: Women play *Minecraft* as a means of relaxation and detachment from everyday life, meaning the physical world, and women play *Minecraft* as a way

of establishing themselves with the community, given that they feel that they belong to that community themselves. However, certain answers did reflect that respondents had an escapist relationship with their gaming habits and used their immersion in *Minecraft* as a source of anxiety relief in particular. In response to the question of whether the participants engaged in *Minecraft* as a way of disengaging with the physical world there was implication that in times of excess anxiety, the respondents not only preferred the lower-risk game play such as creative and adventure, but with regards to the social online aspect, found gratifications in being passive observers:

> "I'm at work all day and take language lessons at night… I don't have a television and don't have patience to watch shows and movies and with this I just tune out and take it one block at a time…" – Katarina, 25, Croatia

Multiple respondents cited "tuning out" of their everyday life as a way of interacting with the game interface, but with regards to the social aspect, there were quite a bit of deviations. The results clearly showed that when discussing using the game for its main purpose, to roam the world of *Minecraft* and individually progress within the game, their responses implied that they distinguish the platform of *Minecraft*, the game itself, as a separate reality where they feel safe and relaxed.

The results differed when discussing the implications of online interactions on the physical world in context of the social aspect of *Minecraft*: the chat feature, commenting on blog posts and YouTube, article comments, and participation in conversations on Reddit and Twitter:

> "Well no, obviously it's real. We're a society and we're congregating around the same interest. I've been to game cons (conferences). This is where it gets real. Everyone's all enthusiastic but you put a face to the username. I don't think it's a 'belonging to a community' thing. I think it's a right to an opinion thing. I want to be validated. I know more about this than most people and the internet is full of trolls."

The excerpt from the interview above shows that the sense of reality is mostly confirmed when "faces are put to the username", corresponding to the theory that if something is not encountered in the physical world, it makes the experience seem more validated than when only

online interaction occurs corresponding and confirming the essence of Nathan Jurgenson's concept of digital dualism, with regards to the term, strictly speaking.

> "Yes, I think real-life contact and discussions are the way that you see how these online societies actually impact the world. I keep in touch with some friends who live abroad through our love for *Minecraft*. It feels like they're with me. It makes the whole experience more worthwhile. Same as if you friend someone on Facebook that's not your real friend. It's not really real." – Elizabeth, USA

The above goes to show that the insistence of validity is important to women who engage in *Minecraft*. Mastering the game's interface coupled with coherent understanding the relevant topics within the gaming community are the relevant starting points for perceiving the belonging to a community. Women interviewed were very critical of their role within *Minecraft* and their answers implied that they set high standards for being a part of the gaming world. Further, their responses suggested a self-reflection rooted in the awareness of their gender. They felt that because they were women, they were inherently required to have a broader understanding of the topic than their male counterparts. It is important to reflect that none of the women compared themselves to male gamers, but took a very introspective approach to understanding the outside perception of them as belonging to the gaming community. One female gamer in particular found that people legitimized her immersion within the game due to her profession in the physical world.

> "I'm a civil engineer, so when people find out I'm into [*Minecraft*], they're like 'oh yeah, well you're good at buildings. I have a 'male' career, I was one of maybe five girls in my class, but what does that have to do with anything? I might as well be a vacuum salesman. But I take it and I'm glad I don't have to explain it further". – Katarina, 25, Croatia

The outward "legitimacy" of her career gave her a sense of peace that she is generally successful within a heteronormative society, which gives her the credibility to be validated within the seemingly male-dominated world of *Minecraft*.

7.4 Results 2: Interpretations of Accounts of Misogyny

During the interviews, the concept of misogyny was one that the women had very strong opinions of. The results showed a definite reluctance and peaked self-awareness when the

participants discussed their interactions online with regards to their gender. The results of self-representation online when dealing with misogyny showed two distinct patterns: purposeful reclusiveness and empowerment, which are two quite polar results. However, the results suggesting reasons behind this were rather inconclusive, and demonstrated the difference in personalities of the participants.

This was primarily seen in the way the women presented their gender online on their *Minecraft* account or on online forums relating to *Minecraft*:

> "No, I don't give out my gender information anywhere, and I think everyone just thinks I'm a man. I'd try to experiment and see what happens if I call myself a girlie name like 'Lucy' but there are just too many trolls out there."

> "Yes and I want to be a part of that discussion. I feel a rush of rage when I see the comments people post and I'm sick of people assuming that gamers are just teenage boys. It's a game. It's media. It's entertainment. There's nothing gendered about it. Still, I feel sad about the world when people don't get it." – Amy

Two different types of exposure to misogyny were observed: passive and direct exposures. Passive exposure refers to the reading, consuming and interpreting of misogynistic messages found on message boards, articles, comments, and tweets, that are targeted at women in general or other women, but no at the respondent in question. Active exposure to misogyny in *Minecraft* in this study referred to the participants being actively harassed and attacked via direct messages or belligerent Tweets or forum comments.

The perception of real world implications and consequences, as well as the women's self-representation in the *Minecraft* community slightly differed with different exposures, whether they were passive or direct. All women immediately understood concept of misogynistic online aggression, and they all reported being passively exposed to verbal aggression targeted to women in context of online gaming. Ten of the women interviewed also reported being directly targeted, but their interpretations of severity and "reality" of the attacks differed to the experience of passive exposure to aggression. With regards to passive aggression and their interpretation of "real" or "physical world" interpretations, the women responded feeling that there is some distance between the event and themselves and did not report overwhelming negative feelings:

"I think that it can be 'real' when it happens to you, but all I see is just comments and I don't take them seriously… Yeah, it's uncomfortable and you see people commenting on YouTube tutorials just 'because it's a girl making them, saying that they will ... kill her, rape her, telling her she's fat… those things. Or just dislike…Sometimes I wonder what it's like for them." – Anna, 19, Sweden

In her response, the interviewee suggested a perception of distance when reading negative comments online. Although no discourse analysis was conducted on the negative comments on social media, when asked to describe the ways in which they saw aggression targeted towards women online, nearly all of them included reading about threats of rape, murder, and body shaming. A supplementary question was asked after the respondents initial answer asking about her active participation in the online community, to which she showed significant reluctance to fully disclose her information online, and implied that avoiding comments and attacks such as the one disclosed above, as the main reason behind not fully participating.

"I don't know. I mean, I'm very active on social media and I'm active about *Minecraft* but I'm talk [to] the friends and community that I've made through the game and my real life friends. Maybe because I'm not a very famous person or I don't make YouTube videos, but yeah, if you put it that way, when I see the comments on YouTube, to be honest I don't think I would like to make them like that".

There were definite implications that due to the passive exposure of misogyny online on others who were more active, the women felt a reluctance to fully immerse themselves. Although Anna reported that she is not sure whether she would make YouTube videos or make herself more public as a *Minecraft* player, the fact that she was familiar with the threats that other more public *Minecraft* players were exposed to, resulted in a disinclination to consider participating in a more public way.

The guided discussions proceeded to a conversation on reasons behind engaging in misogynistic practices online, and the respondents' interpretation of people who find pleasure in corrupting women's progress online. An unexpected result was the fact that the interviewees in question had an obligation to justify other's practices. Julie was particularly opinionated on "gender trolls":

"I think they want to feel power and feel better about themselves. Personally, I think it's due to several factors: individual mindset, doing that together, and targeted attacks. In the end, you (gendertrolls) go online because you want to conform. The internet hates silence. You don't see empty YouTube comments unless they're disabled and if they are, they'll get less views. The comments trigger a massive effect. Bullying (online) is easier and people don't think it's part of the physical life. Maybe it's their pastime. Maybe they're challenging the status quo but I think they're perpetuating it."

To interpret Julie's responses of her interpretation of how "trolls" find that they influence the physical world, she found that online conformity and "belonging" online plays a very significant part. The respondent was quick to justify the indifference of the implications that trolls might have on the physical world, but found that the trolls unearth real, meaningful relationships through their activity because their main purpose is not playing *Minecraft*, it's destructing the socialization that it constitutes.

Although it was not central to the discussion, the women did report types of abuse either directly encountered or passively absorbed on social media. All women interviewed were exposed to sexual harassment above all other types of abuse. While their responses did not focus on sharing explicit instances of abuse and describing them, it is important to note that they were mentioned in passing during the conversations. The below excerpts illustrate the misogynistic messages that the women were directly exposed to:

"Yeah I don't know what their strategy is. They might be doing it in a group, like… just run a search, like you, like 'hashtag *Minecraft* girls' and then just send a 'dickpic' in a DM [direct messaging on social media] to everyone who pops up, and I don't think they feel like anyone is ever going to see it like if they want to find a job later or something", said Elizabeth, and continued to state how she has come to expect this type of harassment, "If I see a direct message (on Twitter) from someone whom I don't know and it's a photo, I don't even open it. Like you get it so much that you just don't even open it, you know what it's going to be and I don't pay attention to it."

Other respondents, who were only passively exposed to harassment online stated that they felt a sense of detachment from the trolls and that they did not feel that they were actual people

with an agenda, but compared consuming the exposure to passive threats as "watching a horror film":

> "It bothers me but doesn't seem real. Even the bloggers and the GamerGate thing – I think it's important for talking about it and opening a discussion, but for me it's more like watching a film or you know, a 'car-crash' effect: horrible but you can't look away. But then I just go back to my game and it all goes away." – Elisa, 19, Netherlands

The interviewees were keen on discussing their gaming experiences as a whole, and even when not directly referring to *Minecraft*, those women who played only *Minecraft* and those who engaged in multiple games had similar experiences and interpretations, yet those who had a stronger self-described "gamer identity" had much stronger and more detailed opinions on the topic of gendertrolling and misogyny not only in *Minecraft*, but in the entire gaming arena.

The women were not directly referencing the misogyny encountered in other games, and were quite consistent with implying that *Minecraft* has been molded into a free world where violence ensues without consequences. However, as observed above, there were differences in the ways in which they were exposed to misogyny. In the gaming community as a whole, as well as in the social community in the physical realm, the implications of misogyny were not violent, but implied. To clarify, the women's pastime in *Minecraft* was deemed "odd" and those that reported playing other games were also cautious to be among the "others" on "enemy grounds", yet they were not subjected to violence or verbal abuse. Within the game of *Minecraft*, as well as on supplementary social platforms, the attacks and feelings of being uninvited and unwanted were much amplified:

> "It feels like we [women] are actually wanted here. Because if it wasn't for us, they wouldn't have anything to do. I think they would be disappointed if all women disappeared from gaming tomorrow" – Elisa, 19, Netherlands

Elisa described her experience with misogyny as a whole, but stated that due to the nature of Minecraft's open world and lack of censorship, its interface attracts users who would want to conform to the "dark side" of the internet and find their gratifications in trolling.

8. Discussion:

8.1 Equilibrium: Technical vs. Social Gratifications

The following discussion will discuss the findings on the basis of theoretical framework and reflect on the understanding of the theories discussed. Firstly, the uses and gratifications of women playing *Minecraft* will be discussed in relation to their identity and misogyny that they are faced with.

With regards to Ludwig von Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory, there is the argument of equilibrium that was observed in the results of this section. In the instance of sheer interaction with the game, but excluding the social aspect of structure that the Bertalanffy refers, to, equilibrium denotes engaging in something as means of seeking balance. The theory suggests that humans are self-regulating and create meaning, in their interaction with a medium, depending on which context they are currently presented with. As previously discussed, in technical terms of using *Minecraft*, it would be the gratification of adopting or mastering a new skill on *Minecraft* if one had not previously had that skill. The beginning of the interviews and the results sections illustrated this immensely. Excluding the social aspects of the game such as interaction online with the community, but solely focusing on the interaction of the gamers with the interface, it was clear that mastering a skill, constructing a building in *Minecraft* from the resources that they themselves reaped within the game was a major gratification in immersing themselves with the game. The women who were on *Minecraft* just "for themselves", as they described, were seeking balance in their current requirements by unwinding after a long day without much thought put into the creations, and focusing on their immediate individual needs and gratifications to be met. The prior section of discussion focused on the women who played *Minecraft* as a way to detach and be alone after either a long day at work or a self-described need for detachment.

On another account was the social aspect of engaging in *Minecraft* and the community and the motivations behind that arose. On account of the concept of equilibrium, the women who found the most gratifications out of the socialization through different platforms supplementary to the interface of *Minecraft* itself craved a balance that they did not achieve in their every-day lives, perpetuating the research by Hagstrom and Kaldo (2014) on their argument that engaging

in an online game heals or balances social anxiety and loneliness that is encountered on a day to day basis by allowing the women to feel like they are part of something. The respondents reported a feeling of belonging and engaging in a world where they felt most comfortable. The differences between these two findings are simple and seemingly discernable, yet it significantly adds to the understanding of the differences in social and technical (in game) gratifications that have not been explored.

The findings of gratifications of in-game and socialization within *Minecraft* showed a clear sense of duality. There is a distinct fluidity of the physical and the virtual realities as described by Haraway, yet the context in which immersion takes place differs in the perception of those realities. The women found that *Minecraft* is nonetheless, even in the instance of escapist tendencies, a profound part of their lives. Through using the game to relieve anxiety and immersing oneself in individual time to counterbalance the overwhelming effect of every day burdens, the women used immersing themselves in *Minecraft* as an extension to themselves, an antidote to their boredom, and a supplement to their realities. Therefore, the existence of escapism, with regards to the concept of digital dualism, is not rooted in the existence of duality between real and physical, but proves that the gratification of escapism is a supplement to the consumption of digital media and thus lies on the fluid line between real and physical. The argument is that participation in an online society such as *Minecraft* does not prove the *finality* of digital dualism, but instead emphasizes the *fluidity* of the transcendence between the real and the physical. To escape into *Minecraft* is to in fact, extend the usability of the physical realm into the digital by unloading the burdens into another realm.

8.2 Gendertrolling & Misogyny: Conformity, Avoidance, Empowerment

Another point which emphasized and illustrated how the fluidity of duality and confirmed that *Minecraft* is, in fact, an important part of the women's lives is reporting that due to their gender, they feel an increased need for self-regulation online. From the women, it was expected that their personal "physical" world attributes would have an influence on their media use, and most importantly, that their gaming use must be gender conforming, or in line with playing games that were previously designed for women. Therefore, it was expected that the roles that they were assigned or assumed in the physical world would transcend to the digital, most noted

in the example of Katarina, a civil engineer, who stated that her peers justified her use of *Minecraft* because she was already proven to excel in male-dominated areas, or civil engineering, which according to her, is a male dominated profession. The women had a need to justify their participation in *Minecraft* because of the exposure to misogyny and pressures to conform, they felt the need to prove themselves by either completely mastering the entirety of the interface, in the case that the women were active across multiple platforms including social media, or refrain from interacting and discussing their pastime for fear of backlash from the community and being deemed "unworthy to participate".

With regards to misogyny in *Minecraft,* the women inherently referred back to their gender and described that their mere existence (as a woman) was a predisposition for verbal threats. On another note, feelings of anger and frustration prevailed among the women and they were active to discuss and share insight into the problem that is misogyny online. There was a significant fear of backlash from the community in both instances. Those "empowered" still felt a foreboding threat of verbal attack, yet distanced themselves from feeling that there might be physical implications of this. None of the women reported being credibly threatened with physical attacks, but all reported online harassment in different strengths of severity ranging from persistent direct messaging on Twitter and Reddit comments including derogatory verbs and rape threats, as well as suggestive photographs sent, to a self-described "mild" harassment of mocking and deliberate and obstinate disagreement in comments regarding particularly topics of women in gaming and the GamerGate scandal.

The reports of self-awareness on even the level of choosing a username and interacting in multiplayer mode demonstrated the profound indirect impact that previous exposure to misogyny in gaming had on the respondents. Concurrently to research done on the concept of the self-representation of women online, it was clear that a major implication of misogyny started before the women were able to even engage in the game. For the women who were more avoidant to be exposed to attacks, out of fear of being attacked themselves preferred to use gender neutral usernames and were quite wary of using gender neutral pronouns, in the case that they were to use the chat feature in multiplayer.

Tying onto the concept of "gendertrolling", and internet trolling in general, the respondents all attempted to self-reflect on the reasons behind someone would engage in this

type of behavior. The overarching conclusion was a seeming lack of consequences that they felt the perpetrators sensed, and with regards to this, there was even a sense of comfort noted. *Minecraft* is a confined area, with rules similar to that of the entirety of the internet and society, and considering the behavior of the attackers, the respondents felt that they mimicked the playground of the internet, envisioning that the aggressors felt a sense of safety and detachment from the physical realm with no actual implications, but an immense and even tangible power over the women who engaged. This calls for measures on the front of government regulation, production manufacturers, and above all, general educational culture on the internet. Golding & Deventer (2016) gave insight into the real life implications that are possible in the country of their origin, Australia, in case someone threatens someone else online. Therefore, the subject of issue is most certainly getting attention yet the sheer abundance of attacks that not only women, but any member of a minority faces online is very difficult to regulate.

This power over the women of Minecraft was most notably described as the seeming need to conform to the rules of the internet. The trolls engaged in tormenting the female players out of the need for tangible recognition of conformity. The opportunity to express one's opinion online and to influence the thoughts and perceptions is where the power of a confined community such as Minecraft lies in. However, the confined community of Minecraft is not limited to exchanging ideas and tips based on the gameplay itself but are rooted in power play of men, who have historically had a more solid ground to play on, and women, who are seemingly new and "unwanted" in the gamer realm. The power of the gendertroll is entrenched in the ability to cause physical world consequences in the form of anxiety and reluctance in their female counterparts, without physical world consequences. The physical inflictions without consequences in any realm is what makes the gendertroll on Minecraft so prevailing, and it is a good indicator of why the population of gendertrolls is on the rise.

Out of this study, it is apparent that although those targeted often isolate themselves and detach from the negativity and misogyny online, the fact that they are nonetheless very exposed to it is certainly alarming. Contributing to the theory of digital dualism, coupled with the concept of escapism and self-representation, it is clear that the self-representation of women in Minecraft depends on the context of the engagement with the game, be it for individual or social reasons, that finally determine the transcendent implications that flow between the physical and virtual

realities. The approach to studying Minecraft is the fact that it has become such a lush base for studying misogyny due to the omnipresence of attacks on women through the game's interface.

9. Conclusion

It is clear that what happens in the digital realm can have real implications in the physical. However, discourse has too often dismissed digital harassment as irrelevant or simply incomparable to the urgency of the physical realm. However, we use media as extensions of our immediate selves and thus live in the same tangible reality both online and offline.

When constructing the concept of human relationships, we often, without deliberately thinking about it, include the everyday interaction online. Facebook for one, is a platform lying flatly on the bridge between the physical and digital realities, and we often know the people we are connected with via this global platform. Mass online gaming worlds, follow quite a different approach in the socialization of their players. Mass online games fit into the theory of research of digital dualism in the sense that they are by creation, the epitome of social constructs. The structure of games give the players the freedom to create and interact on their own, thus initiating a digital society often dubbed as separate from the true reality.

The amount of agency that the internet has given us to use as extensions of ourselves allows us to interchangeably cross the boundary between physical and unphysical reality. With over 40% of the world's population with access to the internet, we are now using the social platform offered as means to express and contribute to our interests and interact within the social confines presented in the virtual world. We are therefore, creating a "cloud" version of ourselves available at the tip of the world's fingertips. However, it is important to wonder whether the originator of our "cloud" versions is the human self or whether, at this point, we are contributing to a preconceived template of online social interaction. It is one way to think of the world, society, the organic, and the digital as a sole evolving organism that completes itself. To live without technology and renounce it altogether, in the modern life, takes as much effort as to renounce the use of a limb, or purposely retreat from society.

Minecraft, and mass online games alike, are internet platforms whose main purpose is not to serve as a base of social interaction and connectedness but rather to act as a confined space for sharing common interests and pursuing the same goal through a shared activity. This is

particularly seen in interaction across social media, which have been dismissed as "detached from the physical world". This brief, yet blunt description of human society lies at the root of every social interaction. However, does contacting and acting within the same social parameters of the internet truly dissolve the boundaries of culture in the physical world? Can it be concluded that the cultures present on the internet through social media platforms and confines of their interfaces prove the fluidity of global social interaction? With that in thought, what are the implications of violence that is no longer confined to the physical but online violence has proved to have had true and serious implications on the quality of life and on the right to online immersion and freedom of information.

By default, it is noted that social media is primarily one such platform in which the versions of ourselves are most complete, with web platforms such as Facebook being infused with extensions catering to every aspect of our interests and personalities. Nathan Jurgenson (2011), by coining the term "digital dualism", described this phenomenon as one that consists of deliberate strict boundaries between the "real", or the "physical" world and the "non-real" or "unphysical". Donna Haraway, in her classic text of "The Cyborg Manifesto", analyzed the philosophy of the impending fluidity between the organic human and our technological self-extensions. However, these interwoven theories have not been applied in the matter of confined areas of mass online gaming, where players are free to build their own surroundings, within the parameters of their respective online worlds. Different gratifications and uses of online games would deem different things, whether the gratification was escapism or socialization. Severity of attacks presented greatly influence the behavior of women online. Particularly in the aftermath of the 2014 GamerGate scandal, where female gaming professionals were targeted victims of online bullying. However, this thesis only explored the individual women's interpretations of their experiences. For a future study, it would be interesting to conduct a focus group to observe the simultaneous interaction of the women regarding this topic to uncover emerging themes when there is no intermediary.

Gameplay and the gaming world can be a powerful medium for socialization, information sharing, and education. It has the ability to both connect the world and obliterate social progress. It is important to study the construction of societies to observe the amplification of social issues that exist in the physical world. This study has shown how easily the lines between the virtual

and physical can be navigated. Shedding light on the issue of misogyny and abuse online is important for creating a level playing field for all users online. However, observing the abuse that women are exposed to is only part of the problem. More attention must be given to discrimination that gamers, in such a confined and niche space, are exposed to.

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Appendix:

Appendix 1. Recruitment Message:

The purpose of the recruitment message was to give potential respondents insight into the purpose of the interview that will be conducted and give them full disclosure on their participation. The following message was distributed to all respondents before their agreement to participate:

> Dear XYZ
>
> I'm a graduate student at Stockholm University in Sweden (although currently based in Brussels). My main research focuses on the topic of the study the fluidity of "real" vs. "virtual worlds". For my dissertation, I need female respondents active on *Minecraft* for a brief interview and questionnaire, and I'm reaching out to respondents on social media. I would like to talk to you about your personal experience as a woman *Minecraft* player. It will be 100% anonymous and confidential and should you agree to have a chat with me, I promise to make it interesting and fun. Your results can be cancelled at any time and I would never, ever share your information with anyone outside those that might need information to check for validity (by request). If you are interested, please do tell me. If not, maybe you might know someone who would be interested to participate? Bear in mind I'm in Brussels, Belgium, so time difference could be a definite issue. Please let me know. Jana

The above message was followed up every few days and generally received a positive response. The eligibility of the women was decided generally based on their self-assessment of eligibility. However, a criteria that they had to fulfil was to have been active on *Minecraft* in the month preceding the interviews.

Appendix 2. Interview Guides:

The following interview guide was conceptualized before starting the interviews. The questions below served as a starting point in discussion and the conversations had with the respondents were meant to be casual, open, unobtrusive, and let the interviewees express their own concerns and experiences with *Minecraft*. Understanding why women engage in *Minecraft* intertwined with their self-identity as members of the community, and because of misogyny being so ingrained into the gaming community, the reasons and ways of using *Minecraft* were interconnected to being exposed to harassment and online abuse.

Question set 1: Uses and Habits

A. Habits of playing *Minecraft*: (Setting the ambience of the rest of the interview). The beginning of this section serves as a preparation to instill a mindset with the respondents

    1. Could you describe how you play *Minecraft*?

        a. Example: What time of day?

        b. For how long?

        c. Do you use any other media while you are playing? If so, which media and why?

        d. How did you start playing *Minecraft*?

        e. Why do you play *Minecraft*?

The purpose of this section of questions was to set a base of the way in which the women consumed the video game. Understanding their uses interlinked with the reasons behind why the women engaged in this game. Uncovering whether other media were simultaneously used resonated with how the players interact with the game and whether they are fully immersed. For example, if the players discussed watching a television show, they proved to be slightly less fully immersed in the game than those that discussed simultaneously watching YouTube *Minecraft* tutorials and tweeting about current *Minecraft* topics. The simple question of asking "why" they played *Minecraft* at the end of the section let them set the mood by discussing the previous questions and guided them into self-reflections about their uses of the game.

Question set 2: Social aspects and self-identity

1. How do you interact with other *Minecraft* players?

2. Are any of your close friends *Minecraft* players?

3. Do you talk differently about your experience on *Minecraft* with those who play the game and those who do not?

    a. How do you feel you are perceived by those who do not play *Minecraft*? How do you talk to them?

    b. What are the main topics you discuss with people who do play *Minecraft*?

4. Have you made any friends through playing the game?

    a. If so, please explain how and why

    b. How do you interact with those friends?

    c. Do you feel that these friends are "real"?

    d. If not, please explain why you feel you haven't

The purpose of this question set was to gain a deeper understanding of the social identity of the female *Minecraft* players within the game, and to understand whether there are differences between how they are perceived beyond the game. The concept of "reality" and the validity of friendships was guided through the discussion, based on each respondent's answer. The reason why the concept of reality was not directly addressed was to observe whether the women were instinctively inclined to discuss the reality of the immersion within the game.

Question set 3: Misogyny

1. Are you aware of the GamerGate scandal?

    a. Please describe it in your own words

2. Have you ever seen harassing messages online?

    a. If so explain: Where did you see them most, have you received any, what did they say?

    b. If so, can you tell me how that affects the communication of *Minecraft* players online?

    c. Why do you think people do that?

3. Have you ever been "griefed"? – What do you think of griefers?

4. Do you feel you're different because you're a female *Minecraft* gamer?

    a. Do you think you have to prove yourself more (because you're a woman)?

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

The purpose of the previously distributed questionnaire was to gain a basic overview of the respondents gaming habits and their personal background before proceeding with the interviews. The questionnaire is intentionally very simple and meant to organize the data better at a later stage. The results of the questionnaire aimed to act as guides throughout the interview, and they were not meant to be analyzed as units of data.

The questionnaire was distributed upon acceptance to participation in the interview, and requested to be completed at the beginning of the interview at the latest. Two respondents were interviewed in person, and they filled the questionnaire in right before proceeding with the interview.

1. Name?

2. Age

3. Nationality

4. Level of Education

5. Profession

6. How long have you been playing Minecraft?
   - ○ 0-1 Month
   - ○ 1-3 Months
   - ○ 3-6 months
   - ○ 1+ Year

7. Favorite Minecraft Mode
   - ○ survival
   - ○ adventure
   - ○ creative
   - ○ hardcore

8. Time preferably spent in singleplayer/multiplayer

   Singleplayer ————————●———————— Multiplayer

9. List your favorite videogames

10. XP points

Appendix 4: Interview Analysis: Julie, 27, Belgium

This section will provide an analyzed summary of an interview with Julie, a Belgian Minecraft player, who was interviewed in person in May of 2016.

Questionnaire Results:

1. **Name:**   **Julie**
2. **Age:**   **27**
3. **Nationality:**   **Belgium**
4. **Education:**   **MA: Anthropology, KU Leuven**
5. **Profession:**   **Barmaid**
6. **Length of playing Minecraft:**   **1+ year**
7. **Favorite mode:**   **Adventure**
8. **Singleplayer/Multiplayer**   **Singleplayer**

Interview Transcript:

The interview guide in the previous appendix served as assistance to the direction of the interview. The transcript is edited to clarity and relevance. The full interview lasted about one hour, with a casual conversation before and after the interview. In case of a diversion, the respondent was directed back to the original topic, but if themes emerged that were not directly related to the guide, they were taken into account. This respondent was chosen due to her clear and consistent opinions on the issue at hand.

JG: Thanks for responding. I've had a look over your questionnaire, so we can just take it from there and, if you would, could you describe to me how you play Minecraft, I mean, the time of day, the ambient you're in, are you alone, at home, etc.

Julie: Thanks – Um, well I normally just play like.. when I'm having breakfast or dinner or if I don't really have that much to do. I work in a bar so I do have time but yeah, normally yes I'm alone and I'm in my room or … the kitchen eating… or sometimes in front of the tv, but I'm playing Minecraft..

JG: And how long do you normally spend per day? I know I've asked that in the questionnaire, but could you describe maybe, if you have obligations or do you have objectives on Minecraft that you want to achieve per day, or you know… do you play it with a purpose?

Julie: Well I liked to play it much more before. I was a student and I spent more time on it than other things [laughs], so before I really had objectives and I couldn't wait to go back and finish like a building, or download some skins, or check out some other servers and stuff like that. But now I don't really go into it that much, but I still love that I have this big world and I can just walk around and stuff. So no, I don't have an "objective" as you'd say, but more of just to pass time.

JG: So you say that before you were much more into it. Why aren't you more into it now?

Julie: It's not that I'm not more into it. I like games, You'll see I play a lot of different games, my dad and brothers were always into videogames so we had everything and I think it's a good thing to expose children to. So I'm not like "not" into it, I just use it more as a therapeutic thing, you know, get back from work, I work sometimes 10 hours a day in a bar here and you know… before bed just zone out a bit.

JG: So for relaxation? Winding down?

Julie: Yeah, something like that. But not always, sometimes I still go way into it.

JG: Would you say it's "addictive"?

Julie: Yeah yeah at first definitely. Super easy, super simple, very open, and so many things to find online. So you start and you play a lot at first… I think… [smiles]

JG: So how did you start playing it, anyways? Did you hear it from friends, do your family play it, you said you like games, so is it just something you think you have to know?

Julie: Well no I don't think you *have* to know about Minecraft, but yeah, no not from friends but more gradually over a period of time this popped up and I read a lot of magazines on games and stuff. So I saw it but first wasn't super interested because I play you know, traditional, "real" games, but eventually it got bigger so yeah, like.. two and a half, three? Years ago I finally bought it…during exams at uni. And yeah it was addictive.

JG: You say you normally play "real" games. What do you mean?

Julie: I mean, not that it's not a game, no no, don't get me wrong I just meant like… you know. The latest action games and stuff like that.

JG: Examples?

Julie: Um, well with my brothers I play those fighting games, you know, and then alone normally adventure stuff, like… Metal Gear, I like Grand Theft Auto, yes [laughs], um… I did try Skyrim but I never fully went crazy into it, but my brothers like it… Um.. Yeah I don't know… Just those like "blockbuster games" you have now.

JG: What about any other mass multiplayer online games?

Julie: What you mean like World of Warcraft and stuff?

JG: Yeah, for example…

Julie: Well um, no to be honest, I've never played world of Warcraft myself, it's just a different genre.

JG: Alright, so would you compare Minecraft and WoW?

Julie: No um, WoW is more like… there's like a definite purpose of the game, um at least from what I heard so it's like a … magical game? Is it? I don't know, it's not like Minecraft to me. Minecraft is like casual, easy, but can be hard if you want it to be but it doesn't have to.

JG: Ok. Um, well onto the next round. Do you consider yourself a "social minecrafter". And by social I mean like, the minecraft community helps each other out, right? There are videos, tutorials, skins, servers, forums, all of that. Do you participate in any of it?

Julie: Um. Well, not as like in Minecraft. I mean, not about minecraft that much, no. I used to use those tutorials so much all the time and I got like obsessed with YouTubers that did videos but now not that much, no.

JG: But like, Tweeting? Are you on Reddit?

Julie: No tweeting not really, I only follow and sometimes retweet. I think twitter is more an American thing. And not reddit but like I used special minecraft blogs, like Planet Minecraft and stuff. There are a lot, a lot of different Minecraft blogs about this, so I go on them and read them.

JG: But do you have friends on Minecraft?

Julie: I've never actually met a friend *through* the game, but I met some people out with friends and they were into it and we like never meet and they live here in Brussels too and we never meet but we're always sending each other stuff. Well they send it more to me than I to them but it's so nice that we're always you know.. like taking care of each other.

JG: Like what "stuff"?

Julie: Like a new update, or a tip or where to find something, or like he built something cool so he shows me. Just so that we know that someone's there and that we're kinda close in Minecraft but like in real life no [laughs]

JG: Would you say you're close friends?

Julie: No no, like I said. Not close friends but people online that you like.. connect with. That you just have in your head like "yeah, they know this and support me" and stuff like that. I don't know

JG: But like, would you say they were your "real" friends?

Julie: Well um, no.. I mean.. yes? Wait. No, not like on a personal level, but yes that they can understand me and support me in some parts. No one can ever support you fully you know? You have to find many people to be happy [laughs]

JG: What about your role? What do you do to help? And how do you feel about it?

Julie: Don't do much, um [laughs] I like talking to people, usually thumbs up, thumbs down on comments or posts or if someone has a question and I know the answer, I'll answer it.

JG: Um alright, what about the friends that aren't on Minecraft? You've mentioned your family being very into games, but are they also on Minecraft? Do you maybe play together?

Julie: Um, at the beginning my brothers would send me stuff all the time. My dad's very into it [laughs] so he got all addicted to building our family home on it, but no we don't play together. We should actually do that! I think I'll make them do that! We never see each other, that could be fun!

JG: True. And what about those that don't play? How are you perceived?

Julie: Well, I'm like a private person very much so my friends who know that I like games are just like "yeah, she likes games, she'll go play her videogame" you know? Oh, but like for Minecraft, they were like "really? You're playing that? It looks stupid", yeah, they were not into it.

JG: So your friends are not supportive?

Julie: No no, they don't care – no but, they do, but like, they don't care. It's not their world they're not in that world and they don't play video games.

JG: Would you like to make them play with you?

Julie: Well sometimes it's like: it's just a game. Like it's just a TV show. Or that saying like "you don't like sports because you haven't found the right one". Well playing games is my sport.

JG: How do you talk about your "sport" with your friends who don't play?

Julie: Well I don't talk about the game itself so much. Like, you know before we talked about GamerGate? And then I commented on it a lot, just like stuff in that area that's happening.

JG: So your main topics are usually events that are about the gaming world in general?

Julie: Yeah, but like interesting stuff you know… Not like everything.

JG: Ok, so it's good you're mentioning GamerGate because that's where we're going now. Oke on to the next section. So my first question is whether you know about GamerGate, and obviously you do, but oke, now can you please describe it in your own words?

Julie: Yeah yeah ok. Well. Event-wise I don't know what to think. But what it was ok, was just people who thought that Sarkeesian and Quinn, I mean it was like way more than that but those were the ones with the attention, were using the fact that they were women to get like, views and money and funding and clicks and whatever you know, by like sleeping with people. So I don't know whether that's true but what happened later was that people were just going crazy and I think the GamerGate just made the comments even worse.

JG: So it was mostly about women being attacked online and threatened. Have you ever been harassed online through Minecraft? Or any other game?

Julie: Yeah well Minecraft is a great playground for that. But nothing has really serious happened to me you know, just like, calling me a bitch and stuff, but my username is just like a nonsense word with numbers and stuff so no one can tell I'm a girl, I think it's worse if you see you're a girl.

JG: Is that on purpose?

Julie: No, it's a username I've always had.

JG: Would you do it on purpose if you haven't?

Julie: Sometimes I think so, yeah. There's like so much stuff out there that's bad and like as soon as some girl asks something in chat it's like *yells* "we'll kill you" or whatever, just stupid stuff, I think these people need a life.

JG: Where do you see these messages most?

Julie: Mostly on comments and stuff. Like youtube comments. But in chat there is a lot of different things, but you learn to find servers or just make your own. There was always lots of trolls everywhere.

JG: And why do you think they do that?

Julie: I mean because they don't have a life. They see their friends doing it and then they do it, or whatever, they see it happening all over the place online and then they just do it. I don't know.

JG: Would you say they're safe online to act this way?

Julie: Well "safe". I don't know. I think want to feel power and feel better about themselves. Personally, I think it's due to several factors: individual mindset, doing that together, and targeted attacks. In the end, you (gendertrolls) go online because you want to conform. The internet hates silence. You don't see empty YouTube comments unless they're disabled and if they are, they'll get less views. The comments trigger a massive effect. Bullying (online) is easier and people don't think it's part of the physical life. Maybe it's their pastime. Maybe they're challenging the status quo but I think they're perpetuating it.

JG: Alright well, that's a lot. So you find that doing it together collectively has something to do with it?

Julie: I don't think *collectively*, I think it's because it's everywhere online. You have idiots doing it and you feel that "ok, this already exists", so you're more powerful if you join them. I don't know what the hell they think, but they just want to be part ofi t

JG: Is it real to them?

Julie: The power? I don't even think they know how bad it is for the community. They're uneducated and think that feminism is something like bad, you know? Like all these talks about being "politically correct". Like I said, maybe they're just challenging this status quo that if girls don't want to play then they shouldn't be forced. They like their territory and enough people are there that nothing can be done.

JG: Do you feel that on your skin? That you're different because you're a woman?

Julie: I don't feel differnet. But yes, a threat, definitely. I wonder if I was a boy if I would be more vocal online and open up and really contribute. I really think it's because I'm scared. But I'm not like actively scared, I just don't do it. I don't chat and I don't make myself known that I'm a girl. And they all assume I'm a boy.

JG: Shows a lot, doesn't it

Julie: Yeah it does.

JG: Do you feel you have to prove yourself more?

Julie: No. I mean I'm good at what I like and I'm not going to apologize.

JG: But you feel people are maybe surprised when you tell them you like games?

Julie: Most don't take me seriously.

JG: What do you think needs to be done for you to be taken seriously?

Julie: I don't know… Just like.. talk about it more I guess, more girls should just like, talk normally and not be affected by anything and then maybe they'll get bored? Maybe if there was less media attention people would not care? But no, it was always there. I don't know.

JG: No that's fine.. Um, anything you'd add?

Julie: Um, yeah.. um.. no? I mean yes – I think that violence is real in any form and I hate that there are people who feel like it's good to ruin it for some. Games should be fun. If you just enjoy it it should be fun, you shouldn't have to feel bad about yourself.

JG: Alright thanks!