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Gender and Gaming: Postmodern Narratives of Liminal Spaces and Selves

Amana Marie Le Blanc

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GENDER AND GAMING: POSTMODERN NARRATIVES OF

LIMINAL SPACES AND SELVES

by

AMANA LE BLANC

Under the Direction of Jodi Kaufmann, Ph.D. and Brendan Calandra, Ph.D

ABSTRACT

This study employs a narrative approach to explore the relationship between gender and video gaming using a postmodern theoretical perspective. At issue here is the meaning ascribed to the construction and iterative performance of gender identity by self-identified female gamers. Using an alternative to the conventional multicase methodology (which inscribes stark demarcations around distinct cultural identities) this research understands participant cases as fragmented and fluid artifacts of hypermediated postmodern experiences. This study examines three gamers in an attempt to offer some provisional answers to the question: What does it mean to the participant in this study to identify as a female gamer? Furthermore, the following sub-questions will assist in cultivating understandings that offer unique and multifaceted worldviews: (a) How is gender identity enacted within video games? (b) How is gender identity enacted in out-of-game contexts related to gaming? (c) How does the construction and enactment of a gendered identity as part of the gaming experience influence individual gamer conceptions of gender?

Data sources—including interviews, observations, audiovisual artifacts, and researcher memos—reveal types of "lived" events (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, pp. 33-34) as opposed to participants' truths as substantiated by means of "brute data" (St. Pierre, 2013a). Data is represented in narrative form as a means of disrupting the prevailing discourse that stages digital culture as male purview, and opening up the space for reinscription.

INDEX WORDS: Video games, Gamer identity, Gender and technology, Gender and gaming, Adapted multicase methodology, Fiction-based educational research, Postmodernism, Feminist criticism

GENDER AND GAMING: POSTMODERN NARRATIVES OF

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the gamers who continually invent and reinvent themselves though their gender enactment in video games.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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GAMING GLOSSARY

ARAM   An acronym for All Random All Mid, a supported PvP game mode in League of Legends. Upon entering champion selection, ten summoners, five on each team, randomly summon a champion from their available pool of champions (owned and free play) to play.

Avatar: An icon or figure representing a particular person in computer games, Internet forums, or other online spaces.

Gamebar: A for-profit business similar to a bar that serves alcohol and pub food, while also offering a variety of computer and console games which patrons pay to use by the hour.

Gamer: A video game player who self-identifies as such, who regularly plays multiple forms of video games (e.g., console, computer, handheld, etc.), and participates in gaming culture.

Gamertag: A word that means an online persona or identity in the game world.

LAN: The abbreviation for "Local Area Network," which is an establishment that permits the use of multiple interconnected computers in a local area, (bar, house, café) to allow data sharing and joint gamer play.

Leveling: The achieved completion of requisite missions, combat sequences, or quests with the primary goal of advancing an avatar to a game's highest level.

MMO: The abbreviation for "Massively Multi-player Online" game.
                   MMOs allow gamers to play with and against other players in en-
                   vironments that can sustain thousands of players at a time.

Noob/N00b: A gamer new to video games with limited game playing skills, ex-
                   periences, tactics, and means. These terms are often used pejora-
                   tively.

Open world   Open world video games have a non-linear structure and allow
                   players to can explore a virtual world without restrictions and are
                   free to choose how or when to approach various objectives.

PvE: The abbreviation for "Player Versus Environment;" a game genre
                   where players contend with game-initiated environmental chal-
                   lenges and opponents.

PvP: The abbreviation for "Player Versus Player;" a game genre where
                   players contend and collaborate directly with other players. PvP
                   brackets are groupings of similarly skilled players to ensure bal-
                   ance in gaming space.

RL: An acronym that stands for Real Life and it is commonly used by
                   gamers and other groups of people who spend substantial online
                   time together.

RPG: The abbreviation for "Role Playing Games;" a game genre where
                   players use their avatars to take on guises of particular classic crea-
                   tures (e.g., *Dungeons & Dragons* characters).

Skin   A skin is an alternate appearance for a character in a video game.

1   INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I don't game with other females because I have a superiority complex. If you look at Facebook and see women with breasts popping out and controllers on their booties, maybe you would think that's a female gamer. That's the wrong idea. I'm not in it for the attention. You can look at my trophy list and see that I have dominance. It's hard being a female gamer. I work for it and I'm as good as a guy gamer.

– Amanda[1] Interview 1, March 18, 2015

I loving playing Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar North, 2008), which is weird because it's kinda misogynistic and I'm a super huge feminist. But I guess somehow I'm able to overlook it because… the game is fun. You can drive, fly, shoot; it's realistic, and it's like… really challenging.

– Lana[2] Interview 1, March 19, 2015

I'm walking that fine line between being the cool gamer girl and being mature enough to put guys in their place when things get too sexist. And I get called a MILF a lot, which I'm kind of like: 'You guys are way too young.' But I'm like, well, as long as it's semi-positive. I've heard all the worse variations of that.

– Lily[3] Interview 1, April, 8 2015

The assertions above, uttered by three self-defined female gamers,[4] underscore commonplace perils and incongruities of venturing into space that is conventionally situated as the province of males. These inconsistent and aberrant expressions of gender identity offer insights into experiences that are not so easily conscribed to oppositional binary formulations. At the heart of these articulations is the paradox of conveying one's positionality in an intermediate stance. The narrative declarations reveal the situational indeterminacy that is inherent in the postmodern experience. Digital technologies have so fundamentally transformed our experience of the world as

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[1] Pseudonym
[2] Pseudonym
[3] Pseudonym
[4] A video game player who self-identifies as such, who regularly plays multiple forms of video games (e.g., console, computer, handheld, etc.), and participates in gaming culture

to contravene totalizing theories of knowledge, negate universal understandings of reality, dislocate geographical and social boundaries, and fragment unified identity constructs (Baudrillard, 1981/1994; Gergen, 1991; Jameson, 1991/1999; Lemert, 2005; Lyotard, 1979/1984; McLuhan, 1964/1994; Soukup, 2012). In light of so many psychic dislocations, the selves that these three gamers are at pains to describe are multiphrenic: saturated with, and ultimately constituted by, innumerable constantly shifting mediated messages (Gergen, 1991). Given the fragmentation of the postmodern consciousness, this study aims to explore discourses, practices, and experiences that function in liminal[5] intersections between defined cultural and social boundaries. The narratives crafted in these threshold spaces are revelatory in that they underscore the contradictions and complications inherent in any attempt to produce textual portraits of research participants.

In this study, gamer narratives are performed across a range of spaces including coffee shops, a gamebar[6], ostensibly private residences, game realms, online video broadcasting platforms, and Internet telephone services. These performances are staged against the backdrop of a myriad of sociopolitical discourses surrounding game culture. The resultant narrative is shaped by my conceptual framework as well as by my relational affiliation with this study's participants.

1.1 Purpose

This study presents a qualitative analysis of the identity negotiation of self-defined female gamers. The rationale for this scholarship is based on the following observations: (a) Game-based educational initiatives are ubiquitous despite the well-documented underrepresentation of females who play video games of their own accord; (b) existing research on games and gender approaches

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[5] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, liminality is "[c]haracterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations." (OED.com)

[6] A for-profit business similar to a bar that serves alcohol and pub food, while also offering a variety of computer and console games which patrons pay to use by the hour.

gender from a fixed binary perspective which is reductive, and thus there is a need for research

that troubles canonical notions of gender; (c) there is a paucity of research of female gamers in

leisure contexts; and (d) there is a dearth of research that approaches the subject of gender of

gaming from a postmodern theoretical perspective. Table 1 synopsizes the relation between the

problems and purposes of this study.

Table 1

Relationship between Need and Purpose

Problem	Purpose of Study
1. Current educational gaming initiatives are ubiquitous despite the widely recognized underrepresentation of females who play video games	1. To explore the situated ways in which females who do play video games makes meaning in the male-dominated space. Such understanding will ultimately add to the body of research that ensures that game-based learning initiatives do not perpetuate gender bias
2. Current research overwhelmingly holds a static and binary view of gender identity	2. To investigate gender identity in a more nuanced manner, as performed
3. Current research on gender and gaming does not do so in leisure contexts	3. To explore the ways in which female gamers inhabit gaming spaces voluntarily
4. Current research on gender and gaming does not do so from a postmodern theoretical perspective which is central to game culture	4. To attune to the hybrid, fragmented, interconnected, and hypermediated context of the postmodern era

The following sections further explore the problems and purposes in further detail.

1.1.1   Problem one

Empirical research involving the use of video games for educational purposes is ubiqui-

tous (Chee & Tan, 2012; Chun-Hung et al., 2013; Eseryel, Law, Ifenthaler, Xun, & Miller, 2014;

Hess & Gunter, 2013; Jong, Lai, Hsia, Lin, & Lu, 2013; Leemkuil & de Jong, 2014; Shah & Fos-

ter, 2014) and many nascent educational games are already in use (Chu & Chang, 2014; Ke, 2014;

Gwo-Jen, Han-Yu, Chun-Ming, Li-Hsueh, & Iwen, 2013). Yet, research reflecting the un-

derrepresentation of female gamers is correspondingly plentiful (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappelle,

2004; Hayes 2005; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Terlecki & Newcombe, 2005; Terlecki, Newcombe, &

Little, 2007), which presents real concerns in terms of equal access in educational contexts. If cur-

riculum that incorporates gaming is not guided by an understanding of how females relate to

game technologies, the result could very well be the marginalization of females in educational

contexts. This research means to gain an understanding of the situated ways in which females

who do play video games make meaning and craft their identities in the male-dominated space.

Though beyond the aims of this particular study, such understanding will ultimately add to the

body of research determined to ensure that game-based learning initiatives do not perpetuate gen-

der bias.

1.1.2 *Problem two*

Constance Steinkuehler (2010) describes video games as "narrative spaces that the player

inscribes with his or her own intent" (p. 61). Gamer agency in these narrative spaces renders them

ideal sites for exploring identity. In games, flow permits identity differentiation and integration

(Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Yet, Gee (2003/2007) has argued that gamers embody "multiple identi-

ties" (real,[7] virtual, and projected), rather than single and unified identity constructs, as part of

their gaming experiences (p. 51). Gender is central to our construct of identity—or, as Judith But-

ler (1990/1999) has argued, the "*regulatory practices* [emphasis in original] of gender formation

and division constitute identity" (p. 22). She further argues that gender is "a dramatic and contin-

gent construction of meaning," or a "performative" (p. 190). To Butler (1990/1999), what it

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[7] While my postmodern perspective (to be discussed further in the Problem 4 section to follow) compels me to sub-
stitute the notion of "real" for hyper-real, I concede Gee's conception of multiple, fluid identities.

means to identify as male or female is stylistically performed, repeated, and regulated in linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts.

My interpretations of this study's participants' gendered performance are influenced by an understanding that gender identity (as other facets of identity) is not an essential state of being, but a provisional identity that is "perpetually renegotiated and rearticulated in relation to" the gaming context (Butler, 1993, p. 146). In this study, I examine how my participants enact their gendered identity in relation to the video games they play. This line of inquiry is significant, because although research on gender and gaming traces back to the mid-'90s, much of this research is predicated on binary, static, and decontextualized notions of gender (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). This early research contributed to "essentialized and highly stereotyped account[s] of differences and preferences between male and female players" (Jenson & de Castell, 2010, p. 56).

It is crucial that our exploratory endeavors do not reify prima facie conceptions of gender identity. Doing so would compound past injuries and help to perpetuate gender inequity. The call for more nuanced explorations of gender identity and games has been put forth by many contemporary researchers (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Eklund, 2011; Hayes 2007; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Jenson & de Castell, 2011; Kafai, Fields, & Cook, 2010; Shaw 2012). I hope to provide new insights into the subject by building on previous research that uses Butler's (1990/1999) notion of the performative as an analytical framework for exploring the gendered identities of gamers (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Eklund, 2011; Flanagan, 2000; Martey & Consalvo, 2011).

1.1.3   *Problem three*

This study explores female gamers in leisure contexts. Gender and gaming research has largely converged on in-class gaming initiatives (Annetta, Minogu, Holmes & Cheng, 2009; Hou, 2013; Kiili, 2007). These and other such studies all but ignore the possibility that there is structur-

al bias inherent in the games being created or selected for educational purposes. Research that explores gamers in leisure contexts is sparse; however, there is precedent for researching gamers in a leisure setting, specifically in local area network (LAN) or Internet cafés (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Beavis, Nixon, & Atkinson, 2005; Cilesiz, 2009; Jansz & Grimberg, 2005; Jansz & Martis, 2005; Wakeford, 2003). The present study examines the situated ways that females engage with gaming technologies in noncompulsory contexts. Conventional educational settings have a long history of promulgating normative societal conceptions of gender (Gaskell & Willinsky, 1995). While binary conceptions of genders may also be entrenched in leisure context, unlike traditional school settings, participants chose to enter into gaming spaces uncoerced, which will allow for a more productive exploration**.**

1.1.4 Problem four

A wide range of scholars have argued that a succession of profound changes that have resulted in globalization and collapsed notions of time and space have fundamentally altered the way we experience our world (Baudrillard, 1981/1994; Jameson, 1991/1999; Lemert, 2005; McLuhan, 1964/1994). It is said that these changes have influenced a cultural shift away from modernity, whose origins are linked to 18th century Enlightenment. Modernity is characterized by notions that (a) there is a fixed, coherent, knowable self (essentialism); (b) reason invariably leads to truth/fact, hence what is good, right, ethical, and legal (rationalism); (c) objective scientific knowledge leads to mastery of the world and human progress toward perfection (scientific method); (d) societal laws are created for the greater good rather than for special interests (utilitarianism); (e) everything is attainable for everyone (optimism); and (f) all "men" are equal and free. These prevailing themes of modernity represent what postmodern scholars have termed *metanarratives* (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Metanarratives are "widely shared cultural stories by which a socie-

ty … expresses the more fundamental ideals, or 'truths,' of their culture" (Lemert, 2005, pp. 66-67). Postmodern theory challenges these and other dominant modernist metanarratives, as it views them as promulgated by interested parties bent on policing ideological exploits, circumscribing knowledge, and suppressing difference (i.e., colonialism).

Postmodern theory is challenging to understand, describe, and use, which may account for the lack of research that employs it toward an analysis of gender and gaming. However, a postmodern theoretical perspective is relevant to the present study in that it regards contemporary culture as mediated, which is to say, our engagement with "reality" is communicated by indirect social or technological means (Lemert, 2005, p. 66). Technological advancements have become so central to the way we engage with the world that "the globe is no more than a village" (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 5). Our PCs, tablets, TVs, radios, satellites, conveyances, emails, cell phones, and a host of social media tools extend us, interconnect us, and fragment our experience. Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994) has argued that this cultural mediation is so pervasive as to render simulations of reality (such as television, cinema, video games, Disneyland) more intense and authentic than the realities they simulate. Video games have the capability to transport gamers into virtual worlds that fit Baudrillard's (1981/1994) definition of hyper-real in that they are "models of a real without origin or reality" (p. 1). Gaming technologies blur boundaries, deconstruct unified identity constructs, dislocate subjects, rupture conventional notions of space, and coalesce divergent cultural practices. This hybridity that is the hallmark of a gamer's experience is thus innately suited to being interpreted by means of postmodern perspectives. In using a postmodern theoretical framework, this work will attempt to capture the fluid, fragmented, borderless, disparate strands of a female gamer's story into a meaningful montage.

1.2   Research Questions

This qualitative study investigates the way gender is performed in relation to video games by self-identified female gamers. To date, very little research on gender and gaming has (a) done so *without* the static binary concept of gender identity; (b) investigated females in situated leisure contexts; and, even less, (c) done so having accounted for the influence of postmodern context on gamers' experience. The narrative approach employed here is most appropriate as a means of coalescing the postmodern cultural fragments into meaningful *assemblage*[8] (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4). Interpreting the gender performance of select female gamers in gaming contexts will facilitate meaningful discourse surrounding the affordances and limitations of gaming writ large.

The primary question that this qualitative study means to narrate a contingent, indeterminate multiplicity of answers to is: What does it mean[9] to the participants in this study to identify as female gamers? Additionally, the following sub-questions will assist in cultivating understandings that offer unique and multifaceted worldviews: (a) How is gender identity enacted within video games? (b) How is gender identity enacted in out-of-game contexts related to gaming? (c) How does the construction and enactment of a gendered identity as part of the gaming experience influence individual gamer conceptions of gender? I will use an adaptation of multiple-case study design (to be described in the Overview of the Study section in this chapter) to answer these questions.

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[8] As formulated by Deleuze & Guattari (1987), assemblages are "complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (Livesey, 2010).

[9] *Meaning*, within a postmodern theoretical framework, is presumed to be co-constituted by the interdependent activity of "becoming" that "co-determines" two parties (researcher and participants) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 66).

1.3   Significance of the Study

As an instructional design technologist I am privy to a host of ongoing educational gaming initiatives in K-12, higher education, and business settings. Prominent educational scholars and practitioners have touted educational gaming as promoting new kinds of literacy (Gee 2003/2007; Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel 2009; Steinkuehler, 2010). While women are indeed gaming, the underrepresentation of women who game in leisure contexts is well documented (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappelle, 2004; Hayes 2005; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Terlecki & New-combe, 2005; Terlecki et al., 2007). If curriculum that incorporates gaming initiatives does not account for female gender identity performance, the result will be the marginalization of females in educational contexts. It is therefore an ethical imperative that learning interventions be designed in a manner that fosters gender equity. The goal of this research project is to step back from educational contexts and explore the situated way that females game in leisure contexts. While it is not in the scope of the current project, I am convinced that better understanding of the gender identity negotiation of female gamers will contribute to the body of research concerning inclusive practices in the design and development of game-based educational materials. Ensuring that educational games do not solidify the predominant binary conceptions of gender and reinscribe gaming space as the province of one gender over the other should, I believe, be of concern to educational researchers.

For over 30 years educational researchers have investigated the possibility of using computer games for educational means. Since Thomas Malone (1981) first asked, "How can the features that make computer games captivating be used to make learning … interesting and enjoyable?" researchers have increasingly added to the body of research on educational gaming (p. 334). The breadth of the research includes epistemological explorations (DeVane & Squire, 2012;

Dickey, 2006; Gee 2003/2007; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Johnson, 2012; Shaffer, 2012; Shute, Rieber, & Van Eck, 2012; Squire, 2002; Squire 2006), empirical studies (Bachen, Hernández-Ramos, & Raphael, 2012; Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010; Barab, Sadler, Heiselt, Hickey, & Zuiker, 2007; Rieber & Noah, 2008; Squire, Giovanetto, Devane, & Durga, 2005; Steinkuehler, 2010), and literature reviews (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle, 2012; Jenson & de Castel, 2010; Ke, 2009).

Despite vilification from sensationalistic media sources and agenda-driven policy makers, the vast and growing body of research has laid to rest outdated notions that all video games are merely hyper-violent, that they cultivate antisocial behaviors, and that they are incapable of nurturing literacy habits. Quite the contrary, educational game scholars have argued that video games are fertile sites for learning and literacy that are (a) more meaningful (Gee, 2007; Johnson, 2012; Shute, Rieber, & Van Eck, 2011; Steinkuehler, 2010); (b) socially and culturally relevant (Bachen, Hernández-Ramos, & Raphael, 2012; Barab et al., 2010) and (c) more apt to accommodate transfer to the digital age learner (Shaffer, 2012; Squire, Giovanetto, Devane, 2005).

Gee and Hayes (2012) have said that "[h]umans do not learn anything deeply by force. Humans do not learn anything in depth without passion and persistence" (p. 145). They and others in the field have been influenced by the seminal cognitive concepts that have origins as least as far back as the 1950s. Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga (1950) wrote about the notion of being "at play," a quasi-ritualistic state in which "the player can abandon himself body and soul to the game, and the consciousness of its being 'merely' a game can be thrust into the background" (pp. 20-21). The same line of reasoning informed Jean Piaget's (1951) cognitive development research. He argued that imitation and play opened up a space wherein the learner was receptive to the "assimilation and accommodation" of new concepts (p.14). Another influential concept is

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) flow theory. He defined flow as a state in which ennui and angst are eased due to an intense focus on challenging activities with well-defined objectives and immediate feedback concerning progress toward the objectives. Csíkszentmihályi believed that flow states induced by play allowed for identity differentiation and integration.

Bolstered by these influential concepts, game scholars, designers, and educators have sallied forth, researching and creating educational games bent on enhancing academic literacy. However, 10 years after Malone's (1981) query, researchers began to cite the implications of the underrepresentation of females in gaming and technologies as potentially problematic (AAUW, 1998; AAUW, 1999; AAUW, 2000; Brosnan, 1999; Bryson & de Castell, 1994; Bryson & de Castell, 1998; Dugdale, DeKoven, & Ju, 1998; Sutton 1991). These and subsequent researchers were concerned that the onslaught of interest in game-based learning initiatives in K-12, higher education, and business settings would threaten to further marginalize females by creating pedagogical context inequitable access (deNoyelles & Kyeong-Ju Seo, 2012; Dyer, 2004; Goode, Estrella, & Margolis 2006; Hill, Corbett, & St Rose, 2010; Jenkins & Cassell, 2008; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Jenson & de Castell, 2011; Jenson, de Castell, & Bryson, 2003; Klawe 2005). Although this concern has prompted years of inquiry into the topics of gender, gaming, and technology, there is a paucity of educational research that does not reify the stereotypical caricature of the female gamer (Jenson & de Castell, 2010).

The ample quantitative evidence, while serving to recast this traditionally male province as at least marginally infiltrated by females, has been underpinned by a reductionist and static view of gender (e.g., Chisholm & Krisnakumar, 1981; Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999; Williams, Yee, & Chaplan, 2008). Qualitative research in this area, while resisting the male-default, female-deficit rhetoric, has nonetheless reinforced essentialized notions of the female video gamer

player as a selective, non-combative, less engaged, hyper-social, and casual gamer (e.g., Jenkins & Cassell, 1998; Cunningham, 2000; Laurel, 1998; Graner Ray, 2004). This lack of research that construes gender identity in more nuanced terms prompted my interest in how female gamers negotiate their gendered identities in video games and as gamers. As underpinned by a relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) which holds that knowing is relative and co-constituted by knowers, and postmodern theoretical perspective (Lemert, 2005), this inquiry seeks to construct an understanding of female gamers that is performed, culturally situated, contextual, and fluid. The theoretical framework that encompasses postmodern perspectives in addition to Butler's (1990/1999) conception of performative will be further explicated in the Brief Overview of Methodology section that follows.

1.4   Brief Overview of Methodology

This study's conceptual framework has three elements. It is grounded in a *relational epistemology*, which is a theory of knowledge that views "*knowing as something that is socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other* [emphasis in original]" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 10). Drawn from a framework outlined by feminist educational philosopher Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2003), this epistemological stance rejects the subjectivist/objectivist binary in favor of focusing on the interactional engagement by which knowledge is produced. My relational epistemology adjoins a postmodern theoretical perspective that—mistrustful of unified, coherent, and universal modern metanarratives—seeks out new provisional, situated, and local knowledge produced by diverse formerly repressed Others. The third element of my conceptual framework is drawn from Judith Butler's (1990/1999) conceptions of gender performativity. Butler rejects biologically deterministic conceptions of gender and argues instead that gender identity is the provisional sequence of acts which have been discursively delineated

within a binary framework. Further explanation of this tripartite conceptual framework and justification for its appropriateness for the purposes study will be discussed in the Methodology chapter.

This research employs an adaptation (Le Blanc, 2015) of the multiple-case design (Stake, 2006; Yin 2014) to explore participants' experiences. The rationale for my adaptation, the particulars of the divergence, as well as the suitability of the approach to the purposes of my study will be discussed in detail in the Methodology chapter. Participants for this study were purposefully selected (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) on the basis of having self-identified as female gamers. I neither specified criteria that defines the term "gamer" (i.e., hours played), or confined gender enactment to those specifically associated with biological females. Self-identification as female gamers sufficed for inclusion. My rationale was that if a participant identified as female and also as being a gamer, a term so imbued with hypermasculine subtext, she was highly likely to have wrestled with her gendered identity expressions within gaming subculture. Permitting my participant to self-identify also allowed me to foreground my subjectivities (discussed in greater detail in the Methodology chapter) and problematize my "authorial position" in keeping with the postmodern theoretical perspective (Lather, 2003, p. 166). Data in this postmodern context is understood as "taken" rather than "given" (Brinkman, 2012, p. 39) as a means of underscoring the notion that there are no essential truths inherent in research data which are not defined and deemed relevant by a researcher invested in undertaking a certain problem. The provisional data sources that were mobilized in service of exploring female gamers included audio-recorded and transcribed interviews, observations, screen captures, video recordings, and researcher memos. Further discussions on the methods used in this study are outlined in the Methodology chapter.

In terms of participant selection, I purposefully stipulated self-identification as female (ir-respective of morphology or bodily form) as well as self-identification as gamer (regardless of average playing time, gaming platform, or genre). My refusal to specify game genre or platform is a deliberate attempt to undermine over 30 years of reductionist "girl gamer" research that produced a corpus of findings which served to caricature the female gamer as casual (often based on fewer hours or frequency of play than males); selective (due to a preference for role-playing games (RPGs) over first-person shooter games (FPS), and choice of mobile platforms over PC games); and sociable (as opposed to violent or competitive male gamers) (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). This research served only to reaffirm existing assumptions and stereotypes that supported female-deficit/male-dominant hypotheses as related to video games. In rejecting this premise, I deliberately refused to assume that a self-identified female who plays a RPG such as The Hob-bit: Kingdoms of Middle-Earth (Kabam, 2012) for four to six hours per week on her Android platform LG mobile phone, might not also self-identify as a gamer. Making such a conjecture would not aid me in understanding what it might mean to that particular individual to identify female gamers. Whether my participants play a puzzle genre game like Candy Crush (King Digi-tal Entertainment, 2012), a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) like World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), or both, I submit that there are valuable in-sights to be gained from exploring each of these gamer experiences.

I represent my findings in descriptive, narrative form that incorporates numerous vi-gnettes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) maintain that vignettes "capture significant mo-ments or the action of an extended portion of fieldwork into evocative prose renderings" (p. 182). Crafting "narratives of becoming" (Stronach & MacLure, 1997) allowed me to represent

my participants' experiences in a manner that is aligned with their hypermediated, fragmented,

hybrid, and liminal experiences in games.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 On Identity, Gender, and Gaming

Derived from the Latin *idem* or 'same,' the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED.com) defines *identity* as the "quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness." The philosophical discourse predates psychological dialogue concerning identity, and among the first to engage in this discourse was the French-born philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596-1650). Regarding his own identity, Descartes (1641/1985) said "my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing … really distinct from my body"—this is Cartesian dualism (p. 54). John Locke (1632-1704) in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1910/1996) defines personal identity as "the [continuous] sameness of rational being" (p. 247) but adds that the "body too goes to the making of the man" (p. 251). More renowned philosophical discourse concerning identity was conducted by Hume (1711-1776), Hagel (1770-1831), Nietzsche (1844-1900), Heidegger (1889-1976), and Ricoeur (1913-2005) among others.

Identity development research in the social sciences can be traced back to German-born developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1902-1994), who began constructing his conceptions of identity in the 1930s after emigrating from Germany to America (Friedman, 2000). His seminal work, *Childhood and Society* (1950), as well as the compositions that followed, garnered him the designation "identity's architect" (Friedman, 2000, p. 57). His work represented a dramatic break from the dour discourse that consumed post-war intellectuals. Erikson's (1950) framework of identity comprised: the *ego identity,* or "the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity;" the *personal identity*, or the differentiation of one person from another; and the *cultural* or *social identity*, or the assortment of roles one plays in a community (p. 42). Most cru-

cially, Erikson's conceptions of identity articulated a move away from the universal constructs of the self, and an engagement with the diverse particularities of agentic human experience (Friedman, 2000). Additional noteworthy psychologists (Marcia, 1966), as well as scholars in disciplines other than psychology—sociology (Mead, 1982), anthropology (Geerz, 1983, Hoffman, 1998), history (Potter, 1954), and cultural studies (Hall, 1990)—have subsequently adopted the concept of identity, and there is an unwieldy body of literature that lacks any common or coherent understanding of the concept.

In the field of education, Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Russian-born psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) contributed much to our understandings of identity development. Piaget (1950) believed that children go through four stages of cognitive development—*sensorimotor*, *preoperations*, *concrete operations*, and *formal operations*—that these stages are sequential, and that stage progression is a precursor to thinking abstractly, logically or theoretically. In Vygotsky's *Mind and Society* (1978) he outlined three theoretical stances pertinent to the study of identity and learning that he meant to debunk: 1) Identity development occurs entirely in internal cognitive processes that precedes learning (he attributes this view to Piaget); 2) learning *is* development; and 3) learning and development are separate but interrelated processes. Vygotsky argued that learning precedes, and indeed results in, identity development through one's mediated experiences with physical and conceptual objects. In Vygotsky's (1978) words, "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions" (p. 90). It should be noted that Vygotsky never expressly referred to the concept of identity, but his sociocultural development notions echoed Erikson's conceptions of identity (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Ultimately, while Piaget emphasized cognitive aspects of identity development, Vygotsky focused on the cultural con-

text within which development occurs. These theories have informed pedagogy and andragogy for years.

Contemporary educational scholars have extended Vygotsky's notions of learning and identity formation as socioculturally enacted. Some prevalent theories related to identity development and learning that encompass a variety of theoretical perspectives include notions that (a) learners' identities are produced by being *situated* in a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991); (b) the postmodern "self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational" (Gergen, 1991, p. 146); (c) the educated person is a cultural product (Levinson & Holland, 1996); (d) learners' identities are performed across multiple dimensions as part of the learning process (Gee, 2000); (e) intersectional analysis of identity categories such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation is crucial for understanding identity (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000); and (f) identities are *reified*, *endorsable*, and *significant* narratives about people (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

As related specifically to video games, Gee (2003/2007) has described the manifestation of identity during play as comprising three spheres: *virtual identity* (the virtual character), *real-world identity* (the non-virtual person), and *projected identity* (the transactional engagement between virtual and non-virtual identities). From my postmodern theoretical vantage point, references to "real" would naturally assume the guise of hyper-real. Nevertheless, I find Gee's conceptions of multiple identities as particularly germane to my exploration of female gamers in that I mean to discover the varied and various gender identity performances that comprise their gaming experiences. Following Gee (2000) and others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), I deploy identity as an "analytic tool for studying important issues of theory and practice in education" (100). However, given a non-positivist framework, I am obliged to recognize that the identities that my study

means to analyze will, in fact, be "textually produced" by me, an invested researcher (Gannon, 2006, p. 475).

Judith Butler (1990/1999) has said: "It would be wrong to think that a discussion of 'identity' ought to proceed prior to a discussion on gender identity" because people "only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (p. 22). She argues that gender is "performatively produced," which is to say iteratively enacted within highly circumscribed binary framework that serves to promulgate the fiction of gender coherence (p. 22). Butler's conception of gender identity is promising because inasmuch as gender is a performative or "an ongoing discursive practice," it is amenable to reformulations, new articulations, and different interpretations (p. 45). Gender identity within the context of this research is understood as being a time-bound, partial, and recurrent performative. Visweswaran (1994) has said: "Identities, no matter how strategically deployed, are not always chosen, but are in fact constituted by relations of power always historically determined" (p. 8). My representational compositions of participants' narratives reflect a view of self as provisionally performed.

As to my narrative approach to gender identity exploration, Yuval-Davis (2006) and Riessman (2008) have characterized identity as individual and collective narratives that are contextual, multiple, and in flux. This is relevant to my research area in that a gamer participates with video games by creating stories, or engaging with crafted narratives. Video games—regardless of platform or genre—are "narrative spaces" (Steinkuehler, 2010). The "truth" related to one's identity is a contested site, and Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that individuals' "belonging" impetus often causes people to take on "forced constructions of self and identity." (p. 7). Riessman (2008) characterizes narratives as places where "truth claims" can be critiqued (p. 9). The exploration of "truth claims" pertaining to gender identity within the pliable and storied context of video games

is a natural fit. Others before me (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Eklund, 2011; Hayes 2007; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Jenson & de Castell, 2011; Kafai et al., 2010; Martey & Consalvo, 201; Shaw 2012a) have viewed the gaming space as a site where gender identity constructs can be rein- scribed in a way that challenges what (in other contexts) Butler (1990/1999) has called traditional "gender ontologies" (p. 203). The narrative space of video games is wholly appropriate to explor- ing, questioning, and challenging axiomatic conceptions of gender identity.

2.2   Review of the Current Literature on Gaming and Gender

The literature related to video games and education is vast (Ke, 2009), but that which con- cerns gender identity is relatively modest. In this following section I examine the literature that compels my interest, questions, and apprehensions about the experiences of female gamers. I per- formed an EBSCOhost Discovery Services search, confining my search to English, peer- reviewed, academic journals no older than 2007, and using these search terms: video game, AND gender, AND female. While there is seminal literature that predates my selected date, given the rapid pace and shifts of gaming technologies, I sought to explore the most current literature in the field. This search yielded 54 articles. I refined my search further to exclude articles that that did not pertain specifically to either female gender or video games, such as studies in which gender was a factor for sampling purposes, but not the main focus (14 articles); studies in which various technologies and/or media were analyzed with no emphasis on video games (3 articles); or studies which contained only males but did not explore aspects of female representation or engagement with video games (1 article). I reviewed the 36 remaining journal articles and my analyses high- lighted six major categories:

- Gendered Character Subject and Content (8 articles)
- Gender Identity Analyses (12)

- Gender and Game Consumption (1)

- Cognition, Learning, and Literacy (3)

- Cultural Text Analyses (3)

- Violence, Sexuality, Race, and Stereotypes Analysis (9)

2.2.1 Gendered character subject and content

Among the eight studies that conducted gendered character the University of Amsterdam and the University of the Netherlands Antilles explored the emergence of female protagonists among previously male character-dominant video game landscape, a trend which they dub the 'Lara phenomenon' in tribute to *Tomb Raider's* protagonist Lara Croft. Their interest was in comparing gender and racial representations in contemporary games versus older video games. They performed a quantitative systematic content analysis of 12 purposefully selected video games and 22 characters, based on defined gender and race characteristics.

Noteworthy findings indicate that: 1) female characters performed in dominant roles equivalent to their male counterparts; 2) sexuality was emphasized in female characters; and finally, 3) more lead characters were White. They posit that while the dominance of female characters may indeed be empowering for female gamers, sexualized female characters may harm healthy conceptions of gender and contribute to there being fewer women gamers. These findings are supported by researchers from Ohio Northern University and Bowling Green State University, Cruea and Park (2012), who—having conducted survey research of 147 undergraduate communication students (67 women, 80 men) from a variety of ethnic backgrounds—attribute the gender disparity in video game usage as due in part to female participants' "clear awareness of the sexist portrayal[s] and its influence on others" (p. 61). An overrepresentation of hypersex-

ualized female characters in video games was also found in studies by Downs & Smith (2009) and Hou (2012).

Moving from in-game to gaming media analysis, Dill and Thill (2007), researchers from Lenoir-Rhyne College, employed content analysis of images in six highly ranked gaming magazines, in addition to a survey administered to 49 freshmen (20 males, 29 females) in a Southeastern liberal arts college who were both gamers and non-gamers. By engaging Ambivalent Sexism Theory (AST) and Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) as their theoretical perspective, they sought to discover the correspondence between media portrayals and the youth culture's perceptions. Their findings revealed that the preponderance of male game characters were portrayed as aggressive, while female characters were portrayed as sexualized, which corresponded to the stereotypical characterizations that survey respondents used to describe male and female video game characters. Similar results were found by Miller and Summers (2007), whose content analysis of 49 gaming magazines and 115 characters revealed video game characters gendered in similar stereotypical fashion. Both groups of researchers are troubled by media images fearing internalization of stereotypes and subsequent negative impact to self-image, expectations, and attitudes.

The previous groups of researchers' fears may prove justified in that Martins, Williams, Harrison, and Ratan (2009), scholars from the University of Southern California, Indiana University, and the University of Illinois, found notable disparities between their analysis of a representative sample of 3,000 American females and body image depictions of females in 150 top-selling video games. Among other findings, Martins et al. (2009) found that video games with more photorealism as well as those marketed to children featured females notably thinner than the sampled population of American females. These findings are particularly significant in light

of van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters, and van Noort's (2013) research which revealed that identification with game characters increased motivations to play. All of the above scholars call for further research into the impact of gendered game characters on gamers.

In sum, four journal articles within the Gendered Character Subject and Content theme contributed to an understanding of gender representation in games. Findings reveal that while outcomes of sexualized leading female characters might potentially be empowering, they are more likely to contribute to unhealthy conceptions of body and gender as well as to user discrepancy between men and women (with females gaming less than males). Four articles focused on gender images in gaming magazines and other video game media, and the findings revealed that conceptions of males as aggressive and females as sexualized are not only prevalent, but dovetail with stereotypical characterizations that males and female undergrads use to describe them. The internalization of negative stereotypes was of particular concern to this group of researchers given the fact that identification with game characters increased motivation to change. These findings are relevant to my study, as they gave me insight into potential issues faced by gamers (both within games and also through exposure to gaming media), but there remains an opportunity to explore the firsthand experience of female gamers as it pertains to this topic.

2.2.2   *Gender identity analyses*

Among the 12 studies that made gender identity the focus of analysis, the following literature reviews appreciably contributed to my understanding of the history of research in this arena. Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell (2010), researchers at York University and Simon Frasier University, critically examined 30 years' worth of gaming and gender literature using a feminist lens, in hopes of revealing new directions for future research. Jenson and de Castell maintained that methodological approaches to gender have historically either viewed gender as

"lack[ing]" or as an "insignificant factor" (p. 52). Early studies reveal technology historically constructed as a masculine arena, and women have typically been cast as deficient in this space. Jenson and de Castell denounce more current research that theorizes about gender and gameplay using an "essentialized and highly stereotyped account of differences and preferences between male and female players" (p. 56). Jenson and de Castell note several contemporary research efforts that resist reductionism by exploring how women consume games with attention to the "tension[s] between the male cultures of gameplay[,]" and are mindful not to "reinforce and solidify the very gender stereotypes their participants seem to be pushing against" (p. 59). The researchers conclude with a call for further scholarship on "gender and gameplay" that "troubles identities of player, producers, and consumers of digital games" particularly from "more nuanced theories of gender" such as "postmodern, poststructural, feminist, postfeminist, queer theory, and theories of race and identity" (p. 64). I found Jenson and de Castell's exploration to be wide-ranging and informative. However, it would have been helpful to know the selection criteria for the studies discussed.

Building on their previous literature review (Jenson & Castell, 2010), Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell (2011) performed a longitudinal ethnographic study of gamers at several after school game clubs in the Toronto area in an effort to answer the questions: "Who plays, and what and how do they play, and what practices (social, cultural; insider, outsider; shared, individual) are being developed by boys and by girls as they play digital games?" (p. 167). Jenson and de Castell cited evidence of the underrepresentation of females in digital arenas, which bolsters their contention that this marginalization is likely to be compounded by the contemporary pervasiveness of game-based learning initiatives. They conducted a federally funded mixed-methods study in which researcher-created game clubs allowed for investigations of same- and mixed-sex

groups. Data included coded observations of interaction from in excess of 95 hours of video, as well as interviews and questionnaires. Participants included 40 boys, 60 girls, and 44 young adults. Findings from this study reveal that the exclusionary practices of the boys' gameplay inhibited girls who had not had their gender transgression into game space "legitimized by male relations" (p. 175). However, by the end of the study gender variances were "far less evident and some of these were no longer present at all, once the girls had been afforded genuine access, support, a 'girls-gamer' model, and the right to choose what, when and with whom they would play" (p. 175). Although the authors do not profess that their study conclusively debunked gender differences related to gameplay, their study shows that "leveling up" girls' competence and confidence through gameplay in same-sex groups effectively "level[ed] the playing field" (p. 176).

In their quantitative analysis, Poels, De Cock, and Malliet (2012), researchers from the University of Antwerp, Belgium, administered an online survey to 466 female participants (average age 27.5) to test their hypothesis that gender identity (GI) of females would align with traditionally established "gender differences" as related to player motivations and play styles. The traditional research links motivation to achievement for males and to social aspects for females. As to play styles, females are deemed to prefer role-player (RP) games and men are said to prefer player-versus-player (PvP) games. The online questionnaire consisted of four parts measuring: 1) motivations (Yee's motivation scale was used); 2) gender elements (i.e., gentle vs. rough and competition vs. cooperation); 3) play styles (i.e. RP vs. PvP); and 4) playing frequency. The researchers used repeated measures ANOVA and multiple regression analysis to reveal that 1) masculine gender identity is positively related to achievement motivation but also to social factors, 2) play frequency is positively related to achievement motivation, and 3) overall, "feminini-

ty is positively and masculinity is negatively related to the immersion motivation" (p. 636). This study, although attempting to prove that "female behavior cannot be generalized based on stereo-typical male/female conceptions," is ineffective in that gender elements are in themselves formu-laic (p. 634). Although this research is more current than that of Jenson and de Castell (2010), it adeptly illustrates Jenson and de Castell's thesis regarding traditional approaches to gender iden-tity and gaming research that approaches gender identity in static and binary terms.

Moving from quantitative to qualitative study, Linda Eklund (2011), a researcher at Stockholm University, examined the female gender performance and sexuality in World of Warcraft (WoW) in her exploratory phenomenological study. Eklund draws on Judith Butler (1990) and Judith Halberstam's (2005) notions of gender as a performative, deliberate, and itera-tive enactment that takes on the appearance of essence. Following Mary Flanagan (2000), she cautiously speculates about "whether we can use cyberspace to create alternative narratives of gender" (p. 326). Research was conducted with eight female gamers, ages 20 to 31, one of whom is gay, who were recruited via snowball sampling, a technique that Eklund found problematic due to female gamers' isolation (as related to male gamers). Data was collected using qualitative interviews, although there is not much discussion about coding and analysis practices. All wom-en chose female avatars (which corresponds to the findings of deNoyelles & Kyeong-Ju Seo, 2012), although one gamer disclosed that male and female characters start off with the same pre-requisites "so sex does not matter," another gamer revealed that she created her character to be strong and independent to "test boundaries," and another chose a non-female name, noting that many men in the game played female characters, so playing one did not mean she was one (pp. 328-329). This experimental boundary crossing is consistent with research on gender swapping conducted by Hussain and Griffiths (2008). All participants described the game and "free space"

and "claimed power" as they gained competence with gaming technology (pp. 336-337). Alt-

hough Eklund says that "it is clear that the potential of gender performance is limited by norms

from outside the game, the social context played in, as well as by the design of the game and the

social structures of the gaming community," she also cites research that points to the possibility

of "gaming being empowering to women in their offline lives" (p. 339). Finally, the researcher

calls for more research exploring lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) gender perfor-

mance in game spaces.

Another group of scholars who used Judith Butler's notion of the performative as an ana-

lytical framework to explore gender enactment in video games were Beavis and Charles (2007),

researchers at Deakin University and Monash University in Australia, who performed gamer re-

search in Local Area Network (LAN) cafés. They deemed LAN cafés as appropriate for the na-

ture of their research due to the fact that they are "sites where on- and off-line presence, identi-

ties and communities overlap and merge as players engage in online play and tournaments with

seen and unseen others, and participate in the jointly constructed textual world of the game" (p.

693). Research was conducted at one particular LAN with seven Asian-Australian "girl gamers"

five of whom were members of a Counter Strike clan (an online multi-player first person shooter

game), and two who played massively multiplayer online role play games (MMORPGs). The

researchers note that the first person shooter genre is typically construed as masculine, while role

playing games (RPGs) are stereotypically feminine. Data collected included half-hour long indi-

vidual interviews and observations. Findings reveal that while the girl gamers' initiation to the

male dominant LAN café inscribes girl gamers as deficient or marginal, the playfully subversive

creation of online gendered characters that were different from those offline, as well as the sub-

jective agency required to lay claim to the space, allowed these gamers to "define their identities

as gamers within and then outside the terms of dominant, binary conceptions of masculinity and femininity" (p. 704). Finally, they call for more research on gender in gaming "leisure contexts," which they argue will ultimately assist in "refram[ing] or reorganis[ing] curriculum in the interests of gender equity" (p.704).

The call for employing non-traditional contexts and methodologies in the exploration of female gamers was also put forth by Wirman (2012), a researcher at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, in her ethnographic exploration and co-construction of the gender identities of female players of Sims 2. She used email interview techniques as a method to disrupt traditional power relations between researcher and researched to foster "reciprocity, reflexivity and respect" in the research process (p. 155). Her research focused on 13 Sim 2 players aged 10 to 45 who were part of a "skinning" or modification forum, which they define as "creation and sharing of the Sims game modifications" (p. 155). This research explored was how participants constructed their technologically mediated identity as a "skinner" (p. 157). Wirman (2012) found that the multi-sited-ness of the email interviewing was analogous to the construction of a "skinner" identity in Sims 2 in that that participant or gamer is free to construct a self in their own space, at their own pace, and according to their designs.

Adrienne Shaw (2012a), a researcher at the University of Pittsburgh, pursues an intersectional approach to explore why marginalized groups (females and LGBT) frequently do not self-identify as gamers. Like Salter and Blodgett (2012) she perceives sidelining and silencing of minorities in gaming domains. She reproves both game marketers and researchers for over emphasizing distinct identity types. Following Foucault and Butler, Shaw (2012a) views gamers as produced by power discourses that draw on these stereotypical and reductionist categories. Shaw aims to reveal the "contextuality and intersectionality of gamer identity" by "focusing on how

people identify as gamers, rather than on the construction of the audience or assuming that the act of playing video games is what defines one as a 'gamer'" (p. 31). Shaw (2012a) employed ethnographic methodology, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, approaching identity through a theoretical perspective she termed reflexivity. Her participants were identified via an online survey that targeted non-White, heterosexual males who played video games on some level of the spectrum from hardcore gamer to non-gamer. Life history interviews and gaming interviews were conducted with each of the 29 participants, ranging in age from early 20s to late 30s. Grounded theory was used in the analysis of the qualitative data which was subsequently coded using NVivo. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data.

Findings revealed that "[t]he meanings attached to 'gamer identity' by industry, and academic and popular discourse, shape people's relationship with the category" (p. 33). In terms of gender, Shaw (2012a) found a negative correlation between being female, transgender, or queer and identifying as a gamer. Shaw (2012a) echoes Jenson and de Castell (2011) in decrying gender and gameplay research which only serves to reify traditional masculine and feminine roles related to technology. As related to sexuality, Shaw (2012a) found it unrelated to identification as a gamer, although she notes that "the industry does not make games for gay gamers" (p. 36), a phenomenon which she explored in a subsequent article (Shaw, 2012b). Shaw (2012b) found no correlation between race and identification as a gamer, although she notes that being a White interviewer may have caused minority subjects to be less than forthcoming. She also notes a conspicuous absence of race data in the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) annual reporting, which points to post-racial ideology. Shaw concludes that "[t]he solution to the invisibility of gender, race, and sexuality in gaming is not the creation of a plurality of video game markets, but instead an insistence on diversity in the construction of the market" (pp. 39-41). She calls on re-

searchers to look to the intersections of identities of gamers rather than making assumptions based on reductionist categories. This research was comprehensive, adequately theorized, and well presented.

LGBT participants were included as part of this next study I examined. Rosa Martey and Mia Consalvo (2011), researchers at Colorado State University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, examined avatar creation of 211 participants whose average age was 37 in the virtual world of Second Life (SL) (which, while a multi-user virtual environment rather than a traditional video game, has gaming elements and a narrative framework). Participants included males and females, heterosexuals and homosexuals, as well as White, Black, Hispanic, Native American and mixed ethnicities. Researchers designed a game set in the steampunk-themed city of Caledon which is cast as "a futuristic re-imagining of Mexico City" (p. 170). Participants were recruited via Facebook and SL advertising and had been playing SL more than two years. They were assigned to groups, told that the game had a steampunk storyline, directed to select costumes, and given minimal support from a robot avatar operated by the researchers. Mixed methods were employed and data collected included observations, interviews, and two surveys. Qualitative data was analyzed and coded for themes, while quantitative data was used to allow for analysis of demographic data and other statistical information.

Martey and Consalvo's research is underpinned by Goffman's (1959) theory of the "dramaturgical self" as well as Cooley's (1902) theory of the "looking-glass self," which they view as co-creative of identity both in online and offline settings (p. 167). Like Adrienne Shaw (2012a; 2012b), they examined their results in terms of gender, sexual, and racial identity, adding an examination of group identity. Findings showed that participants chose gender aligned with offline gender, generally performed "normal" sexuality, predominantly selected White avatars

(even among non-Whites), and retained markers of groups or communities with whom they regularly associate, even while immersed in this new setting. Despite having license to recreate themselves in the guise of any number of forms, participants—with a few exceptions—generally constructed and performed White, heteronormative, attractive, hominid identities. They conclude that "the avatars we create in virtual worlds serve as projective identities indeed; we cannot so easily slip our sense of ourselves off, like a skin, and throw on a new one" (p. 179). This research was provocative and engaging.

Aimee deNoyelles and Kay Kyeong-Ju Seo (2012), researchers from the University of Central Florida and the University of Cincinnati, aimed to understand how female and male college students constructed virtual identities and interacted socially in Second Life (SL). Perceiving a gap in literature that explored gender and technological competence in relation to gameplay, the researchers selected participants including 13 women and eight men in an undergraduate communications and technology course. Self-identified gamers included all the men and two of the women. The researchers focused on the non-gamer women and gamer men, excluding gamer women due to the fact that most college age women are non-gamers. Data collected included two surveys, 82 blog entries, five observations, and four interviews. Data was coded using "open, axial, and selective coding" (p. 24). The researchers neglect to mention their theoretical perspective, which would have offered more insight into their chosen methods and analysis techniques.

Unsurprisingly, findings revealed that skill disparities between females and males, non-gamers and gamers respectively, could potentially impede non-gamer learning in virtual environments. Male gamers tended to be more exploratory in avatar creation and navigation, while women constructed online identities to reflect their "real world" identity in terms of appearance

and actions. Six of the 13 female gamers in this study also held a view of the game as "fake," while all the male gamers were more apt to give themselves over to the virtual "real" space (p. 26). Ultimately, the researchers recommend caution and further research before wholesale adoption of virtual environments in learning contexts. They noted that "fundamental differences in socialization strategies that affect men gamers' and women non-gamers' integration into the learning community, result[ed] in a lack of shared purpose" (p. 27). They recommend that future research efforts focus on female gamers. This research, although important in light of the prevalence of game-based learning initiatives, is characteristic of Jenson and de Castell's (2010) description of research that discursively situates technology as the province of males, while portraying women as lacking. This is a common pitfall of research which takes a stereotypically simplistic, binary view of gender identity; it lends itself to either-or taxonomies of dominant or deficient.

Ending on a more hopeful note, Royse, Joon, Undrahbuyan, Hopson, and Consalvo (2007), researchers at Kutztown University, Bowie State University, Michigan Technological University, George Mason University, and Ohio University respectively, investigated gender and gaming from a feminist perspective that sees "gender and technology as mutually shaping" (p. 557). The thrust of this research was to explore how gaming technologies function to define women's gendered identities. The researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with groups of student female gamers defined as power gamers, moderate gamers, and non-gamers based on gaming hours. Their findings reveal that females defined their gendered identity either through "integration, negotiation, or rejection" of gaming technologies (p. 561).

Among the 12 articles in the Gender Identity category, one seminal study contributed a historical perspective on over 30 years of scholarship on gender and gaming. This study's schol-

ars called for more studies that resist researching gender in the prescriptive and reductionist manner. Four journal articles analyzed provided perfect examples of reductionist gender research. Eight studies aspired toward less reductive research on gender: One study explored same-sex peer groups to reveal access to technology as an impediment to girl-gamers; three used concepts of gender performance or gender performative as a framework; one used the notion of gender and technology as reciprocally formative; one explored gender identity construction performed on an online forum of female game modifiers and constructed via email interviews; and two pursued an intersectional approach focused on sexuality, race, and gender. The above eight studies are most closely aligned with the aims of my study, and yet innovative research such as this is far from commonplace. These scholars called for more research that explores gender and gaming beyond the conventional binary configuration.

2.2.3   *Gender and game consumption*

One study analyzed elements of the marketing, sale, and consumption of video games to gendered audiences. Christopher Near (2013), a researcher from the University of Michigan, performed a quantitative content analysis of 399 video game box art cases that were rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) as *Teen* or *Mature* to discover the relationship between the portrayal of female characters and video game sales in his provocative article "Selling Gender." Using purposive sampling and the sales figures listed on VGChartz.com, he analyzed male and female character representations. His findings revealed that sexualized non-central female characters on the cover art correlated to increased sales, whereas sales were negatively related to central female characters (sexualized or non-sexualized) or females portrayals with males absent. Near suggests that these are "signals that code a game as masculine, something that this audience expects and values in games" (p. 263) and he voices hope that the newly creat-

ed game genres that have more gender neutral or less female objectification portrayals will "spread" to traditional game genres. This research is relevant to my study in that it constitutes the postmodern context inhabited by female gamers that I explore.

2.2.4   Cognition, learning, and literacy

Three studies focused on evaluating the gendered effects of gaming on learning and literacy. Feng, Spence, and Pratt (2007), researchers from the University of Toronto, performed a quantitative investigation of action video games for their capacity to reduce gender differences in spatial cognition. They conducted two experiments the first of which involved 48 undergraduate males and females, ages 19-30, and the second involving a second set of 20 undergraduate males and females, ages 18-32. In the first experiment researchers employed a between-subject factorial design with the three factors being male versus female, player vs. non-player (based on self-reported data on hours per week played), and arts student versus science student. Subjects all took a useful field of view (UFOV) test to measure spatial cognition. Findings revealed that players were superior to non-players, science students outperformed art students, and males performed better than females. However, the gender difference was less pronounced among different genders in the players' group. They therefore performed a second experiment to test the hypothesis that video game play could improve spatial selective attention. In the second experiment non-player participant males and females were administered a pre-test of the UFOV task test as well as a mental rotation task (MRT) test. Then the experimental group (half of the group) played an action video game called Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault for 10 hours, while the control group played Balance, a 3-D puzzle game. All participants then received the UFOV task and MRT as a post-test after an average of five months. Results revealed that playing action video games contributed to enhanced spatial cognition in both males and females, but that females

showed larger improvement. The researchers argue: "Given that superior spatial skills are important in the mathematical and engineering sciences, these findings have practical implications for attracting men and women to these fields" (p. 850). This claim seems rather bold as increased spatial cognition does not automatically equate to interest in or desire to pursue particular fields.

Moving from Feng et al.'s (2007) nod to the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Cunningham (2011), a researcher from Gonzaga University, conducted a case study of 11 multiethnic girls, age 11-15, and three parents who attended a four-hour workshop to create a game as part of a Girl Scouts STEM program designed to promote digital literacy. Her research used situated learning as a theoretical perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as well as Gee's (2007) notions of identification to understand her participants' identity constructs. Data included interviews, participant observations, and analysis of the girls' final projects. Findings showed that while the girls were able to construct game designer identities within the confines of normative assumptions of gender technological mastery, the girls also developed "critical literacies" and "challenged many of the design assumptions of the game, especially in terms of performances of femininity and representations of race" (p. 1385). This research was thoughtful and thought provoking in that it problematized notions of female engagement with technology.

And finally, Hou (2013), a researcher from the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, conducted a semester-long empirical study on 28 fourth-grade participants' (13 boys, 15 girls) use of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) called Talking Island that was developed to teach elementary school children English vocabulary and speaking. English language scores from the previous semester as well as sequential analysis of a year's worth of students' coded behaviors were analyzed and results showed very little difference be-

tween boys' and girls' learning, leading to the conclusion that MMORPGs that feature case studies, problem solving tasks, and elements of social interaction can improve student learning regardless of gender. They advise educational game designers to "provide adaptive practices based on learners' prior knowledge and learning performance" (p. E89). Very little research has been conducted on MMORPGs designed for educational purposes and this study was a worthy beginning.

The studies in the Cognition, Learning, and Literacy group encompass initiatives being driven by educators' and policy-makers' desire to engage women and girls in fields in which they are heretofore underrepresented. Research is this area is much needed and its aims are noble. Nevertheless, my study takes a step back from the already entrenched male-dominant, female-deficit discourse, and explores new configurations and conceptualization of gender.

2.2.5   *Cultural text analyses*

Four studies pursued an analysis of gamer gender as a cultural text. Helen Thornham (2008), a researcher from the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, conducted a four-year ethnographic exploration of video games as a cultural text by examining the lived cultural experiences of participants in six gaming households of varied genders, ethnicities and sexual orientations. The results of a questionnaire administered to 118 participants are also considered in the scope of this research. Thornham's (2008) findings revealed that the perceptions and preconditions of her participants' in-home gaming experiences exhibited "relational positionality between people and technology shifts" (p. 140). Her participants' narratives also highlighted the role-playing or "performative" nature of gaming as a "negotiation with the power dynamics of the home" (p. 140). Ultimately, Thornham challenges researchers to get beyond mere examination of superficial differences between male and female players (avatar selection, game narrative choic-

es, etc.) toward a "more nuanced and sociopolitical account of gaming which encompasses primarily the consumption, but also production and marketing, elements of gaming" (p. 141). This research is valuable in that is offers a view of gender as fluid, temporally situated, and ultimately "produced *within* [italics in original]" game spaces (p. 127).

A researcher at the University of Northern Colorado, Charles Soukup (2007), analyzes the discourse of video games using the literary theorist Kenneth Burke's (1879-1993) concept of the entelechial system, which Soukup defines as "the desire of someone or something to move toward its perceived (symbolic) state of perfection or completion" (pp. 159-160). He finds that the discourses in many video games endorse positivist notions of mastery and control and normalize patriarchal gender configurations. Soukup challenges feminists to scrutinize this previously neglected medium and to work to undermine the hypermasculine discourse in video games. He cautions against minimizing video games' (and other media's) power to shape our gendered lives (a claim also put forth by Dickerman, Chistensen, and Kerl-McClain, 2008). This research resonates with the gender identity research previously explored above.

Moving from the theme of perfection, Evan Watts (2011), a master's student at Florida State University, conducted a provocative exploration of how ruin imagery in video games might be deployed to inspire subversive gender performance. He analyzed three video games and views the ruin of physical structures as analogous to social structures. He argues: "These ruins then become a space that offers freedom from the same gender-oppressive institutions that once permeated them, and thus sites of empowerment" (p. 248). Though Watts (2011) makes several conceptual leaps, I believe that further textual analysis related to ruin in games is warranted.

The three journal articles that analyzed gender and gaming from a Cultural Text perspective have much to say about the social and political discourse that constitutes gender in gaming

media. These researchers posit video games as a powerful mechanism to reinforce or subvert dominant notions of gender, sexuality, and race. My study is influenced by an understanding that the context within which this study's participants plays video games contains opportunities for divergent gender performances and the reinscription of gendered rhetoric of gaming technologies.

2.2.6   *Violence, sexuality, race, and stereotypes analyses*

Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, and Collins (2007), researchers at the University of Maryland, the University of California, Berkley, and the University of Maryland explored the perceptions of 87 (46 female, 41 male) predominantly White students about gender stereotypes in video games using univariate ANOVA testing of interview and survey data. They coded the open-ended interview questions and used inter-rater reliability measures. Females generally found gender stereotypes less acceptable than males. Brenick et al. concluded that "males and females evaluate stereotypic images in video games using different forms of reasoning" (p. 411). This research seems to support research conducted by Lin (2010), who experimented with 104 college participants who were randomly assigned to play different configurations of morally justified characters in non-violent games, or either morally unjustified or morally justified characters in both non-violent and violent games. Participant enjoyment levels, character identification, and feelings of guilt were measured using a questionnaire and ANOVA and descriptive analysis was conducted. Findings reveal that overall, participants have less feelings of guilt when playing non-violent morally justified characters, but the fact that females were found not to derive less enjoyment from being a villain and committing violent acts than did their male counterparts led the researcher to conclude that "males might have better moral disengagement abilities" (p. 537).

Both Brenick et al. (2007) and Lin (2010) offer insufficiently nuanced and overly simplistic renditions of gender.

Jesse Fox, Jeremy Bailenson, and Liz Tricase (2013), researchers at Stanford and The Ohio State University, explored the effect of virtual embodiment of sexualized versus non-sexualized avatars on women's perceptions and behaviors offline. Employing a theoretical framework of the Proteus effect, (a frame proposed by Yee and Bailenson (2007) which holds that when a user embodies a self-representation they internalize those beliefs), and objectification theory (which maintains that women are socialized to be objects to be ogled), the researchers hypothesize that negative self-image and rape myths might be more easily accepted. This starkly contrasts with Linda Eklund's (2011) view of strong and sexual avatars as empowering to women. Subjects included 86 racially diverse women aged 18 to 41 at a West Coast university who received course credit and $15 for participation. Researchers used headgear to immerse participants in virtual environments in which their avatar was either sexualized or non-sexualized and featured their own face (from a picture taken prior to research) or a stranger. Participants first practiced moving with/as the avatar and shortly thereafter were introduced into the space, where there was scripted interaction. Finally, participants were taken out of the headgear and given a questionnaire.

Findings support the fact that women who use sexualized avatars may be at risk of "self-objectification and developing greater rape myth acceptance" (p. 936). They define rape myth acceptance as "false beliefs about rape that blame the victim," "acceptance of interpersonal violence and violence against women," and "aggression" (p. 931). They also argue that "these attitudes may influence their behaviors both on- and offline" (p. 936). The researchers conceded limitations, which included using a college-only sample, the introduction of a male character be-

fore adequate time alone, and the fact that the study relied on answers from a self-reported questionnaire. Fox et al.'s (2013) research design and findings echo research performed by Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009), who used social cognitive theories of gender development toward an understanding of the impacts of gender stereotyping and sexualized characters on females' self-concept. Three-hundred and twenty-eight undergraduate students were assigned to play a sexualized game character, a non-sexualized game character, or no game at all. All participants then took an online questionnaire. The findings reveal that self-concept was negatively impacted by playing sexualized characters, leading researchers to conclude that "playing a sexualized video game heroine unfavorably influenced people's beliefs about women in the real world" (p. 808).

Like the previous two studies discussed, Yao, Mahood and Liz (2009) also examined the effects for sexualized avatars, but rather than examining females' self-perceptions, they explored the effect on male players. Their participants included 74 male university students, age 18 to 47, who were randomly assigned to play a Sony Play Station 2 (PS2) video game for 25 minutes that either contained female objectification content or did not contain female objectification content. After gameplay they were administered a lexical decision task and completed the Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) scale. Results revealed that video games with content that sexually objectified females "primes sex-related thoughts and increases accessibility to a negative gender schema of females as sex objects" (p. 85). The researchers concede the limitation of the duration of exposure to video game content and call for longitudinal studies in the area. A conspicuously un-conceded limitation appears to be the failure to administer pre-assessments in order to ascertain whether or not sexual thoughts and negative gender schemas were preexisting.

Elena Bertozzi (2012), a researcher from Long Island University, advocates for more female participation in violent video games as a method to level the playing field between genders in offline settings. She attributes the dearth of women in "positions of power, authority, status and wealth such as high-level political positions, tenured faculty in STEM disciplines, CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, and partners in law firms" to the fact that women have not mastered the kill-or-be-killed instincts that it takes to succeed in hostile and competitive environs that she takes these fields to be (p. 448). Bertozzi argues that women should flout heteronormative ideology which constructs violent video games as the domain of White males. Playing predation games, she argues, can give women much needed experience in "how to survive and excel in stressful, competitive, aggressive environments" (p. 449). She cites the American Association of University Women as indicating the greatest cognitive differentiation between girls/women and boys/men being in the area of spatial skills, with girls/women consistently underperforming compared to boys/men. She maintains that many boys/men cultivate spatial skills by playing predation games and that girls/women should too. The notion that spatial cognition developed via playing video games might lead to more women in the STEM fields was also posited by Feng et al. (2007), as discussed earlier. While their arguments are intriguing, even if I were to stipulate that video games are the best method to improve spatial cognition, it appears overly simplistic to draw correlations between the improvement of spatial skills and career achievement.

Bertozzi (2012) also argues that such play can challenge internalized stereotypical notions of femininity which privilege superficial characteristics such as body weight and attractiveness, and allow for weakness. She quotes a student of hers as saying, "This is one of the reasons I feel that I became so entranced in playing Madden NFL, because with any guy I was playing against I felt equal on the digital playing field" (p. 452). She sums up her paper by citing litera-

ture to support the notion that playing predation games allows women to practice the use of pow-er, gain empowerment from facing their fears, learn to bounce back from defeat, and revel in hunting and being hunted. Although thought-provoking, this piece lacked a cohesive theoretical underpinning and seemed disjointed.

Unlike Bertozzi (2012), who views the game space as empowering, Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett (2012), researchers at the University of Baltimore and Pennsylvania State University, view it as potentially hostile and repressive. Salter and Blodgett pursued a case study methodological approach to analysis of the Dickwolves incident. In this case, a rape victim who declared her intent to boycott a major gaming event due to the sale of materials with a series of rape comics was publically pilloried. Data collected included 300 pages of discussion collected from web queries with terms such as "dickwolves," "penny arcade," and "women" (p. 404). Inductive open and selective coding approaches were used. Salter and Blodgett explored the history of the case and key actions taken by those involved in the case to find three major themes including: 1) "the association of technical skills and prowess with masculinity" (p. 108); 2) the "overtly hostile" reaction from a privileged gaming public dominated by males (p. 409); and 3) the "diminish[ed] role of women within the discourse" (p. 410). They argue that the roles female gamers are allowed to play are confined to "sex object," "invisible," or "enemy" (p. 411). Salter and Blodgett conclude that female gamers' "perceived transgressions" into the contested space of the game threatens to undermine hypermasculine dominance, and is thus met with hostility. They call for further research to elucidate gamer identity in the public sphere. The essay is well written and employed sound methodological approaches, and was supported by substantial references.

Robinson, Callister, Clark, and Phillips (2009), researchers at Brigham Young University, explore violence, sexuality and gender representations by performing a content analysis of 47 of-

ficial video game sites identified as popular by GameSpot.com. Content was coded using an instrument which included storyline, attractiveness, sexuality, number of violent incidents and instruments, as well as addictive substance use. Findings reveal that "violent depictions, stereotyping, and sexualized portrayals" proliferate these sites (p. 74). The researchers caution parents, policy makers, and social scientists to be wary of these websites' impact on children. Concerns expressed by Robinson et al. (2009) are echoed in the theoretical exploration by Dickerman et al. (2008), who conclude that while the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has a rating system, it inadequately defines violence and fails to addresses gender and racial stereotypes. They conclude: "Users of video games, and parents of users, need to be equipped with the power of knowledge in order to make empowering choices for themselves and their children" (p. 27).

With one exception, the journal articles that explored video games as they pertained to the Violence, Sexuality, Race, and Stereotypes theme were aligned in viewing depictions in video games as proliferating negative self-image, negative images of women overall, negative ideas of race, guilt, sexual aggression, hypermasculinity, and being inappropriate for younger audiences. Research promulgating these views of video games has a long history and has influenced public perception and policy. While these concerns should not be discounted, and indeed they make up the political climate within which gamers play, my study is interested in exploring a female gamer's perceptions rather than the discourse that surrounds her subculture.

2.3 The Literature and this Study

Jenkins and Cassell (2008) contend that gender and gaming technologies research has involved various discourses. It has centered on the pedagogical concern that school girls' marginal technology use and minimal engagement with the sciences could impede their academic and occupational futures (AAUW, 1998; AAUW, 1999; AAUW, 2000; Brosnan, 1999; Bryson & de

Castell, 1998; Dugdale, DeKoven, & Ju, 1998; Sutton 1991). There has been a politically-charged petition for gender equality in science and technology fields (Hill, Corbett, & St Rose, 2010; Jones, 2010; Jackson, 2013). There has also been deliberation about representation in popular culture (Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009). Until quite recently, however, gaming research as it pertains to female gamers has largely been dominated by a static view of gender, which contributed to an overemphasis of analysis on differences. Early studies were firmly ensconced in positivistic theoretical perspectives and as such contributed to the male-default, female-deficit views of engagement with gaming technologies. Current research in this area often gestures toward more inclusive conceptions of technology and gender (i.e., deNoyelles & Kyeong-Ju Seo, 2012; Poels et al., 2012; Royse et al., 2007), but has largely fallen short of truly engaging knowledge claims and challenging the canonical conceptions of gender identity.

Although 20 years of research on gaming and gender has frequently given way to methodological "pitfalls," according to Jenkins and Cassell (2010), the mere inclusion of females in gaming discourse is momentous. Participation in the "gender equity" dialogue, while often wrought with paradox (Bryson & de Castell, 1993), has important social, political, and cultural implications to the lived experiences of female gamers. Representation matters because, among other things, "a medium's general depiction of a group does have an impact on its user perceptions of that group" (Williams et al., 2009, p. 818). However, reductionist views on gender identity have caused us to miss valuable opportunities to explore the ontological assumptions underlying gender identity constructs. Engagement with gaming technologies by means of "projected identities" (Gee, 2007) in games opens up fertile spaces for re-conceptualizing and reinscribing given "gender ontologies" (Butler 1990/1999). Moreover, research in this area has all but ignored the advent of postmodernity and it implications to our hypermediated engagements with gaming technolo-

gies. Lastly, existing research has started where one would hope to end in that they have focused on gaming in school contexts, largely overlooking leisure contexts. I contend that before researching games in classroom settings, we should investigate the "complexities and situated ways in which technologies are taken up in context" and uncoerced (Beavis & Charles, 2007).

Among the studies I examined, some used positivistic, constructivist, and constructionist perspectives, and others a feminist lens. However, very few have examined gaming and gender using postmodern theoretical perspectives (although several scholars called for such research). The gaming space is one among many hypermediated spaces that comprise our postmodern cultural experience and as such demands exploration using a suitable paradigm. A gamer inhabits liminal space. She is part here, part there, and part in between. These mediated sojourns are a singularly postmodern cultural phenomenon. My research addresses the gap in literature that employs a postmodern lens to explore the ubiquitous, fragmented, interconnected, and hybrid experiences of female gamers.

My research is an attempt to bridge the gap between 20 years of contemplative and compelling research, and contemporary understandings born of engagement with the hypermediated postmodern culture. While there is much to build upon in the literature pertaining to video games and gender identity, thus far there is a dearth of research that addresses the subject from three main vantage points: 1) postmodern theoretical perspectives; 2) using the notion of gender as a performative; and 3) engaging gamers playing the games they choose (platform and genre) in leisure contexts. The methods that I use to accomplish the three above tasks will be further explicated in the Methodology chapter that follows.

3   METHODOLOGY

This study explores the experiences of a female gamer, employing an epistemological stance that rejects the objectivist/subjectivist dualism which derives from the presumption that knowledge either exists exclusive of individual experience or is the sole purview of subjective experience. The philosophical belief system guiding this research views knowing as "a matter of conversation and of social practice" (Rorty, 1979/2009), and knowledge as relational (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, 2003). This study also espouses a postmodern theoretical perspective and a view of gender identity as a performative (Butler, 1990/1999). Underpinned by gaps identified in the proceeding literature review, this chapter outlines a conceptual framework that informs my study, as well as the particular methods adopted in conducting and analyzing this adapted multicase study. I contend that my selected methods and epistemology function coherently to offer provisional answers to the questions driving this research.

3.1   Conceptual Framework

As previously discussed, the central question driving this study is: What does it mean[10] to the participant in this study to identify as a female gamer? The related sub-questions are: (a) How is gender identity enacted within video games? (b) How is gender identity enacted in out-of-game contexts related to gaming? (c) How does the construction and enactment of a gendered identity as part of the gaming experience influence individual gamer conceptions of gender? These questions pertain to a person's way of being and knowing in the world as well as my interpretation of said enactments. In the following sections, I will outline the three elements of my

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[10] *Meaning*, within a postmodern theoretical framework, is presumed to be co-constituted by the interdependent activity of "becoming" that "co-determines" two parties (researcher and participants) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 66).

conceptual framework, including my epistemology, theoretical perspective, and gender per-

formativity, which are aligned with the methods employed. This tripartite conceptual framework

is illustrated in Figure 2 later in this section.

Epistemology. Theories of knowledge were first christened as epistemology in the 17th

century, emerging amid Cartesian object-subject dualism, Lockean conceptions of *a priori*

knowledge, and Kantian notions of transcendental psychology (Rorty, 1979/2009). Social scien-

tists have long deliberated the influence of objectivist versus subjectivist epistemological orienta-

tions on research projects. However, theories of knowledge are not esoteric philosophical ab-

stractions; they are profoundly political and have real implications on people's lives (Code,

2006; Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Research projects are shaped by the researchers' theory of

knowledge or epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Their beliefs, feelings, interpretations

and assumptions about the world guide the subject matter, research questions, philosophies,

methods, analysis, and ultimately the conclusions reached. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers

to be forthright about their epistemological orientation.

Objectivism—roughly aligned with positivism and postpositivism (Guba & Lincoln,

2005; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011)—holds that Reality and Truth exist apart from conscious

operations, and that Knowledge is objectively apprehensible (OED.com). Subjectivism—aligned

with critical and constructivist paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba,

2011)—holds that knowing solely comes from a person's subjective consciousness (OED.com).

Objectivism has been the foremost epistemological model since the Enlightenment, particularly

as related to the sciences (Rorty, 1979/2009). According to philosopher Lorraine Code (2006),

> the dominant model of knowledge and epistemology in Anglo-American philosophy pro-
>
> duces an *epistemological monoculture* [emphasis in original] both in the academy and in

everyday life, whose consequences are to suppress and choke out ways of knowing that

depart from the stringent dictates of an exaggerated ideal of scientific knowledge making.

(pp. 8-9)

In this view, objectivism "lends itself naturally to the notion that certain sorts of representations,

certain expressions, certain processes are 'basic,' 'privileged,' and 'foundational'" (Rorty,

1979/2009, 318). Conceding the notion that "ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and

perspectival," (Lather, 1988, p. 570) would preclude the idea of there being a wholly objective

posture of knowing.

Given objectivism's inherent imperialism, I find the subjectivist epistemology far more

commensurate with my worldview. However, if knowledge is subjective and perspectival, one

might ask: What is the point of knowing and how is it useful in addressing real-world issues?

Feminist philosopher of education Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2003) provides me a way to resolve

this quandary (as well as a way out of the objective-subjective dichotomy) with her discussion of

qualified relativism, a perspective she attributes to two American pragmatists who preceded her,

William James and John Dewey. She maintains: "We understand experience in terms of rela-

tions" (p. 71). In rejecting objective Knowledge or Truth she champions a view that subjective

knowers come to know through their experiential engagement with others. She says: "My *rela-*

tional epistemology views knowing as something that is socially constructed by embedded, em-

bodied people who are in relation with each other [emphasis in original]" (p. 10). Although my

epistemology dissuades me from seeking out absolute Truth, it nevertheless affords opportunities

for me to negotiate situated understandings of my shared experience with others. This epistemol-

ogy meets the requirement of this study inasmuch as it is "steeped in a feminist and postmodern

understanding of the need to address power and its effects on theories of knowledge" as well as the "classical pragmatist focus on addressing context" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 48).

Theoretical Perspective. My theoretical perspective is postmodernism. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984) stages *modernism* as "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse … making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative" (p. xxiii). In light of contemporary cultural transformations, he situates *postmodern* "as incredulity toward metanarratives" (p. xxiv). Following Lyotard, Lemert (2005) defines modernity as "that culture which believes certain *metanarratives* [emphasis in original], or widely shared stories, about the value and 'truth' of science and truth itself" (p. 39). Conversely, Lemert argues:

> Postmodernism is a culture that believes there is a better world than the modern one. In particular it disapproves of modernism's uncritical assumption that European culture (including its diaspora versions in such places as South Africa, the United States, Australia, and Argentina) is an authentic, self-evident, and true universal culture in which all the world's people ought to believe. (p. 22)

From a postmodernist vantage point, I suspect that "all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961).

Criticisms leveled against postmodernism include notions that it is nihilistic, irreverent, abstruse, and meaningless (Chomsky, 1995; Dawkins, 1998; Sokal & Bricmont, 1997). Quite the opposite, my understanding of postmodernism is one which holds it to be purposefully optimistic, generative, and meaningful. Although in rejecting unified "metaphysical determinations of truth" one assumes a deconstructive stance (Derrida, 1967/1976), far from destructive, it is "dismantl[ing] in order to reconstitute what is already inscribed" (Spivak, 1976). Having untethered

consciousness from its grasp on illusory objective Truth or Reality leaves one free to "discover and restore belief in the world" (Deleuze, 1985, p. 172). This worldview is inclusive of situated knowledge and negotiated truths.

Postmodernism means many different (often conflicting) things to different people. In terms of this study, it means that significant once-entrenched certitudes have been undermined by the social and political climate of this era. Some of these bygone certitudes include notions that (a) males dominate and females are deficient in the technological sphere; (b) identity (gender and otherwise) is a unified, distinct, and invariable thing; (c) participants' cases and contexts are integrated, detached, and can be studied without regard to mediations or intersections with other cases or contexts; and (d) researchers can verifiably ascertain and represent the unadulterated objective Truth of their participants' experience. In the context of this study it means that we have a responsibility to deconstruct and disrupt assumptions that underlie 30 years of educational research into educational gaming and over 20 years of gender and gaming research. My exploratory endeavor is an attempt to begin this task.

As discussed in Chapter 1, a postmodern theoretical perspective is also markedly appropriate to the aims of this study, in that it is a theory acutely attuned to the technological mediation that is characteristic of the contemporary cultural experience. As mediated by technologies one experiences distant temporal and spatial realities "as if you were there"—that is to say, as hyper-real (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 28). As shaped by an oversaturation of hyper-real simulacra,[11] postmodern space "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (Jameson, 1991/1999, p. 44). Indeed, with

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[11] Plural form of simulacrum; meaning an image, imitation, or representation of someone or something (OED.com).

ubiquitous access to TVs, satellite radio, PCs, tablets, hand-held devices and the socially mediat-

ed realities that they incarnate, one would be hard pressed to demarcate the beginnings of one

cultural identity or population and the next (Soukup, 2012). Hypermediation is a hallmark of a

gamer's experience. In its most basic configuration, regardless of platform or genera, gamers in-

teract with user interfaces to generate visual feedback and create a provisional hyper-reality. In

employing a postmodern theoretical framework, this study will attempt to gather the imperma-

nent, fragmented, unbounded, disparate strands of a female gamer's hyper-reality into a mean-

ingful assemblage.

 Gender Performativity. An interrelated theory that guided my interpretations of litera-

ture and data throughout this study is the notion that stable gender identity is one of the many

metanarratives fit to be regarded with incredulity. Nietzsche has said "there is no 'being' behind

doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed — the deed is every-

thing" (1967, p. 45). In her influential work, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990/1999) rejoins

that "there is no gender identity beyond expressions of gender" (p. 34). These expressions and

actions, Butler argues, constitute gender. Gender is an active practice, a process of *becoming* ra-

ther than *being*. This active practice is performative, which is to say that gender is "real only to

the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 2009, p.363). Rather than a single act or a mere choice,

gender acts are iterative sequences of actions that, so recurrent, generate the façade of stability.

Butler (1990/1999) holds gender to be "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts

within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of sub-

stance, a natural sort of being" (p. 45). These performances are executed and repeated not *by* a

gendered subject, but rather, *to constitute* the gendered subject (Butler, 1993). There is, Butler

(1990/1999) contends, a culturally discursive regulatory system, or a "matrix of intelligibility,"

that has historically functioned to convey unified and stable gender constructs in binary opposi-

tional terms (p. 24). Gender acts are intelligible inasmuch as they conform to the coherence of

this matrix.

Butler's (1990/1999; 1993; 2009) notions of gender performativity are crucial to my ex-

aminations of female gamers in three noteworthy ways. First, performing as a female gamer is in

and of itself a challenge to traditionally conceived and regulated gender roles. Secondly, the act

of selecting or creating an avatar or character in video games entails a conception of identity as

purposeful enactment. Finally, in a digital space where gender identity is ascertained as being

enacted or performed, I believe that there is a potential for broader understandings of gender

identity—narratives of *becoming* that trouble essentialist conceptions of gender.
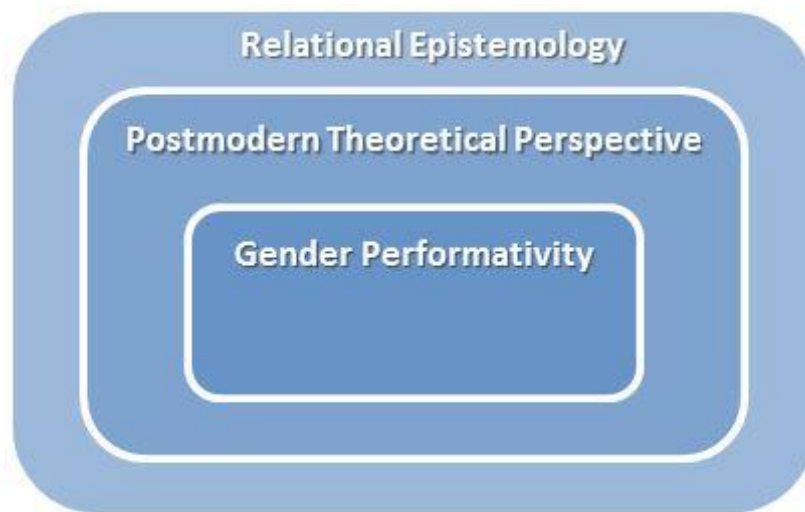
Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

3.2   Adapted Multicase Design

Case study research is employed across a wide array of disciplines including education,

medicine, psychology, social work, and business; not surprisingly, there is very little consensus

about the definition of a case study (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Merriam,

2009). Considerable debate about the character and function of case study research has ensued as

a result of the methodological implications inherent in two broad definitions (Hammersley, & Gomm, 2000). Richard Stake (2005), a renowned authority on qualitative case study research, defines it not as "methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). This and other such definitions focus on the object of study rather than the methodological approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). This approach is commonly aligned with naturalist, interpretivist, and constructivist theoretical orientations (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000).

An alternative perspective frequently (although not exclusively) advocated by positivist and post-positivist researchers regards definitions that focus on the object of study without attention to the methodological approach as inadequate (Yin, 2014). A proponent of this view, Yin defines the scope of a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). He further defines the features of the case study as the process of distilling numerous variables from multiple sources to triangulate on findings as guided by the researcher's theoretical perspective. Though not inherently constrained to any particular orientation, this definition of the case study is oriented toward a "*realist* [italics in original] perspective, which assumes the existence of a single reality that is independent of any observer" (p. 17).

Multiple-case designs, a variant of traditional case study design, prominently emerged in the 1970s as part of federally funded efforts to mitigate perceived flaws in quantitative research by incorporating qualitative data into the enterprise (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Multiple-case designs is frequently undertaken to address positivistic concerns that single-case studies lack rigor, generalizability, and external validity (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Multiple-case designs

are frequently extolled for allowing for comparisons, cross-case conclusions, and replication (Yin, 2014). In fact, it has been argued that obtaining sound empirical and theoretical conclusions using case study research requires comparative analysis (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000a & 2000b). Yin defines multiple case studies as "multiple experiments" or replication designs, which he contends, may add to the robustness of the individual case studies (p. 57). Stake (2006) and Merriam (1998, 2009) on the other hand, view multicase studies in terms of discrete, unique, manifestations of a targeted phenomenon. Stake argues that in qualitative multicase studies "individual cases should be studied to learn about their self-centering, complexity, and situational uniqueness" (p. 6). He also contends: "The study of human activity loses too much if it reports primarily what is common among the several, and universal across the many" (Stake, 2006, p. 88). The concern here is particularization over generalization. Hesse-Beber and Leavy (2011) have argued that views such as Yin's and Stake's occupy polar ends of the continuum of perspectives on case study research, which range from high generalizability to the particular, with the midpoint being occupied by researchers who advocate transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) as an alternative in terms of research goals.

Yet, in any scenario on this continuum, the case is defined as discrete manifestations of a targeted phenomenon in a unique context. Whether drawn from positivist or non-positivist perspectives, and whether aligned with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research traditions, the modernist methodological framework presumes the case to be a complex, unique, "bounded system" (Stake, 2005; Fals Borda, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Smith, 1978). Merriam (1998, 2009) has defined the "bounded system" of case study research as "as single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can 'fence in' what I am going to study" (p. 27; p. 40). In this view, boundaries between case and context, as well as between other cases and contexts, are

existent, although perhaps obscured. The researcher's task, given this traditional configuration, is to probe the isolated cases to reveal the contexts that allow for a holistic understanding of particular phenomena. Figure 3 illustrates the traditional approach to case study research design; in this instance, the multicase study.
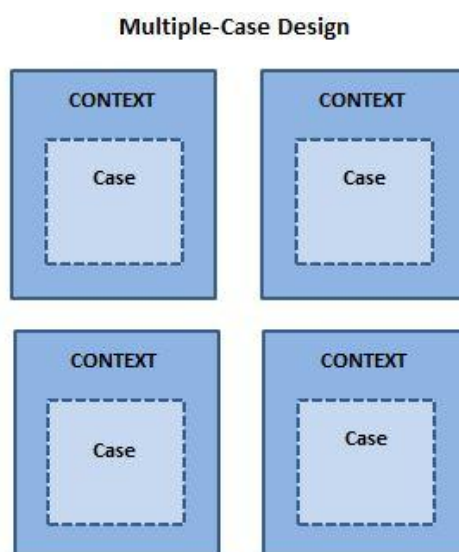
Figure 2: Multiple-case design. Adapted from *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.), by R. K. Yin, 2014, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright [2014] by Amana Marie Le Blanc. Adapted with permission.

This classical ethnographic approach to the study of isolated cultures or subcultures is wholly inappropriate to the practices and processes that comprise the postmodern experience. The postmodern culture as mediated by technologies is anything but tidily compartmentalized. Over 50 years ago, English literature professor Marshall McLuhan (1964/1994) saw our engagement with media and information technologies as progressing toward collective consciousness. He said of divergent various cultures: "They can no longer be *contained* [italics in original], in the political sense of limited association. They are now *involved* [italics in original] in our lives, as we in theirs thanks to electric media" (p. 5). Beyond simple engagement with others,

"we amplify and extend ourselves" by way of technology (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 64; see also

Baudrillard, 1981/1994). Postmodern cases and contexts are hypermediated, fragmented, and in-

terconnected. They are between, becoming, fluid, simultaneous, and interconnected. Our con-

texts and cases are "spaces of pure connection" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 493).
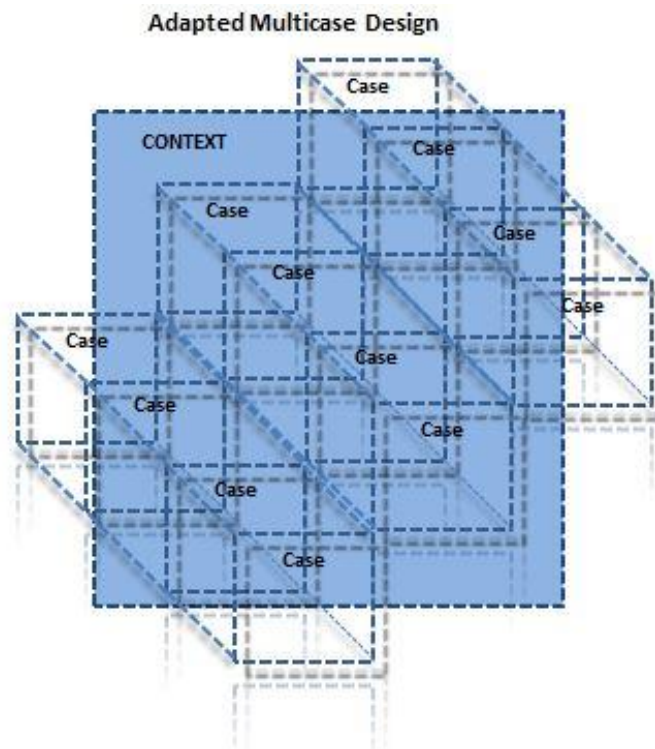
*Figure 3***:** Adapted multicase design.

The theoretical perspective on which this study is grounded required me to adapt the mul-

ticase design to embrace a more nuanced and unconventional conception of a case. This adapta-

tion is "post-qualitative" enterprise that "reconceptualizes and experiments with standard prac-

tices, moving beyond current scripts and their conventional codifying and disciplining of in-

quiry" (Lather, 2013, p. 238). While typical multiple case study design (see Figure 3) is intent on

isolating and analyzing discrete cases within detached contexts, my adaptation (see Figure 4) is

attuned to the hybrid, fragmented, interconnected, and hypermediated nature of the postmodern

experience. Figure 4 depicts a "moving matrix" (Colman, 2005/2010) that is the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Espousing a rhizomatous view of a case means seeing each case as continuously in motion, always "becoming," unconfined by spatial loci, unconstrained by binaries or other taxonomic schemes, seamlessly linked to other cases through "lines of flight" that ceaselessly de-territorialize and re-territorialize each other, and in so doing, engender metamorphosis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21) and "constitute new relations and ways of being" (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 151). While the typical case study design emphasizes studying each case in detached and compartmentalized contexts (see Figure 3), this research design recognizes the postmodern context as interconnected, saturated with hypermediated images on a broad scale, and it understands cases as fragmented and boundaryless (see Figure 4).

There is some precedent for this reconceptualization of ethnographic research. Rachel Sharp (1982) has argued that ethnographers must consider shared sociopolitical and historical context within which subjects operate to offer a meaningful contribution to the field of educational research. Michael Burawoy (1998) has advocated using extended case method to locate the "extralocal and historical context" that forms the backdrop to ethnographic observation (p. 4). As it pertains to the postmodern experience, Charles Soukup (2012) has explored how ubiquitous access to TVs, satellite radio, PCs, tablets, hand-held devices, and a host of social media tools has rendered demarcating the confines of one cultural identity or context and the next an impossible feat. He contends that ethnographers should attune to "spaces between bounded cultures and cultural identities—spaces of hybridity" (p. 232). Rather than placing emphasis on circumscribed sites or individuals, Soukup believes that the postmodern ethnographer must "tie together the diverse, fragmented, and disparate threads of everyday life into something resembling coherent and meaningful narratives" (p. 235). In a similar vein, Ronald Hallett and Kristin Barber

(2014) have argued that increasingly communal engagement with online environments requires contemporary ethnographers to consider digital space as yet another locale where meaningful and generative "lived experience" transpires (p. 307).

Following the above scholars, I consider the collective temporal and situated context within which fieldwork is conducted as distinctly important to a meaningful ethnographic exploration in the postmodern era. The epistemic pursuit that underpins adapted multicase design expands reductionist views of cases and context in light of the shared hypermediated context of the information age. Adapted multicase design exhibits the entropic[12] cacophony of mediated messages that comprise and coalesce cultural identities and social practices (see Figure 2). Far from a mere abstraction, adapted multicase design aspires to craft a meaningful instance of a "cognitive map" that permits the fluid and fragmented cases to be read in relation to the "vaster and properly unrepresentable totality" of postmodern society (Jameson, 1991/1999, p. 51). The application of adapted multicase research will serve both intrinsic and instrumental aims as traditionally formulated.[13]

3.3   Research Sites and Situated Contexts

Increased scholarly attention to informal learning contexts speaks to evolving understandings of learning and development as: 1) mediated by cultural artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978); 2) historically and culturally positioned (Leontiev, 1981), 3) discernible through diverse perspectives (Engeström, 1987); 4) situated in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); 5) relational (Gergen, 1991); 6) produced by political and cultural discourses (Levinson & Holland, 1996); 7)

[12] Baudrillard (1981/1994) has said: "Information in which an event is reflected or broadcast is already a degraded form of this event" (p. 86).
[13] Stake (2005) contends that multicase studies have either intrinsic or instrumental objectives, where intrinsic case studies denote research that is inherently interesting to the researcher, and instrumental case studies are intended to apply the findings toward a greater concern.

necessarily realized intersectionally (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000); and 8) manifest as performed across multiple dimensions (Gee, 2000, Gee 2003/2007). Building on research that understands leisure contexts to be an important setting within which meaningful informal learning occurs (Mitra & Rana, 2001; Sawchuk, 2003; Selwyn, 2005; Turkle, 1984, 1997; Wenger, 1999), my aim was to explore female gamer identity in non-academic settings.

In keeping with adapted multicase design, I sought out leisure sites in which the hyper-mediated collective context was a distinct feature. My selected situated contexts have all previously been conjectured as conducive to postmodern explorations. All of the sites in this study allow participants to transcend individual, social, and geographical boundaries by means of mediated technologies. These locations are particularly appropriate for identity studies because they are sites where "on- and off-line presence, identities and communities overlap and merge" (Beavis & Charles, 2007). By entering any of this study's sites, participants in this study performatively disrupted conventional gender roles and reinscribed spaces customarily viewed as male purview. Sites such as these are locales where the ostensibly innate and observable biological truths of gender are conceivable beyond oppositional binary formulations.

The first sites in this study are coffee shops of the participants' choosing. Soukup (2012) has described coffee house culture as "media-saturated postmodern spaces" which, he argues, can offer ethnographers insights into lived practices and iterations of selves that thrive in the liminal spaces between circumscribed strictures (229). The second site in this study is a gamebar.[14] While I know of no study conducted within this particular context, research conducted in local area network (LAN) or Internet cafés (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Beavis, Nixon, & Atkinson,

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[14] A for-profit business similar to a bar that serves alcohol and pub food, while also offering a variety of computer and console games which patrons pay to use by the hour.

2005; Cilesiz, 2009; Jansz & Grimberg, 2005; Jansz & Martis, 2005; Wakeford, 2003) provides a

prototype for conducting research in gaming spaces where "relationships and spatiality work

across 'real' and 'virtual' boundaries" (Beavis & Charles, 2007, p. 693). Gamebars are particu-

larly appropriate to the aims of this study because these spaces are often colloquially referred to

as "man caves." These are spaces where it is not uncommon for a group of middle-aged males,

still in business attire, to down tequila shots and order pints of beer before heading to the nearest

console gaming area to play Madden NFL 25[15] Redskins versus Cowboys (EA Tiburon, 2013).

Female gamers entering these sites actively reinscribe these "man caves" and performatively dis-

rupt conscripted gender roles related to gaming. This particular gamebar was selected as it is the

only one of its kind in the municipality. The third site in this study is the virtual space of live

synchronous gaming broadcasts. Internet research has burgeoned as of late due in large part to

the fact that so much of our lives are spent online (Baym & Markham, 2009). Hallett and Barber

(2013) argue that ethnographers' reluctance to examine online spaces causes them to overlook

valuable "lived experience and thus miss data that could help them more fully understand the

populations they study" (p. 307). While digital space infiltrates nearly every aspect of the aver-

age person's life, this phenomenon is even more pronounced in game culture where gamers per-

sistently construct and reconstruct themselves within a host of interconnecting game universes.

Reading the gamers in this study required apprehending the considerable cognitive, temporal,

and financial investments they recurrently made in digital spaces.

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[15] Madden NFL 25 is an American football sports video game based on the National Football League.

3.4   Participant Selection

This research took place in Atlanta, Georgia over the course of a five-month period beginning in February and ending in June of 2015. The three participants in my study were the only respondents to numerous fliers that I circulated in location known to be frequented by video game players, including a multitude of local video game shops, coffee shops, comic book shops, and a local gamebar. Each participant met the criteria of self-identification as female and self-identification as a gamer, although each perceived her femininity and defined being a gamer in different ways. I should note that participants in this study were cisgender rather than transgender females, although the only criteria for inclusion was self-definition as female. Interviewees signed an Institutional Review Board approved consent form. All participants met study criteria of being over 18, pseudonyms were assigned, and there were no incentives for participation in the study. Two participants were 27 years old and one was 36; two were European American and one was African American. More information about the participants in this study is discussed in Chapter 4.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant, the first of which took place at the coffee shop of participants' choosing. Interview duration was between 50 and 70 minutes, questions were open-ended, and answers were recorded with participants' consent. Initial questions explored early experiences with and roles played by video games. Subsequent questions explored avatar creation and gender identity negotiation between video game and "real" world spaces, and the mediated discourse surrounding game culture. Second interviews focused on clarification and elaborations of initial interview responses. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. First observations took place in a local gaming bar wherein participants selected their preferred game platform (PC or console) and game to play.

*Figure 4***:** Gamebar observations.

Gamebar observations were recorded using a GoPro, a wide-angle video recording device which captured the game play, participant, and gaming environs. I also captured still images, gathered field notes including detailed descriptive notes and spatial sketches. Subsequent observations took place using Twitch.tv,[16] a live broadcasting of video games, which permits users to play, chat, and watch game action and players. Streaming observations were recorded using Screencast-O-Matic,[17] an online screen recorder. In both gamebar and streaming environments only the gameplay of this study's three participants was captured. Any audiovisual data from other gamers was concealed due to privacy concerns.

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[16] http://www.twitch.tv/; Twitch.tv, a company acquired by Amazon in 2014 for nearly one billion dollars (Needleman, 2015), is the world's leading social video platform and community for gamers whose 1.5 million broadcasters attract an average of 100 million viewers a month (Business Wire, 2015).

[17] http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/
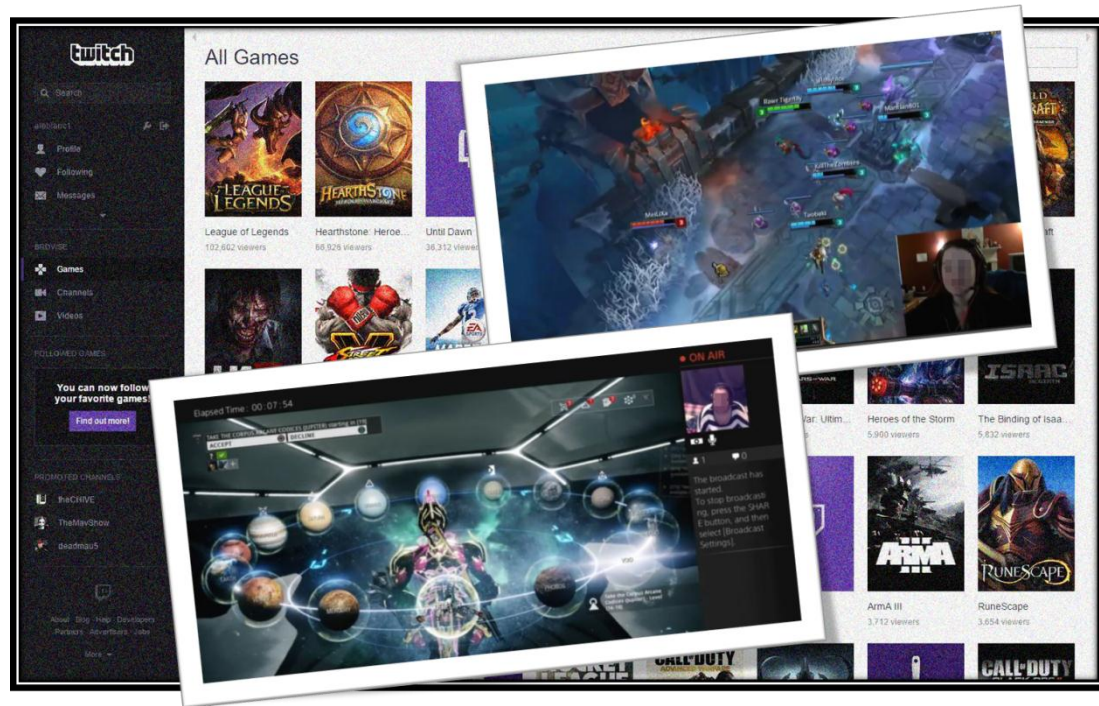
*Figure 5***:** Twitch.tv streaming observations.

3.5   Data Generation

Data are constituted as a culmination of the metaphysical, paradigmatic, and methodolog-

ical framework upon which a study is grounded (St. Pierre, 2013a). As influenced by empiricism

(which privileges sense evidence over thought or interpretation), "[c]onventional humanist quali-

tative inquiry" seeks to provide evidence that data are valid and that the researcher's interpretive

strategies are beyond reproach (St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 223). Data thus defined "are the end of

thought—solid bedrock, building blocks of true knowledge that can be accumulated into regular-

ities, generalities, scientific laws of the social world that emulate the scientific laws of the natural

world" (St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 224). This approach is incongruous when considered in the context

of the constellation of theoretical perspectives collectively known as the "posts" (p. St. Pierre &

Jackson, 2014, p. 716). The posts challenge notions that any truth claim can transcend its histori-

cal, sociopolitical, and cultural situation (Scheurich, 1997). In this context, what constitutes data might be very different based on whether one is a postfeminist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, or post-humanist, and these definitions are variable, indefinite, and open to epistemic debate.

Guided by post epistemologies, data has extended beyond the confines of interviews, observations, and notes to include unconventional empirical matter such as music, poetry, fiction, photographs, and digital artifacts (Kaufmann, 2011). The disposition that would allow one to characterize empirical matter as "any actual or virtual object, event, or intensity that can be read" presupposes a reader/researcher whose subjective interpretations constitute the data (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 149). Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2013a) has said of data:

> If being is always already entangled, then something called data cannot be separate from me, "out there" for "me" to "collect," and, with that astonishment, the entire structure of conventional humanist qualitative inquiry falls apart—its methods, its process, its research designs, and, of course, its ground, data. (p. 226)

However, working within the linguistic constraints of humanism (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 4), while still endeavoring "to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175), contemporary researchers have sought to reframe what constitutes data by moving "post-coding analysis" (Augustine, 2014; Brinkmann, 2014; Childers, 2014; Clark/Keefe, 2014; Davies, 2014; Daza & Huckaby, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014; Holmes, 2014; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2014; Mazzei, 2014; Ringrose & Renold, 2014; Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014). These exploratory ventures trouble humanist notions of data analysis by making meaning in non-prescriptive and unconventional ways, because "[i]n the end, it is impossible to disentangle *data*, *data collection*, and *data analysis* [italics in original]. Those individuations no longer make sense" (St, Pierre, 2011, p. 622).

The theoretical perspective that guided this research required me to make similarly bold choices both about what constitutes data, as well as how I performed data analysis. While empirical matter included the traditional data sets of interviews, observations, and notes, I expanded my definition to include the infinite array of sensory materials, which allowed me to narrate a compelling story about female gamers. Following Lather (1991), I believe that "[d]ata might better be conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify* [italics in original] interpretation as opposed to 'support or 'prove''' (p. 91). My meaning-making or analytical process entailed a concerted effort to simultaneously think, read, write, and live (St, Pierre, 2011; 2013b). It was a process that involved a deliberate attempt not to distance myself from the lived experience that was the backdrop to my scholarly endeavor (i.e., *gardening immersed in the moist earth and fragrant herbs; paying bills online; attending a charity event; trying to wrap my head around Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) principle of "multiplicity;" battling a hangover while sitting through a client meeting; grocery shopping; attending the Anime Weekend Atlanta gaming convention; watching Anthony Bourdain's culinary adventures on the Travel Channel; reading my pre-ordered copy of Pynchon's (2013) latest novel,* Bleeding Edge*; deeply inhaling the coconut oil & baby scents on my nephew's head; having a heated debate with friends about Misogyny and Homophobia in the NFL; floating in the pool looking up at oddly-shaped clouds; wheezing my way through a particularly tough CrossFit class; laughing at Jon Stewart's refers to my guilty pleasure HuffPost as the "Uber-Liberal Sideboob Gazette;" browsing among the decorative booths at the Marietta Square Farmers Market in the Square; trying, unsuccessfully, to be present in yoga class; gossiping with my husband about the neighbors; folding laundry; answering emails; transcribing interviews; planning a party; reading/thinking/writing about data; etc.*). All of these experiences were inter-

twined and generated the "cacophony of ideas swirling" that comprised this research project (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 622).

3.6   Meaning Making

I initially explored this study data using the first-cycle coding method In Vivo (Saldaña, 2013). In reviewing interview transcripts I attuned myself to words and phrases that stood out and made notations in transcript margins, circled thought-provoking turns of phrase, and under-lined and marked up the text using different colored highlighters.
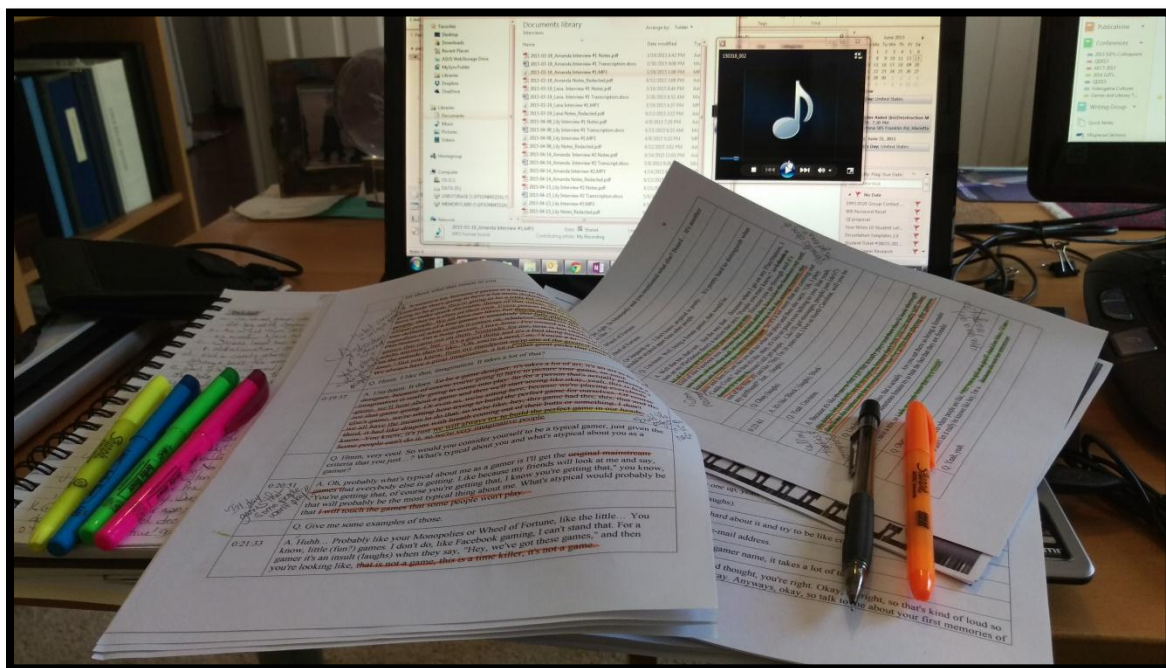
Figure 6: Meaning-making In Vivo

Using verbatim participant-generated speech to elicit themes is often used as "devices of legiti-mization" by ethnographers who seek to proclaim the authenticity of their research narratives (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 67; Minh-Ha, 1992, p. 193). However, narratives shaped by attempts to "give voice" to participants will nevertheless be profoundly influenced by the subjective perspectives

of a privileged voice-giver (Minh-Ha, 1991; Minh-Ha, 1992; Visweswaran, 1995). I employed "writing as a method of inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to interrogate my privilege and scrutinize how my subjective perspective—plausibly divergent from that of my participants—was shaping the research narratives. My postmodern perspective requires me to be attuned, both to my own "overwhelming absent presence" and to "the 'intractable uncertainties' and unstable ambiguities of linguistically communicated meaning" (Scheurich, 1997/2001, p. 63). Methodologically, I aimed to make meaning in a manner that resisted closure, revealing participant portraits that laid bare contradictions and inconsistencies. In so doing I hoped to encourage my readers to interrogate the subjective intentions, motivations, and theories that shaped my text, thereby "reassert[ing] the existence of a plurality of voices, values and perspectives" (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 53).

I also analyzed this study's data, using Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) NVivo 10 toward the construction of narratives that resisted positivistic penchants for coherence and closure. Polemics about potential problems inherent in employing QDAS abound (see Agar, 1991; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Fielding & Lee, 1998; Fielding & Lee, 2002; Glaser, 2003; Lee & Fielding, 1991; MacMillan & Koenig, 2004; Pfaffenger, 1988; Seidel & Kelle, 1995), and these researchers are troubled by (a) the potential attenuation of the iterative analysis process; (b) the reification of a dynamic process; (c) the dilution of rich data; (d) the decontextualization of knowledge and subsequent hyperreal exhibition; (e) the loss of naturalistic collaboration methods; and (f) the possibility that people and events would become reduced to objective codes (Grbich, 2013, pp. 278-282). All of these issues are of particular concern to me given my postmodern theoretical framework, which inclines me to be wary of totalizing systems that lead to static, ahistorical, and decontextualized narratives of "Truth" and "Knowledge."

Here I must draw a distinction between my intention and aims and those of other qualitative researchers who tout their use of QDAS as ushering in a new era of transparency (Cousins & McIntosh, 2005; Johnston, 2006; Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012; Ryan, 2009; Thompson, 2002). The foundational enterprise that frames these discourses is designed to bolster the credibility of qualitative research by subjecting it to quality standards (rigor, validity, transferability, generalizability, etc.). These quality standards have been normalized in the quantitative lexicon under positivist and post-positivist paradigms (St. Pierre, 2011). This defensive impetus is a hallmark of "conventional humanist qualitative inquiry" (St. Pierre, 2011, St. Pierre, 2013a; St. Pierre, 2013b; see also Kaufmann, 2011; Lather, 2013; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014; St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006) which seeks to validate research conclusions by anatomizing the intricacies of the research process.

This study deployed NVivo as a "simulacrum" of research narratives (Baudrillard, 1981/1994). Baudrillard has said that ideological analysis is frequently disposed toward the restoring an "objective" real beneath simulation but that "it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum" (p. 27). This study did not seek out the "real" or "true" narrative, but sought instead to performatively disrupt dominant readings and construct a postmodern "pastiche" (Jameson, 1991/1999, p. 16) of multiple, partial, incongruous narratives. Fredric Jameson (1985) has described pastiche as "[o]ne of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism" (p. 113) and he defines it as parody without satire or humour—it is parody that has lost its sense of nostalgia for the "Real" that it caricatures. While NVivo is conventionally hailed as facilitating 'quality,' 'trustworthiness,' and 'fidelity' in qualitative data analysis (Cousins & McIntosh, 2005; Johnston, 2006; Rademaker et al., 2012; Ryan, 2009; Thompson, 2002), when it is deployed toward the construction of a postmodern pastiche it is capable of

showcasing the transience, artificiality, and malleability of authoritative knowledge narratives. NVivo used in this sense may foreground the "fictions" of ethnographic truth narratives (Visweswaran, 1995). The tensions inherent in this foregrounding are a function of a postmodern artist's or writer's movement toward new knowledge that works against conventional ways of reasoning. Lyotard (1979/1984) has termed this undertaking paralogy. On Lyotard's view, the postmodern artist or writer has an epistemic duty to "impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" in order to "activate the differences" (pp. 81-82).

Lather (2013) has argued that the "blueprint for post-qualitative" might transpire along these lines: "Out of mutated dominant practices, through a convergence of practices of intensity and emergence, both practice and objects of a field are redefined and reconfigured" (p. 641). Using an instrument that is frequently used to codify, quantify, and confine qualitative knowledge toward the paralogical production of counter-narratives that resist closure and challenge the notion of a single narrative might transform both that practice and instrument. NVivo transformed, or mutated, enabled me to hypertextually explore alternate ways of knowing (Rath, 2001). *Hypertext* as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED.com*) is a non-sequential but interconnected compilation of text and graphics that allows readers to explore various pathways through the material at their discretion. David Kolb (1997, 2004, 2008), Landow (1992/2006, 2002), and Morgan (2000), have regarded hypertext as facilitating new understandings. Kolb (1997) has said of hypertext, that it "offer[s] new ways for self-representation and self-criticism" and that it represents "a structural refusal of authoritative meta-positions, through their endless proliferation and mutual inclusion" (p. 3). Landow (1992/2006) echoed this sentiment, adding, "hypertextuality embodies poststructural conceptions of the open text" (p. 2). Hypertextuality's disruption of closure aligns with my postmodern theoretical perspective and is ideal within the context of

adapted multicase design in that "does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice. Rather, the voice

is always that distilled from the combined experience of the momentary focus, the lexia one

presently reads, and the continually forming narrative of one's reading path" (Landow,

1992/2006, p. 26).

In keeping with my adaptation of multicase design I was interested in the intersections

and overlaps in the various discourses that influenced the evolving narratives of the participants'

experiences. To facilitate this intersectional approach I moved the artifacts that represented the

discourses (audio recordings, transcriptions, pictures, memos, news articles, and postmodern

texts) into NVivo to explore them hypertextually.
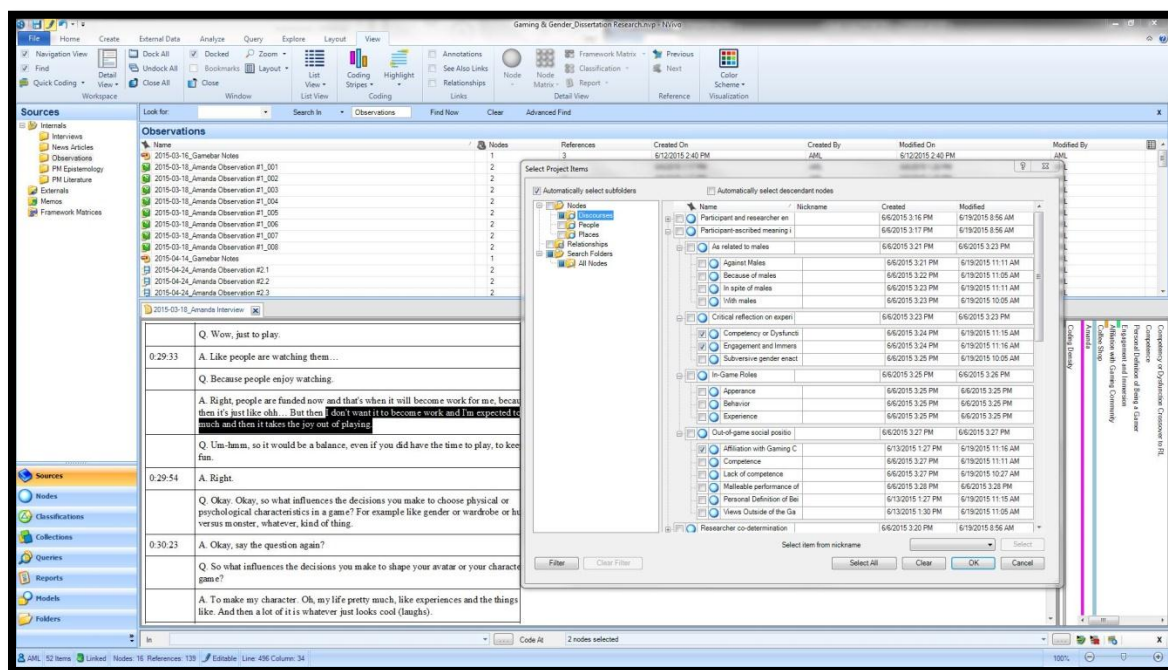
Figure 7: Meaning-making NVivo 10_nodes.

The ease whereby NVivo allowed me to visualize the videos and pictures, hear the audio, and

read text simultaneously heightened my awareness of intersections and deviations in the various

competing narratives. I moved seamlessly between coding text to coding audiovisual data, un-

docking windows and reconfiguring artifacts to construct manifold hypertext narratives within NVivo. As I explored the data hypertextually, I also memoed, copiously writing my way toward an understanding of the data. This act was an attempt to performatively construct what has been called a "layered account" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Rambo 2005; Ronai, 1992, 1995, 1996; Rath, 2001) wherein an ethnographic narrative self-consciously gestures toward the omissions, ambiguities, and impediments of the research process, allowing readers to share in the multivocal creative and interpretive "dialectic of experience" (Ronai, 1995, p. 25).
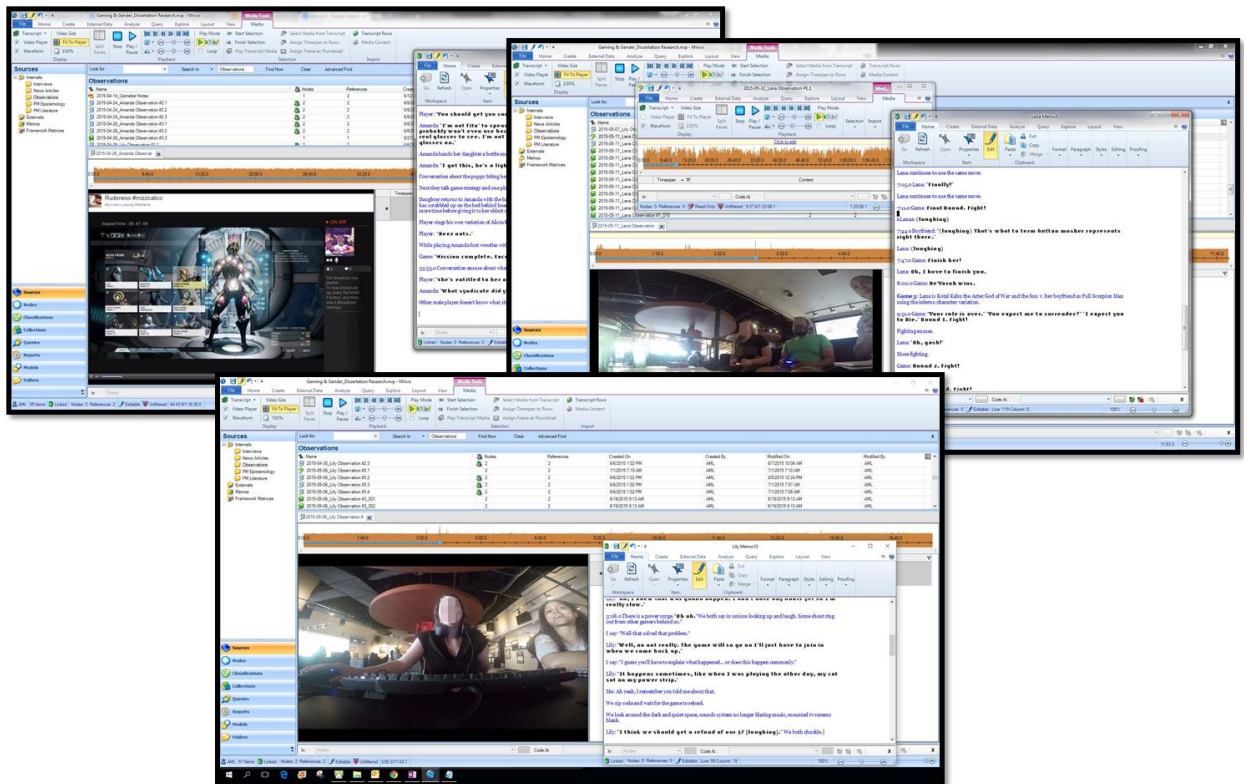
Figure 8: Meaning-making_NVivo 10_mutimedia

Staging the discourses in NVivo, crafting subordinate themes and sub-themes,[18] and linking these to the textual and audio-visual artifacts superficially produced a hierarchical interpretive scheme. However, the hypertextual environment of NVivo readily enabled me to explore non-hierarchical, multilinear paths through the data by way of atypical linkages (i.e., between text, image, audio artifacts), disruptive shifts (i.e., between postmodern literary texts and 24-hour new media blurbs), border transgressions (i.e., between the participants' and researcher narratives narratives), collage (i.e., graphic display of fragmented texts and images), and juxtapositions (i.e., between dissenting discourses). This very deliberate performative enactment of "textual deconstruction" (Morgan, 2000), while never definitively decentering my authorial position, allowed me to conceptualize new discursive gestures and alterative narratives. Below is a brief description of the three discourses explored. I explored these particular discourses as I viewed them as most influential in shaping this research narrative.

3.6.1 *Participant-ascribed meaning in being a female gamer*

This discourse was the most complex, as it reflected participant views which often internally conflicted but, most paradoxically, diverged from my own personal epistemological and theoretical perspectives that gave shape to this research project (St. Pierre, 2000). Contradictions such as the fact that while participants challenged conventional male/female roles by identifying as gamers, they often simultaneously espoused largely traditional views on gender, which were paradoxical given my own epistemic rejection of gender binaries (Butler, 1990/1999, 1993). Another inconsistency involved participants' perspectives on virtual versus "real" life, which contrasted my relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) and, while rejecting the subjectivist/objectivist dualism, nevertheless embraces a "qualified relativist" perspective (Thayer-Bacon,

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[18] In NVivo themes and sub-themes are termed parent and child nodes respectively.

2003, p. 49) wherein any objective known is inconceivable without subjective knowers who, by way of their relations with each other, socially negotiate the knowledge of that given moment in time.
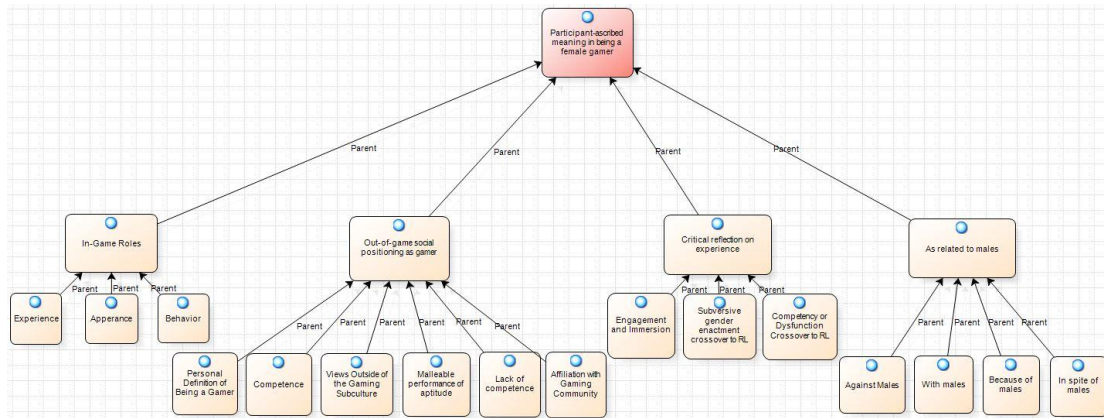
Figure 9: Participant-ascribed meaning.

In keeping with this project's epistemological and theoretical underpinning, as well as the adapted multicase design, the contradictions, inconsistencies, and paradoxes inherent in this discourse were to be foregrounded rather than shied away from.

3.6.2   *Researcher co-determination of meaning*

This discourse was intensely personal in that it incorporated the postmodern literary and epistemological texts that have shaped my worldview and thus influenced the research narrative that evolved as part of my engagement with this study's participants. Key passages of postmodern philosophical texts and quotes from literary fiction were examined alongside other artifacts of this study. The theories that we espouse shape the way see the world and mediates our access to and experience of the world. It was therefore important that I reflexively analyzed my theoretical assumptions which would ultimately shape the research narrative.
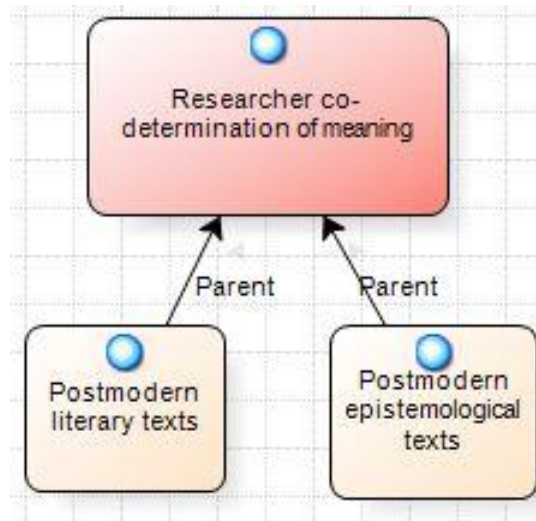
Figure 10: Researcher co-determination of meaning.

Exploring data juxtaposed with the theory that underpinned this study was important, firstly in that it enabled me to maintain alignment between my epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology. This ensured that I did not fall into the common positivist pitfall of treating "words as brute data that can produce truth" (St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 225). Secondly, the juxtapositions between theory and data allowed me to conceptualize different relations and new interconnections. Some interconnected interpretive strategies mobilized by these associative links included:

- diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Davies. 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Mazzei, 2014), which entails "attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another" toward greater understandings of difference (Barad, 2007, p. 30);

- assemblage analysis (Augustine, 2014), whereby writing and reading performed in tandem with immersion in data prompts "different kinds of analysis" (p. 752); and

- rhizoanalysis (Alvermann, 2000; Dufresne, 2006; Eakle, 2007; Leander & Rowe, 2006; Masny, D. 2013; Masny, D. 2014; Masny & Waterhouse, 2011; Perry, 2013; Waterhouse,

2011; Sellers, 2013), which is drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the

rhizome and entails "looking for middles rather than beginnings and endings" as a means

of "remaining open to the proliferation of ruptures and discontinuities that in turn create

other linkages" (Alvermann, 2000, p. 118).

These analytic strategies facilitated "a weaving of method, the politics of interpretation, data,

[and] analysis" toward new performances of the data. (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi).

3.6.3   *Participant and researcher engagement with sociopolitical media discourse surrounding game culture*

This discourse highlighted the fact that the multiple cases and contexts attended to in this

study were unequivocally amalgamated as part of the postmodern hypermediated context within

which gender, race, and class performances are played out in the sociopolitical sphere.
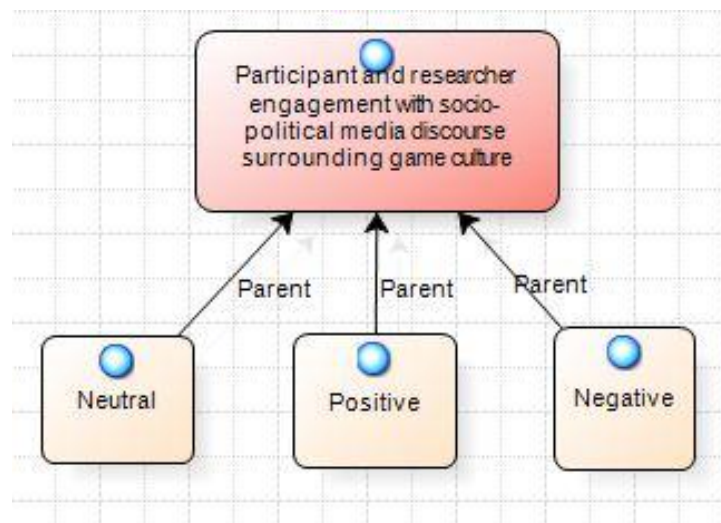
Figure 11: Sociopolitical discourse

All of the above discourses, while superficially distinct, nevertheless coalesce in order to

co-constitute meaning. An adapted multicase design understands the discourses that shape cases

and contexts as amalgamated resulting in narratives that do not inscribe stark demarcations be-

tween different participants' cases, the varied contexts they inhabit, nor my own narrative construction of their experiences. The narrative findings take shape as a single instance of an evocative, indeterminate "cognitive map" of the research data (Jameson, 1991/1999, p. 51).

3.7   Quality Considerations

Sarah Tracy (2010) has identified four ethical elements for qualitative researchers to consider in conducting field research: *procedural ethics*, *situational and culturally specific ethics*, *relational ethics*, and *exiting ethics*. I practiced *procedural ethics* by adhering to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, seeking the informed consent from participants, and assuring them of my commitment to their privacy, which included the concealment of identifying information and the use of pseudonyms. My methodological adaptation of the multicase study (which perceives cases and contexts as interconnected) functions to further conceal individual participants' identities, given that distinct demarcations are not made between narratives. The various gamer narratives in this study are fragmented and interrelated. The context of the gamebar required me to practice both *situational* and *culturally specific ethics* in the sense that I had to be attuned to the complexities and connotations of that site, particularly as a researcher who is an "outsider" to gaming (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In terms of *relational ethics*, on gaining access to the varied sites in this study, I had to be sensitive to how my presence affected my participants' well-being within settings where they have forged spaces for themselves against the odds. *Relational* ethics ensured that I maintained "mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Finally, on *exiting*, I strove to share my results as truthfully as possible in a manner that pays tribute to my participants' understandings and experiences.

Despite the ongoing debate about the worth of using universal criteria for evaluating the quality of postmodernist research (Tracy, 2010), preoccupation with validity (Lather, 1993), credibility, (Patton, 2002), reflexivity (Pillow, 2003 and rigor (St. Pierre, 2011) persists. Qualitative researchers wrestle with terms (validity, transferability, and generalizability) whose formal definitions have been normalized in the quantitative lexicon under positivist paradigms. They attempt to "rethink validity in light of antifoundational discourse" (Lather, 1993, p. 674). To this end, qualitative researchers have often evoked triangulation, a foundational discourse which aims to authenticate research by portraying it as assembled from multiple sources and perspectives (Biklen & Bogdan, 2006). As guided by a different theoretical perspective, Lauren Richardson (2005) has discussed the crystallization as deconstructing traditional notions of validity through the physiognomy of the crystal with its "infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" (p. 963). Regarding quality in ethnographic research Richardson (2000) has cautioned that

> [a]lthough postmodernism frees ethnographers to re-present their findings in different ways, it constrains them asking them to be more self-conscious about claims to authorship, authority, truth, validity, and reliability. Self-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing. Truth claims are less easily validated; speaking for "others" is wholly suspect. (pp. 253-254)

As a researcher operating within a postmodern framework, I am duty bound to be mindful of these considerations.

Whatever the criteria, it is clear that it is not the task of postmodern text to size itself up apologetically using criteria defined by the positivist discourse of the cadre of scientifically based research (SBR) proponents. St. Pierre (2011) has said that it is time to "move away from a center-

ing defensive mode and get on the invention of science" (p. 613). She believes that "[r]igor is the work of différence, not repetition" (p. 620). This is to say that, with old humanist models for qualitative methodology deconstructed, post researchers must rigorously strive to "think the unthought" (p. 620). They must reconceptualize and reinvent new articulations of knowledge, if only from the disarticulated remnants of conventional models. In this postmodern project I practiced the rigor of différence (St. Pierre, 2011) and held myself accountable to crafting a narrative that offered a *substantive contribution*,[19] has *aesthetic merit*,[20] displays the requisite *reflexivity*,[21] and delivers *impact*[22] (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The strength of this postmodern narrative resides in the intractable indeterminacy of the telling.

3.8 Subjectivity

This research is the interpretive enterprise of a 38-year-old, Black, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, atheist female. However, I did not self-identify as Black until age 14, upon first coming to the US, within whose borders actions and interactions are fraught with racial tensions traceable to the colonial incursions that brought about the blight of slavery. To be sure, the 15 different countries wherein my expatriate missionary family worked and lived prior to 1991 inhabited the same world in which "power relations" are significantly negotiated in terms of class, gender, race, and religious struggles (Foucault, 1982, p. 778). But, comfortably ensconced

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[19] A "credible account" (p. 964) of gamers' experiences: Deleuze and Guattari (1994) have maintained that another person denotes the "existence of a possible world" (p. 17). My intent was to represent a possible world in a believable manner.

[20] An "artistically shaped" (p. 964) narrative: This narrative does not aspire to be a mirror image of this possible world but rather an "aparallel evolution" that follows its own "line of flight" Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.11).

[21] A sustained display of "self-awareness" and "self-exposure" (p. 964): Throughout this project I was self-reflexive about my own fragmented, equivocal, and ambivalent identity performance and the way it shaped the narratives developed.

[22] An "emotionally" and "intellectually" (p. 964) evocative allegory: Postmodern allegory is uniquely suited to produce emotional and intellectual impact in that it undermines any attempt to reduce "truth" or "reality" to a single, unified, coherent narrative (Madsen, 1991). In so doing, postmodern allegory denies the reader exculpation from thought.

behind our religio-colonial enterprise, race did not seem like a consideration. Without ever having been to the empire that is America we "acted Empire, represented and presented Empire" (Chapman, 2005, p. 268). By whatever means, our familial mission coupled with the surname Le Blanc (meaning The White), endowed me with tangential possession of the "ultimate property" that is Whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 15), at least in the sense that I never conceived of being Other. The non-believers were Other; I was American. Coming "home" to the US meant giving up that property and upon first arriving being asked "What are you?" (a question I am still quite frequently asked). Now my Otherness was apparent.

My circuitous professional journey led me to the field of instructional design and also converged upon my educational pursuit of a doctoral degree in instructional, design, and technology. As an instructional design consultant working with various commercial clients, I am frequently charged with making boring eLearning content more engaging to adult learners through "gamification" or the use of game mechanics. Therefore, I am personally invested in ensuring that I am not implicated in perpetuating gender bias in instructional contexts. I believe that it is ethically imperative that we obtain a deep understanding of females as related to gaming technologies. And yet, here my colonial past haunts me. Charged as I was in infancy with bringing "light" to "dark" continents, I have a lengthy history as being an invader of worlds—which is precisely why I proceed cautiously into the worlds of gamers: It is experientially Other to me. We must guard against colonial instincts in our attempts to traverse into gaming worlds and exploit them for educational pursuits. Gee (2007), arguably the most prominent and fervent advocate for the use of video games in learning contexts, has cautioned that "we have to be careful not to co-opt young people's cultures for our own purposes" (p. 215). Therefore, I proceed with caution in a modest attempt to gain understanding of particular self-identified female gamers'

attempts to make meaning and craft their identities in this heretofore male dominated space. While my earnest hope is that this research ultimately influences policy and practice in my chosen profession, the fact that I have purposefully opted to conduct my research in leisure contexts precludes me from drawing stark correlative lines between leisure and educational contexts. Nevertheless, following Gee (2007), I believe that gamers often use "video games as a fruitful precursor domain for mastering other semiotic domains tied to computers and related technologies" (p. 40). Hence, understandings derived from leisure contexts cannot help but provide instructional design technologists with greater insight into the characteristics of the audience for whom they are designing.

3.9   Representation

My method of representation is narrative in nature. I used "vignettes" to "capture significant moments or the action of an extended portion of fieldwork into evocative prose renderings" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 182). These narrative reconstructions are a way to resist the closure and intransigence of the academic text and present my participants' experiences as "narratives of becoming" in keeping with postmodern worldview (Stronach & MacLure, 1997). While qualitative research that is guided by poststructural and postmodern theory frequently explores nonconventional representational methods (Britzman, 2000; McCoy, 2000; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Scheurich, 1997/2001; Stronach & MacLure, 1997), literary renderings[23] of data is by no means a widely accepted representational methodology either within the discipline of educational research or in the field of instructional design technology. To represent qualitative data in forms other than the conventional academic text is still viewed as fringe practice. However, despite a

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[23] Or the use of literary devices in the construction of fictionalized research narratives.

dominant positivistic metanarrative that decries nonconformist methods, a growing number of scholars choose to acknowledge the situational nature of all ethnographic accounts and wrestle with plausible narratives of the real rather than clinging fast to a material "real." These scholars have avowed a commitment "to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge different-ly" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175).

3.9.1   *Why produce different knowledge narratives?*

The need for different discourses of knowledge is an ethical imperative, particularly in the field of educational research that, replete with hegemonic empirical enterprises, routinely subjugates the subjects it claims to represent (Code, 2006; Thayer-Bacon, 2003). While tradi-tional ethnographers seek to construct an authentic, fixed, and unified humanistic subject by means of unadulterated textual representations crafted from careful observations and transcrip-tions, their accounts are already alloyed by their own and other interests (Minh-Ha, 1989; Visweswaran 1994). For the postmodern educational researcher in search of particular, complex, and indeterminate narratives, the question becomes how to "activate the differences" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 82). Said another way, how should researchers deconstruct privileged representa-tions so that difference, or the Other, may come to the fore (Deleuze, 1968/1994)?

Educational researchers in search of different discourses of knowledge have likened it to "working the ruins" of foundationalism and post-Enlightenment models of rationality (Lather, 1997; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). It is difficult to invite new discourse because "we are always speaking within the language of humanism" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 4). It is doubly diffi-cult when one employs poststructural or postmodern lenses that "call into question promises of representation and belief" (Britzman, 2000, p. 37). The above complexities are further exacerbat-ed by the "paradox" of a researcher constructing portraits of participants whose theoretical out-

look might drastically diverge from her own (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 273). To address these quandaries I turn to Laurel Richardson's (2005) discussion of creative analytic process (CAP) ethnographies, which she describes as texts that "invite people in and open up spaces for thinking about the social that elude us now" (p. 962). She argues that creative representations (fiction, poetry, drama, auto-ethnography, hypertext, etc.) make a powerful political statement about the fact that all truth and knowledge is situated. This manner of representation

> displays the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing. Because both traditional ethnographies and CAP ethnographies are being produced within the broader postmodernist climate of "doubt:" readers (and reviewers) want and deserve to know how the researchers claim to know. (p. 962)

Literary renderings, or fictionalized representations, have the capacity to underscore the shifting and dynamic dispositions of participants whose experiences have been shaped by discourses of power (Leavy, 2013).

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) trace our divergent understandings of fact and fiction to an artificial 17th century dichotomy between literature, "fiction rhetoric, and subjectivity," and science, "fact, 'plain language,' and objectivity" (p. 960). They argue that "all writing is narrative writing" and that the salient point is what "truth claims" the author makes for the text (p. 961). Proponents for arts-based research, Barone and Eisner (2012) have explored the interchange between the made text, the context of its rendering, and the reader's interpretation. They maintain the legitimacy of fiction-based social research is "not merely in the diffuse sense that all human artifacts are 'fashioned,'" but also in a sense that it "disrupt[s] the commonplace and suggest[s] new worlds" (p. 120). In this same vein, Patricia Leavy (2013) argues that it is reduc-

tionist to draw stark lines between these genres because "[f]iction writers and qualitative researchers both seek to build believable representations of existing of possible worlds … and to truthfully or authentically portray human experience" (p. 21). In both Barone and Eisner's and Leavy's estimation, what is considered factual research and fictional narrative is arbitrary in the face of context and impact. Leavy outlines the uniquely impactful characteristics of fiction-based research as "portraying the complexity of lived experience," "promoting empathy and reflection," and "disrupting dominant ideologies or stereotypes" (p. 53). By virtue of their capacity to simultaneously "represent[], contest[], and invert[]" reality (Foucault, 1967/1984, para, 5), fiction-based representations of research data gesture toward Other spaces and Other narratives of knowledge that readers might not otherwise conceptualize.

Chapman (2005) has asked, "What's a point of research and theory, if only six other people in the world get it?" (p. 261). This is a pivotal question for educational researchers seeking relevance and reverberance inside, but most crucially, outside academic circles. As educational researchers we industriously gather up our participants' stories, we cart them away from the field, and finally we craft highly speculative academic texts that are all but indecipherable to anyone outside academic circles.[24] I argue that a more fitting representation of the Other requires an "incredulity to metanarratives" that hold to prescribed representational methods that are by nature exclusionary and elitist (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. xxiv). Rather than bringing her stories back to the six other people in academia, I argue that researchers employing postmodern lenses should aspire to representation that is accessible to the Other who is the subject of their research. In this manner fiction-based educational research is one method by which a researcher might

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[24] Inaccessibility of my narrative to common readers is of particular concern to me given the fact that this study will employ a complex theoretical framework.

gesture toward inclusivity, because "fictional narratives are incomplete and leave space for the readers' interpretations and imagination" (Leavy 2013, p. 49). Fictionalized educational research also allows for understandings that might vastly differ from those in the cadre of academia. Barone and Eisner (2012) have said that

> uncertainty lives within the 'gaps' in this experimental, postmodern narrative/arts based text. The presence of these 'gaps' signal a refusal of literality (or "closed meaning") that in turn nurtures a kind of productive ambiguity. And this ambiguity suggests a particular pragmatic purpose for which the text may be used. That purpose, insists the author, is a heuristic one: to stimulate reflection and conversation regarding the central educational issue of quality in teaching. (p. 118)

By decentering conventional scholarly accounting and representing research data in the form of a readable, engaging, and resonant story, the Other might be enticed to join the discourse.

3.9.2   *Postmodernity and representation*

I turn now from methodological to philosophical texts that are pertinent to my defense of literary or fiction-based representation. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984) christens his notion of new knowledge *paralogy*, or the "invention of new rules of the game," (p. 80). In light of the unpresentable nature of the postmodern experience— characterized by the limits of our capacity to experience all that we are able to imagine—Lyotard maintains the modern reaction to this deficit is to yearn for sublime presence, and to put forth representational forms (artistic or otherwise) that reverberate with nostalgia for presence. Conversely, he argues, the postmodern condition is one in which the nostalgia is dispensed with and old rules and categories have no place. Lyotard situates the postmodern artist or writer as "search[ing] for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger

sense of the unpresentable" (p. 81). In a social science context, I liken the unpresentable to the Other (Silverman, 2002). As informed by positivistic tenets, social science is confident in its ability to discover a firm and fixed presentation of the Other. Constructivist designs are less assured of their footing, but still nostalgically aspire toward joint participant/researcher representations. Postmodern and poststructural configurations decry the notion that the Other is truly conceivable and presentable. Visweswaran (1994) has argued that when feminist ethnographers present the Other, they must necessarily do so in a matter that calls into question the plausibility of representation and puts forth a critique of "the politics of representation itself" (p. 32). Challenging unproblematized notions of the Other is also crucial because, as Trinh T. Minh-ha (1997) argues, "a concept of the Other is almost unavoidably either opposed to the self or submitted to the self's dominance. It is always condemned to remain its shadow while attempting at being its equal" (p. 415). However earnest she may be, any researcher can only be sure of having told her own story and exposed her own experience with any given participant. Following Lyotard, I believe that the postmodern social scientist must reject the impulse to "supply reality" and instead create work that has the "characters of an event"—a story (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 81). This refusal to succumb to nostalgia and be "witness to the unpresentable" is its own reward in the postmodern era (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 82).

In Deleuze's (1968/1994) *Difference and Repetition*, he takes up the notion of the univocal, a seemingly contradictory concept which holds that all difference, while still different, is equivalent. He says "equal being is immediately present in everything without mediation or intermediary, even though things reside unequally in this equal being" (p. 37). Deleuze describes this concept as "resound[ingly] joyful" since it is a reaffirmation of life that neither looks nostalgically toward the past or longingly toward a utopian future, but rather resolutely wrestles with a

present that, while repeated, is always new and always different (p. 37). Deleuze (1968/1994) uses the example of ostensible variations on the same story and says, "When two divergent stories unfold simultaneously, it is impossible to privilege one over the other" (p. 125). Fiction-based research offers a method for social scientists to divulge "divergent stories" that stand in stark relief to those typically told in academia, and thus reveal the habitually concealed "intense world of differences" (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 57).

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notions of reproducing versus following in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* also pertain to my representational approach. They describe these as two dissimilar approaches to scientific knowledge: *reproducing* and *following*. *Reproducing* practice (associated with striated space) is aligned with "royal science['s]" objective principles of replication and generation, which are equated to "watching the flow from a bank" (p. 372). In contrast, the *following* [italics added] approach to scientific process (associated with smooth, ambulatory, or nomad space) seeks out "singularities of matter" which they equate to "be[ing] carried away by a vertical flow" (p. 372). While neither approach is superior, each approach produces different types of knowledge. The key difference for my purposes is that from a reproductive stance "one is constantly reterritorializing around a point of view, on a domain, according to a set of constant relations; but with the ambulant model, the process of deterritorialization constitutes and extends the territory itself" (p. 372). As an ethnographer in search of singularities and new territories of knowledge, I argue that the *following* approach to scientific discovery is the approach most in keeping with my research objectives.

3.9.3   *Methods for producing different knowledge narratives*

Moving now from philosophical ruminations to practice, how one alludes to the unpresentable is a subject that Charles Soukup (2012) tackles in his exploration of "hyper-mediated

postmodern spaces" (p. 228). Given the postmodern experience of always being tuned in, online, connected and communicating, where, he asks, does one culture, community, or space end and another begin? He questions the role of the postmodern ethnographer given the fragmentation of bounded cultural systems or communities. He argues for an understanding of postmodern culture based on the notion of "spaces *between* [italics in original] bounded cultures and cultural identities—spaces of hybridity" (p. 232). Rather than placing emphasis on circumscribed sites or individuals, Soukup believes that the postmodern ethnographer must "tie together the diverse, fragmented, and disparate threads of everyday life into something resembling coherent and meaningful narratives" (p. 235). And yet, while these narratives might superficially seem uncomplicated and coherent, post ethnographers' tellings underscore the indeterminacy of tales told by continually calling attention to the artifice of their construction. In this manner postmodern researchers are able to create compelling and cohesive tales while simultaneously exposing these narratives as contrived.

In recognition of the challenges faced by the postmodern ethnographer, Soukup proposes a list of five principles,[25] the most noteworthy of which, for my purposes, is his notion of "representing the postmodern in writing culture" (p. 245). He advocates a methodological approach to representation that aligns with the subject of one's study. Soukup argues, "To reconfigure postmodern, hyper-mediated culture into a linear written text would be a gross misrepresentation of the cultural practices" (p. 245). The linear academic texts presuppose unity, certainty, and closure, while the postmodern cultural context is fractured, fragmented, and interconnected. Allegory in a postmodern context is ambiguous, uncertain, and indeterminate (Madsen, 1991, p. 6).

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[25] (1) embrace the emergent, fleeting moment; (2) think dialectically about culture; (3) represent the postmodern in "writing" culture; (4) conceptualize ethnography as partial, subjective, and self-reflexive; and (5) embrace the semiotic tradition

Postmodern allegory collapses distinctions between individual consciousness and culture, thereby calling into question the cultural discourses that "authorize certain configurations of power" in narratives writ large. I contend that allegory or fiction-based representation is one manner in which the postmodern ethnographer can represent postmodern culture in writing.

Another attempt to disrupt the "naturalized discourses" of academic representation is offered by Kate McCoy (2000), who exhibits her data in the form of poetry (p. 237). She, like Soukup (2012), sees our technologically mediated experiences in postmodern culture as fragmented, confounding, and noisy. McCoy argues that the "emotion, urgency, rationality, and commodification[,]" which are hallmarks of postmodernity, call for something other than an "artificial" and "linear" representational approach (p. 249). Staunchly resisting the urge to silence this "white noise" of postmodern culture, McCoy's poems retain the noise and as such represent a more nuanced view of the data. Most crucially, McCoy argues, "Pedagogical attention to issues of representation and intelligibility" can potentially disrupt hegemonic discourses and allow for the inclusion of participant interpretations (p. 252). In the words of Cervantes' (1605/1999) famous protagonist Don Quijote: "We have to wed these fantastic fictions to an understanding of those who read them; we have to write them so that impossibilities become possible, and great things become comprehensible, so spirits are enraptured—astonished—dazed—elated" (p. 326).

3.9.4 *High-quality representational aesthetics*

One important consideration for researchers who employ non-conventional, arts-based representational stratagems is the quality of their compositions. In the absence of a "tough critical community" to validate good over mediocre art it becomes imperative for arts-based research practitioners to be forthright about their commitment both to social inquiry, as well as to aesthetics of their work (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 11). To that end I offer here a brief defense of my

aesthetic approach to narrative inquiry. I was an avid reader throughout my childhood and often read texts forbidden by ultra-religious parents for whom reading anything other than the Bible or missionary editorials was absurd. I read to escape, to find myself, to learn, and to be in the world more completely. I was a writer since before I would have even thought to position myself occupationally. I wrote to transform the habitually cruel, complex, and chaotic environs of my rearing into something personally meaningful. Reading still provides me the succor and sustenance that it once did, and writing still offers me a way of making sense of the world. The master's degree I received in literature gave me the foundations from which to build my own art within the "domain" of fiction writing (Piirto, 2002, p. 432). It was as a part of this scholarship that I was introduced to postmodern literature which would forever alter the lens through which I viewed the world, but would also have stylistic influences on my writing. My master's thesis (Le Blanc, 2002) included an analysis of three texts, one of which was the critically acclaimed *The Crying of Lot 49* by the prominent postmodern author Thomas Pynchon (1966). The choices which led to my grounding this study in a postmodern theoretical perspective, in addition to my analytical and representational choices, have evolved from careful deliberation and over 16 years of scholarship. My fiction-based educational undertaking is a means of employing my artistic sensibilities "as an alternative means of demonstrating knowledge" (Piirto, 2002, p. 444).

As it pertains to the use of arts-based research of poetic nature, Prendergast (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013) maintains that a researcher must "locate his or her work in and among the ongoing methodological body of literature that is poetics inquiry" (p. 206). As my chosen form is fiction-based inquiry, I situate my research within a tradition of literary anthropological experimentation that dates back to the early 20th century (Visweswaran, 1994). Fiction is a natural fit for social science research since "ethnography, like fiction, constructs existing or possible

worlds" that are "incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points" (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 1). Contemporary research of a fictive nature can be traced to the "literary turn," which evolved into the Arts Based Research (ABR) movement, which continues to flourish (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. xi). There is no shortage of methodological explorations which situate narrative inquiry as one among the many ways that social scientists can make meaning (Bamberg, 2007; Banks & Banks, 1998; Chase, 2011; Clandinin, 2007; Denzin, 1997, Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Kiesinger, 1998; Krizek, 1998; Leavy, 2013; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 2002; Richardson, 1997; Riessman, 2008; Tierney, 1997). My readings of these and other such texts gave me the methodological foundation from which I undertook my research. My representational endeavor reflects my intent to produce different knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997), to activate differences (Deleuze, 1968/1994; Lyotard, 1979/1984), to strive toward inclusivity (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2013), to trouble my privileged authorial position (Minh-Ha, 1989; Visweswaran 1994), and to embrace the noise (McCoy, 2000) and hypermediated (Soukup, 2012) nature of the postmodern experience. In so doing, I hope to encourage my readers to participate in the construction of new knowledge. The fictionalized representations in my narrative were shaped by my use of literary tools toward the production of counter narratives. As others have done before me (see Harrison's (1995) discussion of the work of Zora Neal Hurston and Alice Walker), I attempted to blur the lines between ethnography and fiction through the use of literary devices. In describing the non-fictional world of my participants I used four literary tools that are characteristic of good fiction writing, including the use of: rich *description and detail* to fashion believable worlds; carefully crafted *language* & dialogue to communicate meanings; *specificity* to create emotional resonance; and *metaphors and similes* to make connections, disrupt stereotypes, & create subtext

(Leavy, 2013). These devices allowed me to weave a rich tale that allows readers to enter into my participants' lived experiences. Like Huston and Walker, I hoped to "tell complex stories about the social construction of gender, class, and race, the multiplicity of identity, and identity as a source of cultural and political struggles" (Leavy, 2013).

3.9.5   *Typography[26] and the narrative*

As other researchers have done before me (Chapman, 2005; Cixous, 1997; Evans, 2000; Kaufmann, 2004; Kaufmann, 2007; Rath, 2001), I use different fonts to denote the various discourses that constitute my narrative and to undermine the dominance of a single voice or solitary story. Doing so is not meant as a paternalistic attempt at "giving voice" to my participants (Minh-Ha, 1991; Minh-Ha, 1992; Visweswaran, 1995), but rather to underscore the notion that only through joining our voices can a story emerge. As Derrida (1987) has said, "What counts and is counted then, is what we do while speaking, what we do to each other, how we again touch each other by mixing our voices" (p. 56).

This use of different fonts in the narrative is particularly meaningful for the adapted multi-ticase methodological approach in that it allows the interconnected, fluid, and fragmented discourses to be read concurrently. Rather than representing the varied narratives in isolated linear texts, the varied fonts allow for the reader to meander through the different texts in a quasi-synchronous fashion. The amalgamated narrative, while potentially perplexing and unsettling, allows readers to replicate the analytic process and in so doing co-create their own meaningful "cognitive map" (Jameson, 1991/1999, p. 51). Reading the narrative in this manner allows one to see how the varied contextual elements (i.e., news blurbs and literary passages) and diverse par-

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[26] I use the terms font and typeface interchangeably in this section, but it should be noted that typefaces describe the general appearance of the characters included in the font.

ticipant experiences intersect and diverge. This disruption of sacrosanctity of the printed text creates a "layered account" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Rambo 2005; Ronai, 1992, 1995, 1996; Rath, 2001) that serves to underscore the notion that there is no single, definitive, and authentic narrative. As a character in Winterson's (1985) satirical *Boating for Beginners* says, "The vital thing is to have an alternative so that people will realize that there's no such thing as a true story" (p. 124).

My use of varied fonts also speaks to the fact that in a postmodern era replete with mediated provocations, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 9). That is to say, in this case, the typographical conduits by which discourses are disseminated merit scrutiny as meaningful in their ability to create social, cultural, and political change. The scrawled field notes and memoed internal dialogue that crafted and structured my narrative is represented in *Matrix II*.[27] This typeface family was first released in 1986 by Czechoslovakian-born designer Zuzana Licko, co-founder along with husband Rudy VanderLans of the iconoclastic digital type foundry Emigre (VanderLans, Licko, Gent, & Keedy, 1993). Inspired by the release of the Macintosh, Licko's aim was to design fonts that worked well with computers "for both pragmatic reasons and stylistic reasons" (Emigre, 2007, para. 4). She subsequently revised and adapted this font family over 22 years, a testament to her view of the unfinished nature of any work of art. I selected Licko's *Matrix II* because it (as with other fonts of hers) challenges readers to new engagements with text. Asked how she felt about people's discomfort with reading her audacious font designs, Licko replied that partiality toward known fonts such as Times New Roman "exist by habit," and that "[y]ou read best what you read most" (Emigre, 1990, para. 10). Similarly, I

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[27] The particular variation of Matrix typeface used in my text is *Matrix II Script OT Reg.*

challenge myself and my readers to break from the habit of seeing scholarly words as sacrosanct and to interrogate the text even to the point of discomfort.

The voices of my participants are depicted in Oakland,[28] a typeface also designed by Zuzana Licko but which predated *Matrix II* by one year and was an extension of her design work at the University of California, Berkeley (VanderLans, Licko, Gent, & Keedy, 1993). The low resolution typeface families that Licko designed around that time were deliberately pixilated to emulate the aesthetic of digital typography (Staples, 2000). I considered this font as appropriate to my participants' experiences in the digital sphere. As to the choice to use one font for both participants, this can be seen as an attempt to privilege the "collective story" over the "cultural story" (Richardson, 1990). Richardson has described the cultural story as "told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order" (p. 25). A collective story on the other hand "displays an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling the particular individual's story or by simply retelling the cultural story" (p. 25). Richardson argues that collective stories can be transformative in that they can gesture toward different discourses and new narratives.

The postmodern fiction and philosophical literature which influenced my writing style and world views are depicted in **Keedy Sans**.[29] This font was designed in 1989 by Jeffery Keedy and released in 1991 (VanderLans, Licko, Gent, & Keedy, 1993). As part of the design process, Keedy deliberately resisted the logical symmetry of modernist designs. He says of the typeface that "it is a very postmodern typeface in that it included 'high' and 'low' vernacular quotation, and it is self-consciously crude and anti-aesthetic in reaction to the slickness of

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[28] In 2001, the four Oakland fonts were incorporated into the Lo-Res family. The current name of the font used here is LoRes 9 PlusOT Regular.

[29] The particular variation of Keedy Sans typeface used in my text is **Keedy Sans OT Regular**.

Modernism" (Keedy, 1998, para. 15). Keedy's self-conscious and systematic underscoring of his typeface's status as an artifact renders it ideally suited for the postmodern discourses represented in my text.

In keeping with the postmodern impetus to mingle high, low, and pop culture, the ever-present barrage of news media pertaining to gaming culture is also represented by **Keedy Sans** but is displayed within a text box as a differentiator. Powerful sociopolitical discourses in the media influence how game culture is perceived and perceives itself. Ubiquitous access to TVs, satellite radios, PCs, tablets, hand-held devices, and other digital technologies makes it nearly impossible to fend off the media-saturated onslaught in postmodern spaces (Soukup, 2012).

The textual representation that follows is an active construct and is comprised of multiple, blended, fragmentary, and evolving voices. The text format of this article required me to replicate a staging of the hypertext narrative by means of layered voices, different fonts, and juxtapositions. The intent is for readers to analyse and construct the narrative in ways that are meaningful to them. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I believe that the accounts that constitute any narrative are not reproductions of the world but rather constructions of new fields. Narratives are assemblages that work to form a rhizome with the world and other texts. Elsewhere, such compositions have been called rhizonarratives (Kaufmann, 2007). Speaking of intertextuality, Umberto Eco (1984) has famously said, "Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told" (p. 549). The following are excerpts from narratives that are comprised of my hypertextual exploration of data from interviews, observations, and other artifacts from two of this study's participants. Space constraints of this publication did not permit me to include all three. Pseudonyms are used throughout for people and places.

3.10 Strengths & Limitations of this Study

I did not investigate female gamers playing games that were designed as part of learning initiatives, which might be seen as a limitation of this study because it made it all but impossible to directly relate this particular study's outcomes to the field of instructional design and technology (IDT). IDT practitioners or educational scholars in search of defined practices to be operationalized, will, I fear, be disappointed. However, I view the leisure contexts within which this scholarship was conducted as being a strength of this study because it allowed me to obtain a situated understanding of three self-defined female gamers. Catherine Beavis and Claire Charles (2007) have argued that although this manner of research may not translate directly into curriculum initiatives, understanding "the complexities and situated ways" that gamers enact their gendered subjectivities in "leisure contexts" is crucial to ensuring that institutional practices foster gender equity (p. 704). This departure from traditional school settings allowed for an exploration of gender and gaming in contexts within which game culture thrived on its own accord. In a similar vein, Kim, Lee, Merrill, Spector, and van Merriënboer (2008), in their "Foundations for the Future" chapter of the *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology*, speak of the pressing need for the field to evolve to accommodate "complex and informal learning" in "dynamic settings" (p. 811). I am hopeful that lessons learned in gamers' leisure contexts will be pertinent to institutional practices. Following Gee (2007), my assumption is that "knowledge of a given domain can be a good precursor for learning another one, because mastering the meaning-making skills in, and taking on the identity associated with, the precursor domain facilitates learning in the other domain" (p. 39).

A potential limitation is inherent in my being a cultural outsider to the gaming community. Whether insider or outsider, the role of the researcher in any qualitative study should be scruti-

nized as it bears mightily upon the research outcomes. An outsider researcher may by challenged by lack of access, credibility concerns, and by their own preconceptions and misapprehensions (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insider researchers often face the challenges that include presumed understandings, predeterminations, emotions, and participants expectations (Blythe, Wikles, Jackson, & Halcomb, 2013). Sound arguments can be made on the merits and deficits of each manner of researcher role. However, regardless what the researcher's stance, she must acknowledge her positionality and its effect on the study participants and the subsequent interpretive enterprise. As an outsider researcher I practiced a great deal reflexivity, memoing frequently to examine my assumptions and biases. I was also forthright with my participants about my novice stance in the gaming community, which allowed freed me to ask "stupid" questions, and also allowed them to position themselves in the role of the expert. Furthermore, my lack of familiarity with the common discourse of gaming culture ensured that I paid attention to exchanges and actions that might have been deemed insignificant to an insider. Also, inasmuch as I did not have many experiences in game worlds, I shared other experiential affinities with my participants, not the least of which is female gender performativity. Following Dwyer and Buckle (2009), I choose not to reduce the insider-outsider debate to a sterile binary. I choose instead to "embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives" (p. 62).

Another limitation of this study is inherent in the nature of textual products. While I aspired to craft narratives that simulated my hypertextual exploration of the data in NVivo, a printed text can only grant readers limited hypertextual experiences. However, following Lather and Smithies (1997), I have tried to craft narratives that "put[] things in motion rather than capture[] them in some still-life" (p. xvi). I attempted to trouble the notion of the printed product by juxtaposing diverse discourses, layering meaning, shifting patterns, and telling stories through other

stories. In so doing, I hoped to expose my research narrative as a single performance of research data. It also should be noted that "[e]ven the most linear argumentation tends to surround itself with supplements: footnotes, introductions, marginalia, parentheses, instructions on how to read and interpret the argument and how to apply it to real life contexts" (Landow, 2008, sec. 4).

This is an admittedly small study which was never meant to meet the conventional standards of replicability or generalizability (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). This can be perceived as a limitation or a strength depending upon where one positions themselves within positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, or postmodern paradigms (Scheurich, 1997/2001). From my postmodernist theoretical perspective, I view the small sample size as a strength in that I was able to probe deeply into the lives of the three participants in this study. So much more can be said and learned from these three gamers than I have time and space to write within the context of this manuscript. Inferential statistics aside, understanding these gamers' cases as interconnected with all cases by means of their shared hypermediated context of the postmodern experience, makes their stories relevant in and of themselves.

Another strength of this study is that it offers a new perspective on multiple-case design. This study's adapted multicase design or post-multicase methodological approach (Le Blanc, 2015) challenges researchers to think beyond the "bounded system" (Fals Borda, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Smith, 1978; Stake, 2005). Lives are lived between screens and selves are saturated, and ultimately constituted, by so many competing discourses. To shut out the noise and the mess of postmodern experience in an attempt to isolate and examine confined cases and contexts seems to be a futile undertaking. True to its epistemological and theoretical underpinnings, this design rejects the notion of cases and contexts as bounded, static, and subject to unproblematic reproduction and representation in definitive academic texts. Instead, this design embraces the fluidi-

ty, fragmentation, and interconnectedness that is a hallmark of hypermediated postmodern experiences. Rather than placing emphasis on circumscribed sites or individuals, adapted multicase design attempts to weave the varied, shifting, disintegrated, incongruent, and interconnected strands of lived experiences into "narratives of becoming" (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 118). It is a methodology that challenges ethnographers to attune to the fragmented lapses, overlaps, and the hybridity that operates in the liminal spaces between defined cultures or identities. This design also lays bare the contradictions and complications that are the result of any attempt to encapsulate any Other's experience.

Adapted multicase methodology can undermine naturalized discourses by compelling any narrative to be read in relation to other narratives and thus underscoring the contrived nature of all authoritative accounts. While the dominant narratives or "cultural stories" (Richardson, 1990) on gender and gaming operate in discursive formations within which gender is constituted and constrained (Butler, 1993, p. xxv), attention to the "collective stories" (Richardson, 1990, p. 25) of marginalized gamers can potentially reveal new narratives. Employing this alternative methodological approach in conjunction with other deconstructive interpretive and representational strategies has the potential to disrupt the circumscribed and symmetrical modernist approaches to qualitative research. In the words of feminist philosopher of education Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2003),

> we are not spectators to Reality reporting "it"; we are part of this world, this universe, affecting 'it' as we experience 'it.' To describe ourselves as separate from each other and our world around us is really to miss all the ways we are connected and related. (p. 76)

Embracing our entanglement can potentially reveal the generative and meaningful nature of our engagement with each other in the postmodern era.

This study is also strong in that it employed a new tripartite theoretical framework. I posit this conceptual framework as well suited to address the challenges of ethnographic exploration in light of the hyper-mediated, fragmented, and fused sociocultural climate of the era. This conceptual framework is also particularly useful in the exploration of gender related issues. While conventional gender studies frequently employ reductionists binary interpretations, this framework allows for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of gender identity. This study is also strong in that it explored a new deconstructive approach to using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) toward the construction of a "layered account" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Rambo 2005; Ronai, 1992, 1995, 1996; Rath, 2001) that dramatized the contrived nature of all knowledge narratives. Finally, this study is compelling in that it employed new representational strategies aimed at problematizing privileged telling and readings and gesturing to other stories, and toward the voices of the marginalized tellers.

4   NARRATIVE FINDINGS

I'm producing too many stories at once because what I want is for you to feel, around the story, a saturation of other stories that I could tell and maybe will tell or who knows may already have told on some other occasion, a space full of stories that perhaps is simply my lifetime, where you can move in all directions, as in space, always finding stories that cannot be told until other stories are told first, and so, setting out from any moment or place, you encounter always the same density of material to be told. In fact, looking in perspective at everything I am leaving out of the main narration, I see something like a forest that extends in all directions and is so thick that it doesn't allow light to pass: a material, in other words, much richer than what I have chosen to put in the foreground this time, so it is not impossible that the person who follows my story may feel himself a bit cheated, seeing that the stream is dispersed into so many trickles, and that of the essential events only the last echoes and reverberations arrive at him; but it is not impossible that this is the very effect I aimed at when I started narrating, or let's say it's a trick of the narrative art that I am trying to employ, a rule of discretion that consists in maintaining my position slightly below the narrative possibilities at my disposal.

<div align="right">

– Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler*, 1981

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Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry. When we consider a book, we mustn't ask ourselves what it says but what it means.

<div align="right">

– Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1984

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It's only a story, you say. So it is, and the rest of life with it–creation story, love story, horror, crime, the strange story of you and I. . . . I can change the story. I am the story. Begin.

<div align="right">

– Jeanette Winterson, *The PowerBook*, 2000

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What follows is a metafictional[30] dramatization of research narratives meant to problematize my privileged telling of participants' stories. The textualized identities in this manuscript unescapably preclude other accounts. My earnest endeavor to know and share what it "means" to Amanda, Lana, and Lily to identify as female gamers can only ever be a partial and interested mobilization of my authorial power. This scholarly endeavor was never about discovering external certainties, but rather about exploring the discursive practices at play in the liminal intervals

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[30] Metafiction is "fiction in which the author self-consciously alludes to the artificiality or literariness of a work by parodying or departing from novelistic conventions (esp. naturalism) and narrative techniques; a fictional work in this genre or style" (OED.com).

between defined states. Offered here is one staging of data explored using a post-multicase methodological approach (Le Blanc, 2015). Lorraine Code (2006) has said of narrative identities that they "are as much about imaginers and listeners as about narrators, about condition of imaginative uptake and response, without which they could not escape the monologic mold of the cognition" (p. 235).

Readers may note that there is a lack of seamlessness between the main narrative and varied media and literary discourses surrounding the text. To a large extent this disjointedness can be attributed to my hypertextual meaning-making in NVivo. In NVivo, I explored the news blurbs and postmodern and literary and epistemological texts alongside the artifacts that I collected from the participants. In crafting the particular narrative in this chapter, I watched and read participant data alongside various undocked widows with news articles and postmodern texts in them. These readings influenced the placement of the boxes and quotes within the narrative. While I acknowledge that the narrative is ultimately my voice, I attempted to deconstruct my authorial power by juxtaposing these various quotations and blurbs where I found them in the messy hypertextual environment of NVivo. The images in this chapter were taken during the course of in-person and online observations of gameplay. In some cases, I used software to illustrate or pixilate the images to protect the privacy of this study's participants.

4.1   The Gamers

The following are textual portraits of the three self-identified gamers in this study. I caution readers against uncritically accepting my narrative as truth. Astute readers of any text should, I believe, problematize the modes of intelligibility that constituted particular portrayals. Judicious readers of postmodern texts have an responsibility to "interrogate texts for what they

fail to say, but cannot fully cover up … to reassert the existence of a plurality of voices, values and perspectives, in the face of universalizing tendencies of the dominant culture" (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 53).

4.1.1   Amanda

Amanda is a 27-year-old African American cisgender[31] female who self-identifies as a female gamer. She picked up my flier at a local comic book store and contacted me to express her interest in participating in my study. She is a single mother of three young girls (ages 8, 7, and 3 months) and she lives south of the city in a small apartment with her children, her mother, and her boyfriend. She has never been to college. At the time of this research she had no vehicle and used the public transit system to get around town. She works as a game advisor at a major video game, consumer electronics, and wireless services retailer, as a telesales rep at a multinational mass media and cable company, and she also sells health insurance and does tax preparation on a part-time basis.

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[31] Cisgender is a term designating someone whose sense of personal identity corresponds to the sex and gender assigned to him or her at birth; of or relating to such persons. Contrasted with transgender (OED).com.
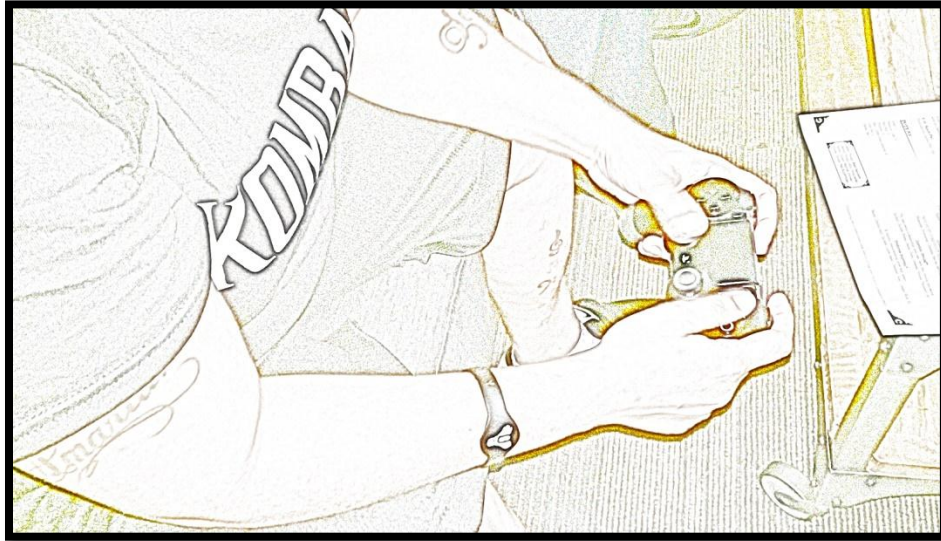
Figure 12: Amanda gaming.

We first meet at a coffee shop of her choosing near one of her jobs. She is around 5-foot-2, slightly stocky, and wears her work uniform of khakis and a collared shirt with a logo on it. She has medium-length black hair pulled into a neat bun behind her head and wears no makeup, which makes her look younger than her 27 years. She has almond-colored skin, delicate brows, wide-set dark brown eyes, a button nose, and full lips. Her voice is low and there is somberness in her bearing, but when she smiles it lights up the room. Her social media features pictures of friends, selfies, lots of pictures and videos of her children, as well as pictures of video game posters and gear. She proudly tells me that she is a "true" gamer because, except for sports games, she plays any and every type of game she can get her hands on. She admits to having bought games before paying bills and, recounting how much she spent on games over the year, laughingly tells me "It's terrible! You should probably pray for me." She shows me pictures of her massive collection of games with a curious mixture of pride and shame. However, she says that gaming and being a part of game culture is something

she needs. "It makes me happy," she says. "I do a lot for my kids, I do a lot for my mom, I do a lot for my employers, so gaming is my way of doing for me."

4.1.2 Lana

Lana is a 27-year-old European American cisgender female who self-identifies as a female gamer. She is a full-time chiropractic doctoral candidate at a prestigious private university in a large suburb of a southern urban metropolis. She picked up my flier at an independent coffee shop and emailed me to express her interest in participating in this research study. She is unmarried, has no children, and lives on campus.

Figure 13: Lana gaming.

We first meet at a coffee shop near her university. I see her steer her small red car into a space up front before dashing to the door. She is a little late so she bounds in, slightly out of breath, smiling and apologetic. She has pale, almost translucent skin and has long curly red hair that reaches to her elbows. She has neatly shaped brows, and piercingly blue almond shaped eyes, a Roman nose, a thin upper lip and a full lower lip.

A light dusting of foundation covers a few skin blemishes on her forehead and chin. Lana's social media showcases her passion for serving others—featuring her and friends at various volunteer functions. She is thoughtful, inquisitive, and defines herself as spiritual and as an existentialist.

Lana prefers console games to PC games and refers to herself as a binge gamer because she often goes months without gaming, but upon starting a game session she plays nonstop until she is able to beat all the challenges and conquer the game. To Lana, being a female gamer means being capable of "hold[ing] my own in discussing games with men." She prides herself on understanding and contributing to game talk that her female counterparts don't comprehend. She plays with her boyfriend, also a chiropractic doctoral student. While she defines being a gamer by means of her relationship to male gamers, Lana is an avowed feminist (she mentions this eight times during our first meeting) and as such is disturbed by the misogynistic language, sexist imagery, and the limited character options for female players in the games she plays. Although Lana understands this to be the contemporary reality, she hopes for a future in which her future daughter doesn't have to choose between "pink princess Barbie shit" or hypermasculinzed games, but instead can choose games "with more gender neutrality, less violence, and more intellectual stimulation."

4.1.3   Lily

Lily is a 36-year-old European American cisgender female who self-identifies as a female gamer. She picked up my flier at an organic food supermarket and emailed me to express her interest in participating in this research. She is a doting mother of a 15-year-old son with Asperger's syndrome. Lily, her son, and former husband relocated from her

northeastern home state over 13 years ago, and she now lives in a small house in a large suburb north of the city with her son and her on-again-off-again partner. She attended a little over a year of college back in her home state before dropping out to have her son. She was a customer service representative at a small software company for over nine years, but was laid off and is currently unemployed and seeking work. She is a secretary for the Parent Teacher Student Association at her son's school and is also involved in her son's Boy Scout troop. Lily's household only had one car at the time of this research so we first meet at a local coffee shop chain that Lily is able to walk to from home. Lily has shoulder-length straight brown hair, green eyes, an aquiline nose, and thin lips that are quick to form a smile. She wears off-brand high-waisted jeans, a purple sleeveless top, and carries a large brown faux leather bag.

Figure 14: Lily gaming.

Lily is a PC gamer who considers herself to be more mature then most people she games with. She brings what she calls a "lazy Buddhist mentality to the gaming,"

and she is well aware of there being more important things in life than gaming. But she relishes her gameplay for the friendships she has made despite being miles apart from family and friends for the intellectual simulation it provides, as well as for the escape it provides from real-world concerns. She tells me:

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I think when I first started playing that Pikmin [Nintendo EAD, 2001]
was when I had had my son and I felt sort of powerless in that
universe. I mean, there were still challenges in the game, but all
the choices were completely me and the characters would always
listen to what I told them to do. When you have a screaming, hun-
gry child in the middle of the night you don't have choice or con-
trol.
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While she might normally only game a couple hours a day, her current lack of work allows her to game four or more hours on an average day. She looks for work in the mornings and then plays video games in the early afternoons before her son gets home from school and needs the computer for homework. She also frequently plays games in the evenings, after her son has gone to bed.

4.2   RL[32] Game Spaces

Maces and Mead is a gamebar[33] nested in a corner of a sprawling suburban shopping complex on the outskirts of a southern urban metropolis. The establishment shares the strip with an amalgam of enterprises that one would expect to find in a predominantly White suburb that consistently boasts household incomes and home values above state averages. Some of these businesses ventures include a children's gymnasium, a comic book shop, a "gently used" clothing and toy shop, a hair salon, a Hospitality

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[32] An acronym that stands for Real Life and it is commonly used by gamers and other groups of people who spend significant online time together.

[33] A for-profit business similar to a bar that serves alcohol and pub food, while also offering a variety of computer and console games which patrons pay to use by the hour.

> In terms of video game characters: The white male is always the default, and anything else, it's like, you have to work for it. (Henn & Jiang, 2015).
>
> — *The New York Times, November 29, 2013*

& Tourism Welcome Center, a retailer of discounted upscale merchandise, the ubiquitous Mexican and Asian eateries, a Caribbean café and lounge, a neighborhood bakery, a drive-up ATM, the see-and-be-seen brunch spot, and several empty suites.

Maces & Mead's doors and windows are covered with darkening vinyl roller shades giving the place a clandestine feel. To the right of the entrance, a fence encloses a small smoking space with a few metal table-and-chair sets. Just through the doors, past a brick wall, sits a greeter's booth with two embossed metal panels on the front. Three cheerful greeters with vividly dyed hair coloring, various pierced body parts, and a miscellany of tattoos usher patrons into the space. The expansive 9,900 square feet that greets patrons is a gaming nirvana. This is not the cozy and deliberately kitschy comfort that one would find in the average gaming bar, this is geek chic.

Directly to the right of the greeter's booth stands a multiple arcade machine emulator. Past the arcade is a black granite bar overhung with Edison style incandescent pendant bulbs in vintage metal casings. Fifteen high-top bar stools stand facing glass shelves lined with wide array of spirits behind which mirrors give the illusion of many double bottles. A red brick wall between the glass shelves sets off a gleaming chrome pipe onto which 16 beer taps are affixed. A generous selection of tap, cask, craft and bottled artisanal beers supplement specialty cocktails, a generous wine list, and a menu that is a cut above traditional pub grub are all on offer.

Figure 15: Maces and Mead.

The darkly lit space has a corrugated metal roof with exposed metal trusses that support HVAC ducts, all of which are painted black. Below, false ceilings divide the space into five main areas: a dining area to the left of the bar with asymmetrically swag pendant lights, a grand central space with three octagonal PC gaming towers, and two console gaming nooks to the right and left of the PC gaming space. **The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost (Pynchon, 1965/1986, pp. 105).** At the far end of the room, beyond the main PC gaming space, is a counter at which gamers can rent gameplay time and gaming merchandise. Controllers, stacks of board games, and other gaming paraphernalia line the shelves behind two registers. Framed videogame and TV-themed posters are everywhere (Vintage Hulk, Capitan America, Iron Man, Spider-Man, Walking Dead & and Dr. Who). The entrance to the restrooms is crafted to resemble the TARDIS (Time And Relative Dimension In Space), a police box which is actually a sentient time machine in the 1960s BBC sci-fi TV show Dr. Who. The space also boasts a board gaming

area, cordoned off by four frosted glass panes that are embossed with board game playing pieces. Above the board game space the walls are adorned with a variety of vintage-style metal beer logos, and there is also a Steampunk[34] lounge behind the dining area.

It is 7:30 in the evening, and though Maces & Mead has only been open a couple of hours, a fair number of patrons are already settled in. Thirteen male gamers are seated at the first octagonal gaming stations, two groups of male gamers are in the console gaming areas, and there are five tables at which diners are already eating and drinking. I am here to meet Amanda for our first observation. **All this happened, more or less (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 1).** I sit at the bar watching a pink-haired pixie carefully drip ice water from a vintage replica absinthe fountain onto a perforated spoon that holds a cube of sugar set over a glass with absinthe in it. As the oils are released the air is perfumed with wormwood, fennel, and anise. To my right at the bar is a 30-something Asian man in business attire who tells me that he and his wife recently moved here for his job in finance. His laptop is open and he occasionally looks at the screen between sips from his draft beer glass, chatting with me, and watching Saint Seiya: Knights of the Zodiac[35] on the flat screen TV that is affixed to the wall above the bar. To my left a scraggly haired 40-something white man is intently watching a match of Magic: The Gathering[36].) **Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told (Eco, 1984, p. 549).** Servers and managers with hipster

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[34] Steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction which has a historical setting (esp. based on industrialized, 19th-century society) and characteristically features steam-powered machinery rather than electronic technology (OED.com).
[35] Saint Seiya is a Japanese manga anime TV series from the 1980s.
[36] Magic is a trading card game that is played by millions of players that inspires a cult following. There is an annual world championship that is televised. This appears to be last year's championship.

beards, beanies, Mohawks, multicolored tresses, ear gauges, flat caps, and sundry tattoos hustle around the space attending to patrons who look only slightly less bohemian.

As I look around the space I wonder what Amanda will think of this place. The space practically screams White privilege and here I have asked a Black, carless, overworked-but-underemployed mother of three to trek all this way from south of the city to a mecca of White leisure. I inwardly chastise myself for not having considered her certain discomfort. But since it's too late now, I resolve to try to make the best of it. From the minute

> Hillary Clinton delivered a speech heavy on tech and gender issues in Silicon Valley on Tuesday…. She commented on the falling percentage of women in computer science and noted that tech companies can be uncomfortable places for women. (Gibson, 2015).
>
> — *International Business Times, February 24, 2015*

she walks in with her boyfriend and two male friends that she typically games with, she is in heaven. She absolutely loves the place! She ooohhs and aaahhhs over the MAME machine[37], scopes out the PC gaming towers, and then wanders around the console gaming areas. "This is so cool!" she says multiple times. "I had no idea a place like this existed." I marvel at how wrong I was about her reaction. But then again, this is not the first time that I've made assumptions about the participants in this study that turned out to be completely wrong. The group goes over to the gaming counter at the far end of the space to choose a game to play off the menus of over 50 PC games and over 150 different console games. They decide to play Mortal Kombat X (NetherRealm Studios,

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[37] MAME is an acronym of Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator. It is an emulator application designed to recreate the hardware of arcade game systems in software on modern personal computers and other platforms.

2015), which was only released that day. Amanda tells me that she and her boyfriend

had stood in line for the midnight release[38], so they've only played it a few times today.

Amanda, her boyfriend, and one friend settle into a plush couch that is situated in

front of a 60-inch HDTV in one of the console gaming areas to the left of the central PC

gaming space. The other friend pulls up a chair to one side of the couch. I sit in a chair

to Amanda's right. In the stand below the TV that we all face, a variety of console types

> **Anita Sarkeensian, a feminist cultural critic who faced threats in the 'GamerGate' campaign said: Whether they [males] realize it or not, they're no longer special in that way. Everyone is playing games. (Wingfield, 2015).**
>
> **— The New York Times, October 14, 2014**

are available. Amanda and her group play Mortal Kombat on a PlayStation 4, taking turns so that two of the four are picking champions and pitting them against each other in bloody battles while the others watch. In the first match Amanda plays Reptile, a humanoid reptilian creature with scaly green clothing, against her boyfriend who plays

Jacqui Briggs, a professional kickboxer turned Special Forces fighter. Jacqui is a strong

and shapely African American woman with cornrows pulled bank into a neat pony tail.

She wears military camouflage under body armor with a Special Forces insignia on it.

She has a utility belt around her waist, and wears armored gloves that reach up to the

middle of her forearms.

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[38] A midnight release is when people gather at local game retailer at or around midnight for a video game release.

Figure 16: Jacqui Briggs vs. Reptile.

FiFA GM David Rutter on the introduction of 12 new female footballers: Finally my kids will stop going on at me, and nagging me about why they can't play with women players. My youngest is a fantastic soccer player and she loves it. It doesn't really compute [for them] that there wouldn't be women in the game (Blake, 2015).

— iNG Games, May 28, 2015

The battle is graphically violent and each character trades bloody assaults. Jacqui wins round one, but Reptile wins in the end, having spit acid that cleaves Jacqui's head into two pieces. "(laughing) sooo gross!!!" I ask Amanda what gender of characters she normally picks in this game and she says that she picks based on their abilities. "A lot of the females, their strength is weak but they move fast, so you could get a lot of punches but it will do little damage, but because you're doing so many it'll amount to the same amount as like a male hit."

Not in her work attire this time, Amanda wears a black shirt that says Kombat, black shorts, and black tennis shoes, with white socks peeking out of the tops. I notice that her two oldest daughters' names are tattooed in flowery script on her left and right

arms. The baby's name, I assume, will eventually be added to the collection. On her left calf several small musical notes are embossed. Amanda explains different characters, fighting styles, and game strategy to me all while rapidly moving both thumbs around the controller to maneuver her character in battle. Amanda's boyfriend hands her the cellphone and she takes a call from her middle daughter who wants to play outside. She tells her no, that she has to stay inside and mind her grandma. Amanda orders fries with three different kinds of sauces, and when they show up she chats animatedly about her daughters, work, and about the gamebar while munching on fries.

When Amanda's turn comes up again she picks D'Vorah, a creepy-looking hybrid human and insect. D'Vorah's yellow skin is more hide than skin, and she has four pincers jutting out from her back that she uses to stab and whip at her opponents. There are black markings on her head, her eyes are black and bulbous, there are scars on her cheeks, and sharp teeth poke out beneath jet black lips. D'Vorah wears a long sleeve black leather top that exposed her chitonous[39] midriff. A hood meets her top at her breast bone and is held in place by a green pendant. On her arms spikes poke through her long sleeved shirt and she wears gauntlets on her forearm a well as armored shin guards. Mortal Kombat X boasts some of the more gruesome fatalities gamers have ever seen and D'Vorah is not to be outdone. She shoots resin, strikes with her stinger, throws swarms of wasps, and uses her pincers to throw her opponents into midair.

> Game Developers Conference (GDC) panelist Rachel Quirico said: You just have to realize that the women you know who are interacting in this space are walking through a minefield and you guys are skipping through a daisy patch (Livingston, 2015).
>
> — PC Gamer, May 4, 2015

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[39] A shell or plate-like consistency that makes up the coat of insects (OED.com).

Lana also chooses to play D'Vorah in Swarm Queen fighting style opposite her boyfriend who plays Princess Kitana in Assassin fighting style.

Figure 17: D'Vorah vs. Princess Kitana.

Before round one begins each character taunts the other with canned quotes (Kitana: "Keep your distance D'Vorah!" *D'Vorah:* "I can hear you from here." *). Meanwhile, while Lana and her boyfriend confer on how to use the controllers and which map to choose. Round one begins. Both Lana and her boyfriend begin furiously moving their thumbs across the controllers.* "Hooo!" *They exclaim in unison. Neither of them has played this recently released game before so they both are struggling. Lana:* "Haaaahhooo! (laughing) I think what I'm just doing is just pushing the buttons and not letting it... uh... Are you holding the buttons down longer?" *During our first and second interviews Lana used the term "button-masher" in a pejorative sense to refer to female gamers who really didn't un-*

12 year-old-girl: if our character choices tell us these games aren't for us, eventually we'll put them down (Messer, 2015).

— *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2015

derstand what they were doing and so simply pushed a variety of keys until something happened. Boyfriend: "(laughing) See, but then, she figures out one move and then starts exploiting it. (laughing) That is what the term button-masher represents."

Lana's boyfriend wins round one, but after a while Lana nails the winning combination of buttons to mash to make D'Vorah skewer Kitana's brain and heart. They play two more rounds and then Lana wants to switch games. She says: "These games are like fun for a while, but it's the same thing all the time so I'd get bored with it. Not enough of a story. You just keep fighting over and over. Like I say, I wouldn't buy it. But it's fun to play in this setting." They switch to playing Dead Rising 3 (Capcom Vancouver, 2013). Dead Rising 3 is an open world[40] survival horror fighting video game set in a post-apocalyptic city in which there is a lone White male protagonist who used to be a mechanic, but is now a zombie fighter. As Nick moves through the game he collects supplies and weapons to complete series of missions, all while warding off a hordes of undead zombies. Lana plays in single-player mode while her boyfriend and I watch.

The game is quite realistic, and watching it I get sucked into the storyline. The undead groan loudly and grasp for Nick Ramos. Nick jumps on tops of cars and over obstacles while alternately using shotguns, crossbows, and other weapons to keep throngs of zombies at bay.

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[40] Open world video games have a non-linear structure and allow players to explore a virtual world without restrictions and gamers are free to choose how or when to approach various objectives.

Figure 18: Nick Ramos and zombies.

Nick Ramos: "Ugh, this is so messed up!" *Lana:* "Nooooooo. You're dead!" *Nick Ramos meets up with various characters along the way, rescues random strangers, and completes various objectives all while engaging in heated battles with throngs of undead. Lana:* "(laugh) This game is intense. I can't even, like, explore because there's just zombies everywhere." *Her boyfriend replies:* "Yeah, that's why I don't like these types of games. They're just nonstop intense." *I notice that Lana easily slips into referring to Nick Ramos using subjective or nominative pronouns:* "Ugh!! (laughing) What happened to my gun?!" "I've got a Katana sword now!" "Yeah, I am definitely gonna need to pick up these aviators." *To another character:* "Aren't you done yet, Rhonda?! Let's go!" *After about 30 minutes of play, Lana's boyfriend plays and Lana and I watch. Lana provides running commentary:* "Go around and see if you can push the wood chipper. Yeah, now you can chip some zombies. There's a zombie over there; see it if works. (laughing)." *We both find ourselves just as absorbed in the game as if*

we were playing. **They will misread facts, invent connections, will extrapolate reasons where none exist, but i told you, that is their business here (Didion, 1970, p. 4).**

Lily doesn't even look at the Console Gaming menu since she prefers PC games. Neither Mortal Kombat X nor Dead Rising 3 is her style of game. She chooses to play League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009) and she settles into the presently unoccupied octagon that is furthest from the entrance and bar. The other two octagons each have a handful of male players. League of Legends is a multiplayer online battle arena video game.[41] When Lily logs in she notices that four of her friends are online and so she IM chats through Skype to invite them to join a game with her. She remarks that their typical Skype call wouldn't be possible because of all the background noise. I Prevail's[42] metal cover of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" blares in the background and large elevated TV screens all over the room play the music video. One of Lily's friends declines because he is about to play an ARAM[43] game, and two are in other games, but one friend joins her. As they wait to be routed to the game Lily tries to settle in. She says that the headset, keyboard, and mouse

> **Comics have long been a mirror of American society. The ways women were introduced on the pages reflect how women were seen at the time. Women were either there to play damsel in distress or to lure men into sexual temptation (Abad-Santos, 2015).**
>
> **— Vox Media, February 6, 2015**

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[41] Players in League of Legends take on the role of a Summoner, a gifted spell caster who has the power to bring forth a champion to fight as his or her avatar in Valoran's Fields of Justice. Summoners control the champion in combat and also influence the outcome of the match through the use of spells, masteries (skill trees that grant bonus statistics and attributes) and runes (bonus statistics).

[42] A contemporary Rock Band.

[43] An acronym for All Random All Mid, a supported PvP game mode in League of Legends. Upon entering champion selection, ten summoners, five on each team, randomly summon a champion from their available pool of champions (owned and free play) to play.

are different from the ones she is used to playing with. The Champion Loading screen

appears. The Lineup is as follows:

Lily's Team Champions:

- **Zed** *(Classic skin[44])—a heavily armored ninja warrior, master of the Order of the Shadows, whose primary role[45] is Assassin, with a secondary role of Fighter.*
- **Blitzcrank** *(Classic skin)—a large lumbering steam automated techmaturgical construct golem, whose primary role is Tank and secondary role is Fighter. This is the character that Lily plays. She says that she's only played Blitzcrank in a ranked game once before but is trying to challenge herself to learn how to play him well.*
- **Draven** *(Classic skin)—an egomaniacal executioner who makes a spectacle of killing to enlarge his celebrity. His primary role is Marksman.*
- **Katarina** *(Classic skin)—a buxom, fiery red-headed, multi-knife wielding slayer with a killer instinct, who is also known as the sinister Blade. Her primary role is Assassin and secondary role is Mage. This character is played by Lily's friend who she chats with in Skype. He is a 17-year-old male.*
- **Trundle** *(Constable skin)—a hulking and devious troll king whose primary role is Fighter and secondary role is Tank.*

Opposing Champions:

- **Nidalee** *(French Maid skin)—a half-human, half-feline huntress whose primary role is Assassin and secondary role is Fighter. During my first interview with Lily she remarked about some game characters having ridiculously hyper-sexualized skins, and as an example she used Nidalee's French Maid Skin. She said:* "It makes her seem prissy and weak and she's really supposed to be fierce. And why don't they have suggestive skins for the big burley

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[44] A skin is an alternate appearance for a character in a video game.
[45] Players in League of Legends typically have primary and secondary roles that dictate the lanes they patrol in the game as well as the expected behaviors in the game.

male characters. Like French Maid Warwick or French Maid Urgot. (laughs)"

- **Taric** (Classic skin)—A valiant knight with a flowing brown mane and glowing eyes. Taric uses his bejeweled armor and weaponry to summon the magic from the earth in service of good. His primary role is Support and secondary role is Fighter.

- **Jax** (Classic skin)—a burly former mercenary for hire-turned-champion in the Fields of Justice. His primary role is Fighter and secondary role is Tank.

- **Ahri** (Foxfire skin)—a fox-turned-human beauty who, among other abilities, is capable of stealing the enemy's essence. Her primary role is Mage and secondary role is Assassin.

- **Lee Sin** (Dragon Fist skin)—a blind male monk, who is nevertheless a fearsome martial artists whose primary role is Fighter with a secondary role of Assassin.
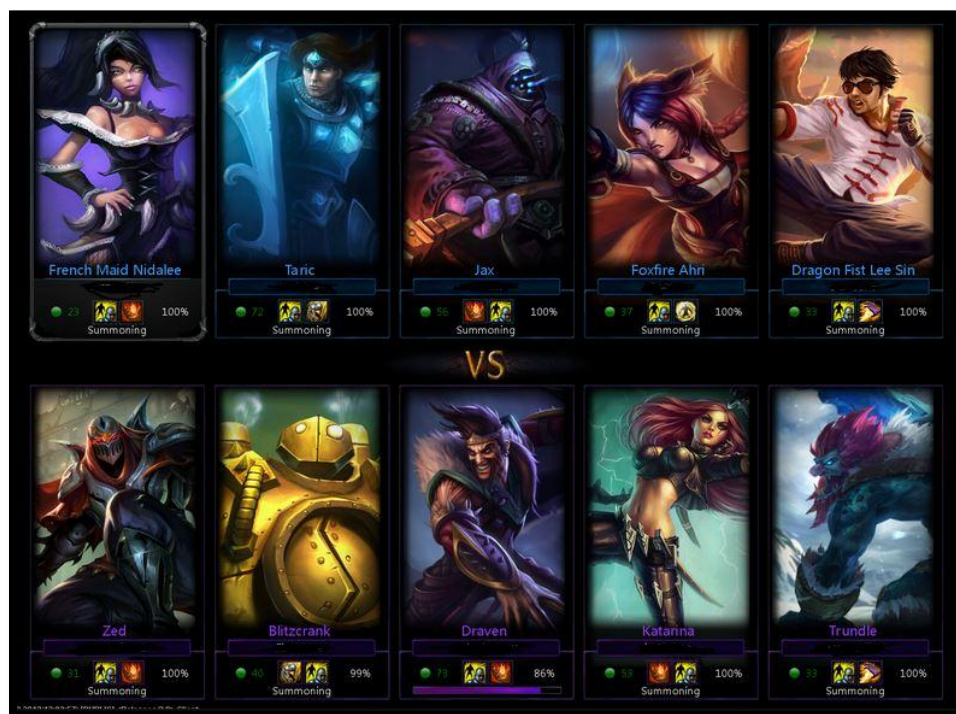
Figure 19: League of Legends lineup.

The characters appear so much more real at the selection and loading screens because on the field of battle (seen from above) the computer screen's resolution com-

presses the overall size of the champions, thus obscuring sharpness, shadows, and sub-tle textures. As soon as the game begins I quickly lose track of who is who and what's go-ing on. The characters just seem like so many ants running around on screen. Lily keeps me informed about the action on screen via her exclamations, groans, and by occasion-ally narrating the action on screen. My observations of streaming game sessions later would prove easier to follow for a non-player, because I was able to use a headset and thus was able to hear the game sounds, dialogue, more easily see game action and the player chat pop-up screen. Since the sessions were also recorded, I was able to pause the game and research player lingo or game action that confused me.

Figure 20: League of Legends battle scene.

As Lily plays, I can tell that she is definitely not as comfortable here as in her home gaming space. Lily accidentally hits the wrong keys. "Oh my gosh, this caps lock! My keys are closer together. This might go badly. We'll see. This is like the keyboard that the pros use, but they're all like big guys with

big fingers. " *She briefly takes her hand off the keyboard and spreads her fingers to*

showcase the difference. Continuing to play, Lily also remarks about the fact that she

typically games in slippers at home. Still, she plays on, occasionally explaining game

action to me. Lily: "Yeah I usually look at the mini-map in the corner here. I

can see the big waves of minions. So I would normally navigate to them

and take them out to get more gold. But right now, I am just supporting

my champions because the opposing team's Jax is really strong. " *Periodi-*

cally, she gasps and remarks in reaction to what happens in the game ("Oh, I

missed!" "Ooooohh! They just killed my Katarina. " "Yeah! I got him!"). *Lily*

furiously taps keys with her left hand with furrowed brows and pursed lips. She plays

on through some intense fighting, through a random power outage (she has to log back

in to the game), and ultimately her team is victorious. She tells me that although this

was interesting, gaming at home and streaming is more true to her actual experience.

She says that she will be streaming later that same night.

4.3   Virtual Game Spaces

Whatever it means to identify so completely with a video game character is some-

thing relatively hard for me to fathom. Lily describes it thusly: "It's not a link any-

more, it's me; I'm swinging the sword or shooting the gun. " *As I watch Lily*

play I attempt to distance myself from myself and **be** *fully in the game in this moment.*

In so doing, I make an imperfect but earnest attempt to let go of my own preconceptions

about what being a gamer meant and embrace an Other's understanding. In this game

Lily is playing Jinx in Firecracker skin. Jinx is a sprightly loose cannon and former Zaun

gang member, now semi-independent, whose primary role is Marksman. Jinx wears a

red short, skin-tight Chinese motif dress,

thigh-high socks and boots that reach almost

to her knees. She has fluorescent green high-

lighted bangs and the rest of her black hair is

tied back into two long ribbon-wrapped

braids that bounce behind her as she

runs. The computer game voice says, "Wel-

come to Summoner's Rift[46]." *Jinx wan-*

A recent multi-year study on gaming and sexism: both pushes against a certain model of cause and effect and exposes the limits of scientific study in a cultural debate. Even as it argues against gaming generally making people more sexist, it tells us nothing about, say, what gaming reflects about our society or how games influence how we think of women's bodies (Totilo, 2015). — Kotaku, April 17, 2015

ders around with Pow-Pow her mini gun and Fishbones her rocket launcher, occasional-

ly parroting canned phrases: "Bulleeeeeets!" "I really need a new gun. But

don't tell my other guns." "I'm crazy! Got a doctor's note." The computer

game voice says, "Minions have spawned."

I watch the action on screen and listen as dramatic music swells. Lily turns a

corner and encounters allies Morgana and Nidalee engaged in a heated battle against

Amumu. Without a moment's hesitation Jinx fires Fishbones, her rocket launcher, fol-

lowed by her flame chompers at Amumu. Morgana throws a Tormented Soul, but it is Ni-

dalee, the bestial huntress, who, having transformed into a fearsome cougar pounces

on Amumu and delivers the takedown blow. Computer game voice: "An enemy has

been slain!" Nidalee heads down the path in the direction that Jinx just came from.

Lily types "Drag!" to warn the player that there is a recently spawned dragon just

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[46] Summoner's Rift is the most commonly used battleground or Field of Justice in League of Legends. The setting is a magical forest with diverse wildlife that have been mutated by the forest's powerful magic.

around the corner. Player (Nidalee) types "ΘK." Player (Morgana) pings to indicate that she is on the way. The Dragon Monster rears up, wings spread wide.

Figure 21: League of Legends battling a dragon.

Jinx takes up her position at the opening of the enclosure in front of the dragon with her rocket launcher poised for battle. Nidalee, still in cougar form, has leapt over the wall and stands dangerously close to the dragon's swishing tail. Morgana meanwhile can be seen running around the walls of the enclosure toward the action. Jinx fires off a first shot and the dragon flaps his wings and spins around to face Nidalee. Jinx launches more rockets at the epic monster. Jinx: "Gotta die sometime!" Dragon and Lion roar at each other for a motionless moment before the dragon breathes a burst of fire. The burst blackens the wall but misses Nidalee, as she has pounced forward at lightning speed, and she claws and bites the dragon. The epic monster loses health but is still furiously flapping. The dragon breathes out another fire blast and it makes contact, but

Nidalee retaliates by hurling her javelin and following the javelin to again pounce on dragon. Jinx fires off more rocket blasts (Jinx: "You're my favorite waste of bullets." *) and Morgana rounds the corner and throws her Tormented Soul.* **In slow motion the game's violence became almost tender, a series of lovely assaults (DeLillo, 1972/1986, p. 98).** *Nidalee and the dragon, both low in health, face each other, exchanging blows. Jinx and Morgana fire from behind. Warwick runs past Morgana & Jinx and delivers a swift claw swipe to take down the dragon permanently. Jinx:* "Bye bye!" *The dragon slain, the allies disperse in different directions.*

I watch, listen to, and read the onscreen action, and in play-back mode I frequently pause to read up on characters, game action, and gamer lingo on the League of Legends Wiki). I also watch Lily on the small screen located to the lower left of a Twitch streaming screen. She is pretty intense when gaming, appearing to forget all about her "lazy Buddhist mentality." **The connections between one element of the story and another were not always obvious to the emperor; the objects could have various meanings: a quiver filled with arrows could indicate the approach of war, or abundance of game, or else an armorer's shop; an hourglass could mean time passing, or time past, or sand, or a place where hourglasses are made (Calvino, 1974, p. 38).**

There is so much going on as Amanda broadcasts her gameplay from her home. During any given moment Amanda is either intently focused on the game, giving instructions to her daughters who wander in and out of frame, cooing at her infant that lays on the bed beside her, conversing with her boyfriend or mom, playing with her purebred Husky puppy, or on her cell phone. The small computer-mediated window into Amanda's world reveals it to be chock-full of responsibilities, simple joys, worries, and

people. The cluttered space—which serves as a bedroom, office, and game room—has a homey feel and attests to the modest life that Amanda lives. There are two small desks, on top of which sit Amanda's PC on the left and her boyfriend's PC on the right. On the desk in front of both computers are varied artifacts of Amanda's life, including soda bottles, cups, game controllers, a disheveled-looking Barbie doll, a tissue box, and clothing, Two Japanese scrolls displaying anime characters hang on the wall centered above the two PCs. Shelves to the left of Amanda's PC are stacked high with a jumble of items (bills, pictures, game paraphernalia, etc.). Between the PCs, perched atop a plastic three-drawer cart that is filled with unfolded clothing, a prized collection of over 50 video games are neatly stacked. A black curtain serves as the door to the space and Christmas lights surround the opening.
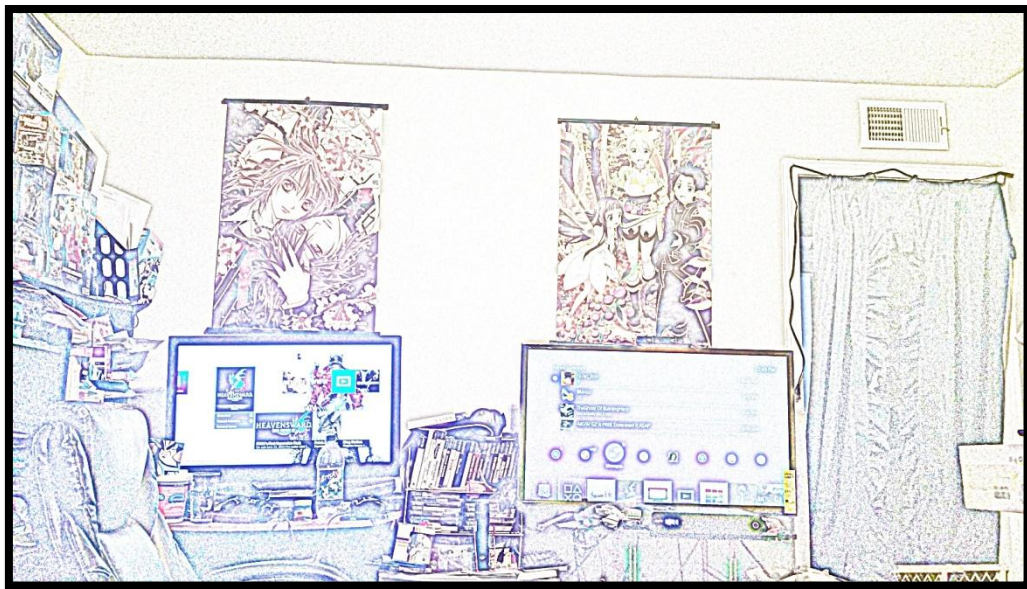
Figure 22: Amanda's home game space.

Directly across from the computers sits a queen-sized bed. While her boyfriend sits in a plush office chair to play video games, when Amanda plays she pulls her computer

away from the wall and she either sits or lays on the bed and manipulates the controller from that distance. Amanda's streaming broadcast showcases her gameplay, but also affords me with a partial view into her RL world. **All places communicate instantly with all other places, a sense of isolation is felt only during the trip between one place and the other, that is, when you are in no place (Calvino, 1981, p. 17).**

One particular evening Amanda plays Warframe[47] (Digital Extremes, 2013) on her PlayStation 4 with her boyfriend and the two friends who I have previously met at the gamebar. It is Friday evening and Amanda lies on her stomach with her headset on and her arms wrapped around a plaid pillow. She wears a black shirt and horizontally striped

> **The game developer said via his Twitch stream that Mortal Kombat X female characters will be more realistically proportioned (Makuch, 2015).**
>
> **— Game Spot, February 12, 2015**

black and red flannel pants. Her baby's white-socked feet can be seen vigorously kicking on the bed beside her. One of Amanda's friends says, "I see baby legs! That is so raw."[48] Eight people are watching Amanda's stream, including me. The gamers use microphones on their headsets to communicate with each other and the rest of us silently watch, voyeurs to the action on screen. Amanda is playing the character called Ember, a devastatingly dangerous offensive instrument. Ember uses her fire-harnessing abilities to annihilate enemy combatants.

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[47] Warframe is a cooperative third-person shooter video game in which players control members of the Tenno, a race of ancient warriors of the blade and gun, who have recently awoken after centuries of cryostasis to find themselves in combat with militarized humanoid clones known as the Grineer and several other powerful factions. Guided by Lotus (a mysterious female), the Tenno use advanced exo-armor, Warframes, to complete their missions (Warframe.com/Game/Story).

[48] In this context *raw* is an adjective meaning cool, excellent, or awesome.

Figure 23: Ember Prime in Warframe.

Her boyfriend plays Mag, who is a master of magnetic energy and uses her force to pull dislocate enemies, steal bullets, polarize enemy shields, and employ the metallic traces in her enemies' bodies toward pulverizing her enemies. Amanda and her fellow players have just completed the Stolen Dreams quest and are about to embark on the Archwing quest. They have already started this quest at another time, but are set to finish it now.

Amanda and her team drop out of ceiling vents into a significantly damaged vessel known as the Corpus Ship and are immediately besieged by Grineer fire. The Tenno must use their Archwing to navigate through the colossal ship passages and snug ventilation systems in a zero-gravity atmosphere. Mag and her team return fire. Amanda: "`Oh, I forgot to change my weapon back.`*" Lotus (the game guide) appears in a screen to the right of the player's screen to give the Tenno instructions. The Tenno race through the cramped corridors of the damaged ship, sporadically exchanging fire with enemy combatants. Their mission is to gather intelligence about another enemy*

battleship. Amanda's baby girl makes gurgling sounds and she leans over, off frame, and Amanda talks to her: "My baby talking. Yes you are! You are!" She turns back to the screen and says, "All right, let's go. Let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go!" From one of the gamer's microphone Chappelle's Show can be heard in the distance. In this particular Chappelle's Show scene cocaine dealer Tron Carter (played by Dave Chappelle) can be hear ex-claiming "I plead the FIF!" The gamer that has the show on bursts into laugher exclaiming "Dat nigga is crazy!" The group begins a discussion about Chappelle as the laugh track can be heard in the background. Ember blasts Grineer with her guns

> i don't think the core problem in gaming is angry misogynists threatening violence. i think Gamergate is just a symptom of a disease: a $90 billion global industry that was built by men for men (Wu, 2015).
>
> — *The Boston Globe*, March 4, 2015

before pounding her fist on the ground to unleash World on Fire, an explosive fire blast that pulverizes the enemy combatants in her path. A message appears on screen telling Ember to head to the extraction point to meet up with her teammates. Amanda's middle daughter appears with a picture she has drawn. Amanda: "Oh, that's a really pretty bunny! We'll put it on the fridge." She gives the smiling girl a peck on the cheek as her boyfriend wanders past the screen petting their new Husky puppy dog saying, "That's a good boy." At the extraction point the Tenno get instructions from Lotus to deploy Archwing,[49] allowing them to fly through space. Ember flies amongst the floating debris from the severely damaged Corpus vessel. Amanda: "Ohhhh yo! This is gangster (laughing)." Amanda's boyfriend can be heard talking in infant-

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[49] Mechanical wings that the Tenno can use to fly and engage in combat in three-dimensional space and also underwater.

directed speech to the baby. Amanda says, "I made it the extraction. I made it to the extraction."

More missions are completed, and more action takes place both on and off the many screens that are connected to Amanda's streaming broadcast. **[i]ntrusions into this world from another, a kiss of cosmic pool balls (Pynchon, 2005, p. 101).** A basketball game can be heard through one of the player's mics and the group gets into a discussion about the Golden State Warriors vs. New Orleans Pelicans game. All the while the battle rages throughout the solar system between the Tenno, guardians of good, and the malevolent Grineer armies. "Who just hit the damn life support?! No, you don't hit life support until they hit like 60%. Once they hit 60%, THEN you hit them. We could have went like a whole hour, but you prolly just kilt us about 20 minutes." But they all live to fight on. As they do so, they discuss Fetty Wap's Trap Queen[50], their various jobs, the food they want to eat, the weapons their characters are using and the next time they'll be able to play together. An ambulance can be heard in the distance. Amanda removes her glasses and vigorously rubs both eyes. Amanda addresses her oldest daughter, who is playing a pink hand-held video game on the bed behind her: "Sweetheart, your sister wants to go to sleep; can you please lay her on your chest and pat her butt?" Amanda yawns, stretches, and decides to shut down for the evening. The stream disconnects and I am back at my desk left to wonder what the rest of Amanda's evening looks like. **You don't need to know everything. There is no everything. The stores themselves make meaning. The continuous narrative of existence is a lie. There is no continuous**

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[50] A popular song hip hop song that came out early in 2015.

narrative, there are lit-up moments, and the rest is dark (Winterson, 2005, p. 132).

4.4 Metagame

When Lana critically reflected on how being a gamer influences her day-to-day experiences she used the phrase "Getting shit done." She explained that after having been successful in a game (say, "killing 10,000 monsters") she leaves the house feeling empowered and more capable of solving "real life" problems (see also McGonigal, 2006; McGonigal 2011). She says, "It's like 'What are you doing in the game?' I'm getting shit done, you know, like accomplishing quests and things like that. And there

> it's time to stop obsessively trying to find differences between men and women and to focus that energy on breaking down the cultural norms that keep girls out (O'Conner, 2015).
>
> — The Huffington Post, February 3, 2015

is crossover there to real life when I think like, 'What I am I doing with my life?' I'm getting shit done... studying, cleaning the house, doing my taxes. You know? It builds self-esteem in some kind of indirect way." Things outside you are projections of what's inside you, and what's inside you is a projection of what's outside. So when you step into the labyrinth outside you, at the same time you're stepping into the labyrinth inside (Murakami, 2005, p. 352).

Lily sees crossover from her in-game to out-of-game experiences in her propensity for "support mindedness" in both spaces. In video games, Lily's preferred role is that of support, a champion who has abilities that directly benefit and support teammates, such as the abilities to heal or wield a shield. In her roles at home and work she

similarly finds herself supporting and nurturing. In both situations she says that she likes to "strike the right balance between initiation and defense." Whereas "online Lily" might game with players ranging in age from 15 to 50, in her roles as a Boy Scout leader, as a mother, and in customer service, she encounters similarly diverse age groups, each posing different challenges and requiring her organizational and psychological support. Lily also believes that her "big picture philosophy on life" applies both to her in-and-out-of-game experiences. She tries to keep everything in perspective and not sweat the small stuff. **So it goes (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 2).**

Amanda tells me that her game playing temporarily transports her back to a less stressful, uncomplicated space in her life. She says, "It's exciting. I feel like I'm a kid in a candy store and it's Christmas all over again. I have the same feelings that I got when I was a kid, like with birthdays or with Santa Claus coming to visit. I relive all those childish emotions of joy now through videogames." *Her mom, she tells me, is* "an angry person," *her kids often frustrate her, and work* "sucks hard." *But in games, she's a carefree kid playing Pac-Man*[51] *(Namco, 1980).* **Longing on a large scale is what makes history (DeLillo, 1997, p. 11)** *She also believes that her gaming translates to RL in that it gives her confidence to do what she needs to do. She says,* "When I play the game I've got a point to prove because I am a female. But in my day-to-day life... I'm short, so people just look at me like 'Whatever.' so I have to prove

> **Captain Marvel movie to be written by two women (Nicole Perlman and Meg LeFauve)... The film will be Marvel's first with a female lead character (Sakar, 2015).**
>
> **— Polygon, April 27, 2015**

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[51] Pac-Man is a classic arcade game developed first released in Japan in the 1980.

myself to them. And then when it comes to my children, I have to prove myself because they look up to me. So no matter what, in or outta the game I'm always having to prove myself."

In Amanda's, Lily's, and Lana's engagements with game culture, they all view their participation with the gaming community as a badge of honor because they see gamers as a segment of the population that is exceptionally intelligent, fiercely competitive, and remarkably unique. **Everybody is identical in their secret unspoken belief that way deep down they are different from everyone else (Wallace, 1996, p. 205).** *However, each remains deeply conflicted about their association with a subculture that still views them derisively and routinely treats them with hostility. Each gamer understands the current rules of engagement (Lily:* "You're a girl so you can't have an opinion. Shut your mouth and put your boobs out."*), but each performatively enacts a subversive narrative through their participation in game culture.* **You were not there for The Beginning. You will not be there for The End. Your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative (Burroughs, 1959/2001, p. 184).**

4.5   Narrative Findings and the Research Questions

When I began this study I set out to answer a specific set of questions, and my time with the three participants and the above narrative, in its own way, stages answers to those questions. This narrative is but a single dramatization of data explored using a post-multicase methodological approach (Le Blanc, 2015). However, this is also a narrative that I might be expected to analyze, unpack, and explicate. I am hesitant to impose my understandings of the preceding narrative onto my readers, because a layered account "offers an impressionistic sketch, handing the

readers layers of experience so they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer's narrative" (Ronai, 1995, p. 24). Also, I am inclined against excess interpretation because as Deleuze and Guttari (1987) have said, "there is no longer any need to interpret, but that is because the best interpretation, the weightiest and most radical one, is an eminently significant silence" (p. 114). Nevertheless, to ensure that I have adequately and explicitly related these findings to the questions guiding this study, I offer the discussion below. This is my interpretation, one of many possible interpretations.

4.5.1   *What does it mean to the participants in this study to identify as female gamers?*

To Amanda, Lana, and Lily it means belonging to a restrictive order of distinctive people who share a passion for escaping RL and venturing into virtual spaces. It means having high intelligence. It means embracing being a nerd and being scoffed at by others.

Amanda:

> A true gamer is going to be somebody that's going to have a lot of deductive reasoning, great hand/eye coordination, and they're going to be a little bit smarter than non-gamers. Gamers stand apart from other people; they're a class of their own. Outsiders can say "You're a nerd," "You're lame" or "You're a loser." But from my standpoint we're the greatest people to ever exist. We have a great imagination.

Lily:

> Gamers generally have above average intellect. I mean, like, a decade ago, in order to even install a game on your computer you had to be relatively intelligent, you know? If you weren't, you couldn't do it. So I feel like the level of intelligence is probably slightly higher in at least some of the gaming communities.

Lana:

> The games that me and my friends play stimulate us intellectually. The challenges that we overcome, other people probably wouldn't be smart enough, or maybe neurotic, enough to accomplish (laughs).

To these three participants, being a female gamer also means forging meaningful connections with people near and far, people you may never meet in person. It means failing but not stopping

until you've succeeded, reliving your childhood, and momentarily forgetting all about RL concerns. It also means dealing with a fair amount of sexism, both within games and as a part of game culture, and prying your way into spaces where you weren't invited and staking your territory.

Lana:

> I feel like as a woman I can never be a serious gamer in a man's eyes. Maybe because… I don't get into the demeaning banter or use the derogatory terms that men use to talk to each other online. And you can't be the female that gets all mad. I mean I've said like: 'Dude, I'm a feminist, you can't say that' but of course they never take it seriously. They don't take you seriously.

Amanda:

> Some dudes, when they know I'm a girl, will say like 'will you be my girlfriend' or other guys with be inappropriate and sexist, but I'm not here for all that. I let it be known that I don't care about their attention, good or bad. I'm here to play.

Lily:

> I feel like there is a stereotype of what that people imagine a girl gamer is, like she's going to have tattoos, her hair's going to be some wild color, she maybe dresses provocatively and she might show you her boobs if you buy her skins[52]. I'm sure that there are many girls who might fit that profile but that's not me. I am a gamer, but I'm just not interested in trying to fulfill someone else's stereotype of who I should be.

To Lana, Amanda, and Lily positioning oneself as a gamer means daring to *be* in a space and amongst a community that may never fully embrace you as a compatriot.

4.5.2 *How is gender identity enacted within video games?*

To the participants in this study female gender performativity in video games is deemed as largely immaterial. Although Amanda, Lana, and Lily all agreed to participate in a study explicitly bent on studying female gamers, each expressed a measure of surprise when asked to re-

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[52] A skin is an alternate appearance for a character in a video game.

flect on the gender choice of game characters. In the game, the skill kit is what counts most: How high can the champion jump? How hard can the protagonist hit? What weapons are at the character's disposal? Gender is largely an afterthought. The crucial thing in games, so Amanda told me, is to ensure that any wardrobe or other such customizations match that characters' disposition. She elaborates: "So like if I am playing a psycho killer role-playing game, I will try to make the character look as crazy and as scary as I possibly can." Lily voices a similar opinion in her objection to the League of Legends character Nidalee, who is supposed to be a fierce warrior, having a French Maid outfit as a potential option.

And yet, while gender enacted within video games might have diminished significance, the inclusion and particular portrayals of female characters was viewed by each of the participants in this study as an important portend about the changing landscape of game culture. Lana described being able to see herself represented in powerful and non-demeaning ways in games, for example, as a "female archetype that is all-powerful," as being profoundly inspiring. Lily and Amanda echoed this sentiment. If and how women are represented in video games matters because it has real implications both on gamers' self-perceptions as well as on larger societal perceptions of women. As one instance of this, Lily said that in games "you just kind of have to accept, that half the characters are going to be naked if they're ladies and if they're guys they're going to have armor and giant thighs," but she also voiced concern that unhealthy body image issues might be fueled by those stereotypical portrayals. She also discussed the use of commonplace sexist gamer parlance as something she feared could potentially convey unsavory notions about women to her teenage son. Lana echoed this sentiment in discussing her nephews' gameplay.

4.5.3 *How is gender identity enacted in out-of-game contexts related to gaming?*

In out-of-game contexts related to gaming, the participants in this study performed their femininity in different ways depending on the situation. While they drew confidence from their positionality in game spaces, male gamers dominated conversations, directed and corrected gameplay, and were decidedly more at ease in the space. The female gamers in this study were conceptually liberated, but were often constrained by out-of-game gender norms or by the male-centric context of gameplay. The question of how to gesture toward gender neutrality while sim-ultaneously being bound by binary linguistic and speculative limitations is a weighty one. As Minh-ha (1989) puts it: "How am I to lose, maintain, or gain an (fe/male) identity when it is im-possible to me to take up a position outside this identity from which I presumably reach in and feel for it?" (p. 95). The tensions of being inside, while also operating outside, a prescribed set of gender roles were particularly evident in Amanda's, Lily's, & Lana's interactions in the gamebar setting. Lana, who played with her boyfriend during the gamebar observation, alternately sought and repelled her boyfriend's advice on gameplay. She was positioned ambivalently between ef-forts to perform the traditionally male script of confidence and independence, and a conventional feminine script of seeking help from a more competent male gamer. As an avowed feminist who sought gender neutrality in game spaces, Lana nevertheless reified gaming as a male province when citing her ability to "hold her own" with male gamers as contributing to her position as a gamer. Lily was eager to show me her gaming prowess, but felt relegated to noob[53] status by the difficulty she had in manipulating keys on a keyboard that had been designed for male gamers' hands. Amanda, for her part, was ever so convincing as a hardcore gamer with gaming trophies

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[53] A noob is a gamer new to video games with limited game playing skills, experiences, tactics, and means. These terms are often used pejoratively.

that surpassed several of her male counterparts, and yet her silence during recurrent vulgar references to female's bodies belied her insider standing.

4.5.4 How does the construction and enactment of a gendered identity as part of the gaming experience influence individual gamer conceptions of gender?

That Amanda, Lily, and Lana can inhabit spaces that they all still perceive as male domain, speaks to their openness to performatively disrupt and reinscribe gendered spaces. Each of the gamers in this study sought to position themselves as moving beyond conscripted gender roles.

Lily:

> I'm not here to entertain anyone and I don't care what other gamers think of me. I play games and I happen to be a woman.

Amanda:

> People just don't understand it so they bash it. It's something that people don't want to get to know. They especially don't understand a female gamer, because it's not a female thing to do. But I'm a female and I do it. So what?

Lana:

> When I have a daughter, if she plays games, I would tell her that she's just a gamer, that she's not entering some man's world. I would tell her to hold her own because she's good enough to compete with men. I would want her to feel like she's just with other people. Why does it matter that she's a girl?

And yet, while their discourse suggests a determination to move beyond binary conceptions of gender (not male or female—just people, just gamers), their claims to womanhood and femaleness presuppose differentiation from an opposite gender, thereby reinscribing the gender binary. Nevertheless, Amanda's, Lily's, and Lana's performative incursions into game spaces also reveal the liminal quality of such spaces wherein selves (gendered or otherwise) are staged as tenuous, indefinite, and manifold. Recurrent impositions into these gender-fluid spaces might unsettle the

"*appearance of substance*" [italics in original] upon which gender is constructed (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 192). I join Butler (1990/1999) in a belief that gender formulations beyond the static binary strictures may be discovered by gamers "precisely in the arbitrary relation between" the repeated acts by which gender is performed, and a cognizance that it is that selfsame performative that constructs gender identity (p. 192) .[54] I believe the liminal spaces in games can foster such an awakening. Countless times throughout the course of my time spent with Lana, Amanda, and Lily, I saw the permeable boundaries between in-game characters and out-of-game personas dissolve. The three gamers frequently referred to the actions of characters of varying genders using first person pronouns (for example: *my* sword, *I* got her, *we're* winning). The possibility of dissonance between out-of-game gender identity and in-game gender performance is significant because it gestures toward both the contingency and the performative nature of gender itself.

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[54] To Judith Butler (1990/1999), a "performance" of gender would presuppose an a priori subject, but the gender "performative" constructs the gendered subject. She queries: "What kind of performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilized the naturalized categories of identity and desire?" (p. 189).

5   OPENING THOUGHTS

You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not.

– Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 1989

Others reflect our selves to us, and they enlarge our view. Yet they also inhibit our view for they only reflect their partial, limited, locally situated perspectives. Others socially validate us as well as threaten to socially determine us. And we, as other, can stimulate changes in our society.

– Barbara Thayer-Bacon, *Relational "(e)pistemologies," 2003*

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.

– Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*, 1967/1984

The concept of using games for learning is far from new (Malone, 1981). Over the course

of the months that I conducted research and wrote this manuscript, I had conversations with peo-

ple from all walks of life that expressed the gamut of reactions from enthusiasm to wariness

about game-based pedagogy. Despite public perceptions or the prevailing political discourse on

the value or detriment of gaming in our society (and beyond scholarly investigations of commer-

cial games), games are purposefully being designed to support teaching and learning in academic

contexts (Barab et al., 2007; Barab et al., 2010; Barab, Pettyjohn, Gresalfi, Volk, & Solomou,

2012; Chesler, Arastoopour, D'Angelo, Bagley, & Shaffer, 2013; Corredor, Gaydos, & Squire,

2014; Martin, Dikkers, Squire, & Gagnon, 2014; Perry & Klopfer, 2014; Rosenbaum, Klopfer, &

Perry, 2007; Squire & Jan, 2007; Van Eck, Hung, Bowman, & Love, 2009). This makes under-

standing audiences for whom these learning interventions are being produced of paramount importance.

This study sought to obtain an understanding about how three self-identified female gamers interacted with (and conjectured their relation to) gaming technologies and game culture. During the course of this inquiry, I have learned about the profound pleasure, emotional succour, intellectual rigor, and personal meaning that Amanda, Lily, and Lana derived from being gamers. In this final chapter, I attempt to speak to the broader value of this scholarship, contemplate the implications for the field of instructional design and technology (IDT), and suggest some avenues for further research. My intent is not to forcibly extrapolate this study's findings onto academic contexts, but rather to simulate thought and dialogue around the potentially transformative ways in which three female gamers are using gaming technologies in leisure context, which might ultimately be relevant to the academy.

5.1   Personal Narratives, Collective Significance

The narrative findings in this study have import to the shared experience of gamers the world over. As has been argued throughout, the collective hypermediated context that shapes postmodern selves fractures and fuses distinct identities. The adapted multicase methodology (Le Blanc, 2015) employed throughout this study eschewed compartmentalizing cases and aspired to an understanding of the ways in which gaming technologies connect spaces, coalesce gamers' identities, and unify gamers' experiences. The narratives performed within liminal spaces and by liminal selves are noteworthy in that they foster an understanding of gamers as perpetually engaged in identity negotiation. The identities that gamers in this study crafted for themselves, both within and out of game spaces, were not detached, nor were they fixed. Through their gameplay these gamers actively created and recreated identities, moment to moment, by way of the deci-

sions they made, the actions they took, and the other parties engaged in play. Given these considerations—and in keeping with previously cited research (e.g. Gee 2003/2007; Gee, 2001; Sfard & Prusak, 2005)—game scholars and instructional designers should consider the implications of multiple and collective identities at play within game spaces.

Gender, as one of the many types of identities that the gamers in this study negotiated, was similarly fluid and open to reinscription based on the situated context of gameplay. Consequently, any scholarly exploration of gamers or game culture that is not guided by an understanding of how unorthodox and mutable gender identity is, and how it is performed in game contexts, will be at risk of merely replicating studies that have unproblematically endorsed binary understandings of male and female gamers (e.g., Chisholm & Krisnakumar, 1981; Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999; Williams et al., 2008). More fertile explorations will explore gender as a provisional identity that is performatively produced to suit a defined set of circumstances, because "[d]espite all our desperate, eternal attempts to separate, contain and mend, categories always leak" (Minh-ha, 1989/2009, p. 94).

5.2   Gamer Narratives and IDT Implications

There are many impassioned, influential, and often competing discourses that surround the topics of technology and education. This study has attempted to augment and extend this dialogue toward an understanding of alternative narratives beyond the prevailing corpus. Contemplating this study's participants' engagements with technologies outside of academic settings is important in that it countermands "normativizing any one particular account as 'the account' and prescribing *any* [italics in original] particular set of practices as 'the practices' appropriate to the educational use of computers" (Bryson & De Castell, 1994, p. 82). The narratives of gamers who play in situated leisure contexts can offer practitioners and scholars of educational technologies

valuable information about the affordances and limitations of gaming technologies. Shute, Rieber & Van Eck (2012) have argued that the design of good educational games would require a "paradigm shift" (p. 322) for designers who are not able to conceptualize the intrinsic motivation of play for play's sake, or of being "at play" conceptually (Huizinga, 1950). I contend that the narratives of leisure gamers can add to the academic discourse pertinent to the use of instructional technologies by theorizing the conceptual and cultural space in which play occurs toward better understandings of learners.

The narratives of gamers who play in situated leisure contexts can also afford instructional designers and researchers of educational technologies with valuable opportunities to observe gender negotiation as is plays out in a context wherein identity performance exhibits a fluidity not found in other spaces. As I have argued in Chapter 4, the liminal spaces in games have the potential to disrupt normative conceptions of gender because to a considerable extent gender is "produced *within*" [italics in original] game spaces by means of the shifting relational dynamics that constitute gameplay (Thornham, 2008, p. 127). Butler (1990/1999) has situated drag as a subversive practice which, by means of pastiche,[55] efficiently troubles the "the myth of originality itself" (p. 188). Like drag, I position video game playing as another space or practice wherein variable and various gender configurations can be taken up or discarded, which might ultimately gesture toward new meanings and different articulations of gender itself.

This scholarship has led me to several noteworthy implications to the field of IDT. Both as an instructional designer and as a woman, I consider these implications as important to the development of inclusive game-based pedagogy. While these implications may pose challenges

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[55] Fredric Jameson (1985) describes the postmodern practice of pastiche as parody without satire or humor—it is parody that has lost its sense of nostalgia for the "Real" that it caricatures.

to traditional educational practices, they should nevertheless remain at the forefront of game scholars' and designers' minds. Collectively, these implications speak to the importance of diverse perspectives, multiple voices, and multi-layered accounts to foster a commitment to educational practices that include rather than marginalize females. Taken together, these implications also attest to the importance of understanding the spaces outside of traditional school contexts as significant to nurturing meaningful developmental exploits.

5.2.1   *The gamers in this study were averse to being pigeonholed*

This is a point that I believe to be unique to my study, and it is significant in that it challenges researchers and practitioners to problematize their approach to designing for female learners. Given the well-documented underrepresentation of women in the lucrative field of computer science, there are many well-intentioned academic initiatives focused on closing the gender gap to women's access and utilization of technologies often seeming to espouse a prescriptive definition of femininity. However, the varied and various narratives that the gamers in this study shared corroborated the notion that there is no one way of being a female gamer. When instructional designers, teachers, or policy makers construct curricula, they would do well to do so with the awareness that one size will not fit all. The participants in this study were gamers who each crafted their gendered identity in gaming spaces in different and variable ways. To enumerate the types of games, the kinds of platforms, and the styles of play that most females choose, and to extrapolate those findings to women writ large would do nothing to aid in understanding the situated ways in which individual female gamers make meaning and construct their identities in relation to gaming technologies. This makes it imperative for the designers and facilitators of educational games to make every effort to get to know the learners they serve beyond the classroom. Though the time and opportunity for individual engagements with learners might be con-

strained, if designers and educators internalize the notion that there is a vast tapestry of fragmented and interconnected identities that make up learner populations, they will be less likely to design or deliver instructional games that have been shaped by biased interpretations of who gamers are and how they make meaning.

5.2.2 *The gamers in this study found personal meaning from their play*

This is a point well supported in the literature on games and learning (Gee & Hayes, 2012; Shute, Rieber, & Van Eck, 2012; Squire, 2006; Steinkuehler, 2010). Any designer of game-based learning initiatives should understand that gamers consider playing games as being a meaningful enterprise. If the content that is being taught, within the context of gaming, is not intrinsically relevant to the learners, they will lose interest in learning. The irony, as Barab and Roth (2006) have pointed out, is that we "wonder why children appear unmotivated to learn after we have disconnected meaning from the learning situation, assuming that the learner somehow will attribute the same functional value to the information as the teacher does" (p. 3). Any designer or facilitator of educational games should seek to impart the relevance of the content to the learners. Abstracted knowledge is of little value to learners who are accustomed to *doing* and *being* in the world in out-of-school contexts. As Dewey (1929/1988) has argued, "ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live" (p. 111). Gee and Hayes (2012) have argued that humans learn "well and deeply only when [content is] learned as tools for doing something meaningful and important to them" (p. 146). Learners must understand the meaning and relevance of the game-based educational content to transforming their lives and futures, or they may not believe it to be worth their investments of time and intellect. While games are "sites of naturally occurring, intrinsically motivated learning" (Squire, 2006, p. 22), purveyors of educational

games must not equivocate about the instructional content's capacity to create meaningful change in learners' lives.

5.2.3 *The gamers in this study drew succor and self-assurance from their engagements with other gamers*

This is another point that is well supported by video game scholars. Shaffer (2012) in particular has argued that "we can understand learning— the transfer of experience from one context to another—as something that can be discussed, analysed, conceptualized, and supported both in *transformation of an individual and participation in a practice* [italics in original]" (Shaffer, 2012, p. 405). Learning does not happen in a vacuum and the gamers in this study established the importance of other players in helping them learn how to play as well as keeping them engaged with game culture. Each gamer in this study proudly shared how diverse their circle of friends was across a variety of intersectional perspectives. For example, Lana told me how gaming gave her common interests and a common language with classmates from divergent cultural backgrounds, Lily spoke of gaming with Mormons from Utah and playing with gay gamers, and Amanda discussed playing with a male gamer friend who is 68 years old. Designers and facilitators of game-based educational enterprises should understand learning as a participatory endeavor. The learning trajectories of individual gamers/learners will be shaped by their fellow gamers/learners because in a very meaningful sense, games are cultures (Gee, 2003/2007; Shaffer, 2012; Steinkuehler, 2006). Findings from this study lead me to conjecture that game-based initiatives that are designed in a manner that fosters gamers' engagement into diverse communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) will have the best chance for success and sustainability.

5.2.4   The gamers in this study viewed gaming as an intellectually stimulating enterprise

On this final point, the literature on gaming also bears out this study's findings. Amanda, Lily and Lana viewed gaming as a significantly cerebral activity. In their gaming practices they challenged themselves to use superior strategies, augmented deductive reasoning, and improved physical dexterity to become better gamers. Notably, they all believed that in-game lessons learned along these lines crossed over to their worlds outside the game in unique and profoundly personal ways. For instance, Amanda told me a story about using her heightened spatial awareness and enhanced reflexes to safely navigate her children across a busy intersection. Lana discussed in-game achievements as boosting out-of-game confidence, and Lily discussed her in-game people management skills as analogous to out-of-game responsibilities. Here the suggestion to designers and facilitators of game-based educational interventions would be not simply to teach traditional content in a gamified medium, but rather to radically reimagine and restage the subject matter in a manner that allows for the logic of choice and permits individual learners the autonomy to discover their own meaning (Steinkuehler, 2010). Squire, Giovanetto, Devane, & Durga, (2005) suggest as much when they say that game-based pedagogy might require a "rethinking and restructuring of the basic 'grammar' of schooling;" most particularly, they contend, the "role of standardization in education" would need to be reevaluated (p. 41). Because, they argue, that the absence of "choice from game-based environments renders them somewhat meaningless and threatens to nullify exactly that which makes them engaging" (p 41).

5.3   Suggestions for Further Research

Beyond the implications to the field of IDT discussed above, this scholarship offers avenues for further investigation of the conceptual framework, methodological approach, and representational strategies that I employed. As to my conceptual framework, more can be explored

about the interplay between a relational epistemology, a postmodern theoretical perspective, and conceptions for gender performativity. For my purposes, a relational epistemology broadened my gaze beyond subjectivist preoccupations toward the co-construction of knowledge through my relationships with this study's participants. This epistemology dovetailed nicely with my postmodern theoretical perspective which—given the demise of the venerated Cartesian subject—also speaks to the interchange between fragmented, saturated selves which are constituted within the hypermediated contexts of the postmodern world. Finally, as my study concerned gender, adding performativity as the final element of this study's conceptual framework helped me to conceptualize gender beyond binary formulations. Further scrutiny of this tripartite conceptual framework is needed as it may prove to be a useful tool for future scholars exploring gender issues.

My adapted multicase methodological approach (Le Blanc, 2015) might also be plumbed further toward deeper understandings of amalgamated cases and shared contexts. Toward this aim, future researchers pursuing this line of inquiry might use their research data to further deconstruct the boundaries between (a) gamers' varied situated contexts when playing games, (b) diverse game spaces and interactions online, and (c) the broader context that constitutes how female gamers are characterized in popular culture. A potential approach to such deconstruction in the context of this research could be to narrate the data as a series of intermittent conversations between gamers who are temporally and spatially dispersed (alternately playing at gamebars or broadcasting their play online from home), but interconnected by means of shared sociopolitical and cultural contexts, as well as by mediating technologies.

The use of Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) such as NVivo 10 can also be further explored. In this study, the hypertextual environment offered by QDAS proved to be a

powerful tool for linking participants' narratives to the broader cultural practices and discourses. Docked and undocked windows in NVivo 10 heightened my sensitivity to the interplay among the various narratives by way of juxtapositions between: 1) transcribed and audio recorded words; 2) video recorded gameplay in the gamebar and in home settings; 3) media commentary related to game culture as depicted in news blurbs; and 4) the postmodern literary and epistemological texts that informed my worldview. This conversation between narratives, or intertextuality, functioned to "free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships" (Morgan, 1985, p. 2). Additional scrutiny of using hypertext as part of the meaning-making process will be helpful in discovering its potential to stimulate different modes of intelligibility.

This study also offered an atypical representational strategy which might be further explored for its potential to deconstruct privileged researcher findings. Patricia Leavy (2013) has argued that "fiction-based research practice challenges the fact/fiction dichotomy that has historically dominated our understanding of what is and is not considered research" (p. 24). Reassessing our notions about how knowledge is fashioned and legitimized is crucial because hegemonic discourses "continue[] to hold sway in determining who is heard and who is silenced, who gets hired and promoted and who is fired or impeached" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 6). The fictionalized representational strategies used in this study worked to foreground the contrived nature of all knowledge narratives and also gestured toward the multiplicity of potential Other stories to be told. Fiction-based or arts-based educational research also offers new possibilities for drawing in broader audiences toward the creation of more pragmatically useful texts. As Dewey (1929/1988) has argued, the value of theory and ideas lies in their bearing upon lived experiences. The power of the fictionalized research narrative resides in its ability to contest stereotypes,

generate empathy and self-awareness, and expose readers to rich new worlds and lived experiences (Leavy, 2013).

In terms of import and impact to the daily lives of female gamers, this study offers hope that insights into the gender performativity of women in this arena might contribute to social change. Constructing a just and equitable world for women requires us to be conscious of how and why we construct gender in the manner in which we do. Such an understanding can give us the tools to behave differently. It can also permit us to begin to narrate our and others' identities in ways that promote gender neutrality. Awareness of the practices and processes by which female gamers construct their identities beyond binary constructs can challenge reductionist analyses of bodies and subjects. My hope is that the narratives of this study's participants will foster understandings that will ultimately contribute to greater equity in education. I urge instructional designers, teachers, and policy makers to construct (or preside over the construction of) game-based curricula that incorporates diverse narratives, thereby gesturing toward inclusivity in academic settings.

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