

Online Communities of Female Gamers: A Resistance Analysis of the PMSclan

by

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ABSTRACT

This research is focused on competitive female video gamers. This study focuses on a specific group of competitive female gamers who participate in an all female online community group or clan known as the PMSclan. The purpose of the study is to analyze the highly competitive female video gaming clan members of the PMSclan in order to understand how resistance is displayed in a female centered video gaming community and how that affects the identity of the individual gamers through Shaw's (2001) theory of resistance. This study employs qualitative research design and uses content analysis of publicly available clan doctrines and member blogs through the PMSclan website. Findings indicate that collective acts of resistance lead to individual acts of resistance which can be seen through self-expression, self-determination, and empowerment. These acts of resistance have a positive impact on female gamers with outcomes of strength and power which can be displayed in a typically masculine society.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I am a gamer. More precisely you could call me a female video gamer. As a young child, my mother always supported and even encouraged my playing of video games. When I entered my teens, my friends (mainly boys) challenged me in different genres and on different platforms for the fun of competing and playing different types of games. In my group of friends, I was always the one with the newest gaming system(s) and coolest games.

When I think back on my time playing video games, I realize that I was living, and playing, within a male-dominated society. All of my friends that played video games were boys. As I have progressed in my academic career, I have come to realize that video games have been an important part of creating an identity for myself as a female. Video games have been a source of empowerment and a voice for me, a typically shy person. In the virtual worlds that video games provide, I am free to be me.

The number of female video game players, or gamers, has been steadily increasing over the last several years. According to the Entertainment Software Association's (ESA) 2012 video and computer game industry report, of all video game players, approximately 47% are female which is increased over the 2008 industry report of only 40% of all gamers being female. Furthermore, of all the female gamers, women age 18 or older represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (30%) than boys age 17 or younger (18%) (Entertainment Software Association, 2008; Entertainment Software Association 2012). Although the number of female gamers is rising, there is still a dominance of male gamers in popular genres such as First-Person

Shooters (FPS), Role-Playing Games (RPG), and other types of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG). However, regardless of the male gendered dominance in these genres, women are slowly encroaching into these subcultures of game-play through online female gamer communities.

Within gaming communities are clans. Clans can be considered as teams within the communities. Imagine teams in the National Football League (NFL), for example the Arizona Cardinals or New England Patriots, clans are members of teams within the community. Although there are many individual gamers who are not represented within clans, clans can include hundreds of gamers. Many popular gaming clans began their rise in the 1990's with Personal Computer Local Area Network (PC LAN) gaming with games such as the Quake and Doom series among others. These LAN parties, as they came to be known, were a place where clan members could meet and practice to game at events such as DreamHack in Jönköping, Sweden (currently the largest LAN party in the world) and BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer), a very large LAN party held in New Delhi, India. However, the number of gaming clans significantly increased in the early 2000's with the beginning of the gaming console party. At these types of parties, it would be common to see eight consoles (e.g. Xbox/Xbox 360) linked together through an LAN playing games like Halo. When Halo 2 was introduced in 2004, Xbox allowed the creation of gaming clans, up to 100 members, to play the first-person shooter style MMO competitively. It was during this time that I was first introduced to the existence of an all female gaming clan. At the time, I was well aware of the existence of several professional level gaming communities such as Legendary Gamers Clan and Major League Gaming clan, that supported male and female gamers, although mostly they were male dominated.

I was playing Halo 2 online with a group of friends when one of them introduced me to a member of the PMS clan. I was intrigued by the use of symbolism in choosing the acronym PMS and this encouraged me to find out more about this female gaming community and if there were others like it.

Several online female gaming communities currently exist. Gaming communities such as FragDolls (<http://www.fragdolls.com>), GamerchiX (<http://www.xbox.com/en-US/community/gamerchix/>), and PMS Clan (<http://www.pmsclan.com/>) welcome female gamers at all levels of play from newbie to elite. However, Pandora's Mighty Soldiers, otherwise known as the PMS clan, was started in 2002 and was one of the first all-female gaming clans and is currently the largest with over 1200 active female members. They state that their mission is to "...provide a fun, competitive, and positive environment to female gamers while promoting respect for women in matches and tournaments" (<http://www.pmsclan.com/>). Moreover, these communities have risen as a social support system to empower female gamers to become equals in previously male dominated gaming genres.

However, during my more than 20 years of video gaming, there have often been instances where I felt embarrassed, shy, and degraded. However, at times, I felt just the opposite of those negative feelings; I have also felt empowered, confident, strong, and unique to be a female playing video games. In playing cooperative Massively Multi-player Online Games such as Halo, World of Warcraft, Call of Duty, and many others, depending on who you are playing with, being a girl can be a good thing or it can bring about harassment. Being a woman in a gaming world is not always easy.

This research is designed to take a critical look at the effects of an online all female video gaming community on the identity of individual female video gamers within the community. The study employs a qualitative methodology utilizing critical analysis of gamer member blogs and clan doctrines through the lens of a feminist theory perspective to examine how these women negotiate the identity of being a female and a video gamer in a patriarchal gaming society.

Recreation and leisure studies have for a long time studied the constraints, politics, and empowerment on women from a feminist perspective (Shaw, 1994). Only recently has video gaming been a topic of discussion in leisure studies (Delamere & Shaw, 2008). Taking a critical look at women in an all video gaming society from a recreational and leisure perspective is long overdue. Furthermore, there are few studies that focus on resistance as a reason why female gamers persist in participation in gaming as well as few studies that specifically cover the effects of online female gaming communities on the identity of female gamers. Shaw (1994; 2001; 2007) discusses resistance as a conscious or unconscious way to contest the traditional notions of gendered constraints within a leisure setting. Using this theory may help to lead to a better understanding of the female gamer identity and persistence in gaming in a male dominated society.

The studies discussed in this literature review clearly indicate the need for video gaming research to be further expanded into the field of leisure studies. Moreover, an analysis of the gaming culture found that female gaming communities are socially constructed upon the cultural position of individual gamers (Yates & Littleton, 1999). This further reinforces the importance of resistance in the social structure of female

gaming communities, where resistance can affect the overall structure of the online female gaming community. Furthermore, understanding the impact of resistance to constraints on female gaming could help to further explain why online female gaming communities, such as the PMS Clan, are seeing a consistent rise in members.

Previous gaming research has studied female gamers through the perspective of personal motivations, behavior outcomes, and gendered constraints of video game play. Many studies have listed the sociality of gaming as one of the reasons why people play video games (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Jansz & Martens, 2005; Jansz & Tanis, 2007). However, little research has been done to understand the social motivations of female video gaming communities and the effects of these communities on the identity of the gamers from a feminist perspective.

Problem Statement

The problem of the study is to analyze female clan members of the PMSclan in order to understand how resistance is displayed in a female centered video gaming community and how that affects the identity of the individual gamers.

Delimitations

The study is delimited to female gamers of the PMSclan. The members must have been initiated within the clan for a minimum of four years, be currently active, and also classified as clan leaders. The study will not include general registered users of the online website but will include only those identified and classified as actual members of the clan as well as being leaders. Inclusion of members outside of those included would be problematic because some registered users are male and would thus be outside the sample demographic. Additionally, if all members of the clan were included the amount

of data to be analyzed would be unreasonably large for the resources available for this study.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation is the minimum four year requirement. Female gamers who are newer to the PMSclan gaming community, been a gamer for less than four years, will not be included. Additionally, the study is limited to female gamers only in the PMSclan; which leaves out female gamers who are playing individually or in other clans therefore leaving out the possibility of other ideas and opinions, however this could be useful for further research opportunities. Furthermore, by only investigating the public forums, this may be leaving out the intimate feelings and opinions that the gamers would be experiencing having used a more formal one-on-one interview or individual survey.

Definitions

Blog - A website that allows individuals or groups to share information and opinions.

First Person Shooter (FPS) - A genre of video game in which the player assumes the role of a shooter in a first-person perspective allowing the player to point-and-shoot multiple weapons at other characters.

Gamer - A person who plays video games.

Gamer tag - A name (moniker) that identifies an individual. In a specific environment, such as a specific server, the tag must be unique.

Gaming - The act of playing a video game.

Gaming arena - A virtual location where gamers can compete against one another.

Gaming Clan/Guild - Similar to a gaming community but are more likely to participate in certain video game play and play together and may play against other clans or guilds.

Gaming consoles - An interactive video gaming device which allows the users to play video games either on a television, monitor, or handheld device. Examples of gaming consoles include the Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation, and Nintendo DS.

Gaming communities - A collection of video game players who can discuss video gaming and often participate in gaming together.

Gaming culture - The way gamers share and interact with one another is a culture which includes certain norms and values.

Gaming systems - See gaming console.

Guild - An organized group of gamers who play together on a regular basis and usually compete in the same video game. This group often includes a hierarchy of leaders, officer, and members.

Hater - Individual or group who expresses dislike of another individual or group.

Local Area Network (LAN) - A group of computers or other video gaming devices, such as gaming consoles, that are networked together and can easily communicate with each other.

Massively-Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) - Similar to an MMORPG but may not include a strong role playing aspect.

Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) - A genre of role-playing in which a large (massive) number of people, usually from different locations globally, play together in a virtual environment.

Newbie - See Noob.

Noob - A slang term referring to a player who is new or inexperienced with regard to a certain video game or gaming style.

Role-Playing Game (RPG) - A genre of video game in which the player assumes the role of a character within the setting described by that specific video games virtual world.

Shooter - See First Person Shooter (FPS).

Virtual world - A simulated environment which allows players to interact online virtually with other players or non-player characters.

Research Questions

1. What are the ways in which a highly competitive female gaming community promotes resistance amongst its members?
2. What kind of resistance is shown in the website and among the individual gamers writings?
3. What effect does resistance have on the identity of the female gamers?

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This paper will begin by delving into the theories related to constraints and resistance in leisure and recreation studies and the effects of constraints and resistance on women's leisure. Furthermore, this paper will examine gaming studies which focus on gaming constraints and acts of resistance in gaming as well as discuss the implications of gaming research from a gender perspective. Additionally, this study will explore the social aspects of gaming and female gamers. These studies provide support for the research questions guiding this paper.

Constraint and Resistance Theories in Leisure Studies

Most of the current body of knowledge on leisure research involving constraints has focused on three main theories. These theories include constraints to leisure (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), leisure as constraining (Shaw, 1994), and leisure as resistance (Shaw, 1994). These three theories will be briefly described in this paper; however, for the purpose of this study, this literature review will focus on the work of Shaw's (1994) theory on leisure as resistance.

Constraint is typically defined in leisure research as referring to factors which limit or inhibit people's participation in leisure, their preferences for an activity, or satisfaction in an activity or experience (Henderson, 1994; Raymore & Godbey, 1994; Shores, Scott, & Floyd, 2007). Crawford et al. (1991) proposed a hierarchy of constraints to leisure in three levels. These levels are intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Intrapersonal constraints refer to an individual's psychological state or attitudes which can affect their preference or interest in an activity (Crawford et al., 1991;

Henderson & Winn, 1996). On the other hand, interpersonal constraints refer to those factors that arise out of interactions or relationships with others, for example an individual may experience an interpersonal constraint if they cannot find a partner or friend to participate with in a leisure activity (Crawford et al., 1991; Raymore & Godbey, 1994). Finally, structural constraints refer to external factors which can influence an individual's participation in a leisure activity. These external factors can include time, money, or lack of programs among other things (Crawford et al., 1991).

Many leisure studies have used the Crawford et al. model to identify differences in constraints perceived by male and females. For example, Shaw (1994) reported time, economic, and opportunity constraints as the most commonly experienced constraints by women. Raymore and Godbey (1994) examined sociodemographic variables and their relationship to perceptions of constraint on leisure among adolescents ($n = 363$, $M = 17.4$). Their findings indicated that adolescent females were more likely to have lower self-esteem than males, and females were significantly more likely to perceive intrapersonal and overall total constraints than males. Additionally, Shores, Scott, and Floyd (2007) found gender differences in perception of constraints to outdoor recreation activities. Their findings showed females were significantly more likely to report fear of crime as a constraint to leisure. These studies indicate strong differences in gendered perceptions of constraints to leisure. However, this model alone is not enough to explain all the outcomes of constraints to leisure.

The idea of leisure as constraining focuses on "how participation in certain kinds of activities influences women's lives and women's position within society" (Shaw, 1994, p. 12). In other words, media and socio-cultural stereotypes perpetuate gender-

based structures within society. Hayes (2005) suggests there is a gender divide in video gaming partly due to the stereotype that most hard-core gamers are adolescent males who prefer to play violent FPSs such as *Halo* or *Call of Duty* and those females who do game, are playing casual games like *Diner Dash* and *the Sims*. In some cases, this is true, however, online female gaming communities such as PMSclan.com, who boasts more than 46,000 members, is a social support community made for hard-core competitive female gamers who enjoy FPSs, RPGs, and a host of other genres that are typically considered to be played by males. Similarly, Shaw (1994) recognized that certain leisure activities have a stereotypical nature to them indicating activities such as gymnastics and ballet as more feminine and sports such as hockey and baseball as more masculine. However, studies utilizing the previously mentioned hierarchical model of constraints and the feminist ideology of leisure as constraining have more commonly showed the negative outcomes of constraints to leisure participation.

In contrast to the two previous models, the least explored of the three theories is Shaw's (1994) theory on leisure as resistance. Shaw's viewpoint focuses more on the positive outcomes of constraints to leisure stating that "this perspective focuses on ways in which leisure participation can function as resistance to oppressive gender relations" (Shaw, 1994, p. 15). Resistance in this instance is linked to power and power relations in leisure and societal structures. In the context of women's studies, resistance can be used to perceive leisure as, not necessarily constraining, but as a form of self-expression, self-determination, empowerment, and as a challenge to structured gender relations (Shaw, 1994; Shaw, 2001; Shaw, 2007). Furthermore, the act of resistance can be both individual and collective. In other words, an individual act of resistance has the potential to

empower others in similar situations. In this light, resistance can produce an outcome of social change. Similarly, Du's (2008) expansion on the theory of leisure as resistance in folk dancing showed, for women, engaging in leisure activities increased opportunities for exercising personal power as well as provided them with the chance to develop new social skills which in turn changed their social relationships. As previously mentioned, video game genres such as FPSs and RPGs are typically considered to be oriented towards male gamers, and as such, creating an online female gaming community may be an act of resistance in and of itself. In studying female gamers, utilizing the theory of leisure as resistance is a highly appropriate way to understand the motivations of female gamers who join online social support communities.

Constraints and Resistance in Gaming Studies

Interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints are a dominant focus in gaming studies. Gaming is considered to be a highly gendered and masculine culture (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Hayes, 2005). As such, female gamers have often reported feeling unwanted or unwelcome in public gaming spaces due to the competitive and masculine nature of these spaces (Bryce & Rutter, 2003). Additionally Bryce and Rutter (2003) found that stereotypes towards female gamers are reinforced in the gaming culture from male competitors, and state that this further reinforces constraints to female participation in gaming spaces. Adolescent female gamers who primarily gamed at LAN cyber cafés found interpersonal constraints in experiences of hostility from male players as well as café management stating they feared that female gamers would drive off their male clientele (Beavis & Charles, 2007). Beavis and Charles (2007) also found that the

resistance of female gamers to these constraints allowed a reformulation of understanding towards their identities in the gaming culture.

In the same sense, intrapersonal constraints such as attitude have been found to detrimentally affect participation in gaming by some females. Royse, Lee, Undrahbuyan, Hopson, and Consalvo (2007) found that the critical and negative attitude (i.e., intrapersonal constraints) towards gaming of female non-gamers was the main reason constraining their participation in gaming. For example, Royse et al. found that negative perceptions of the gaming culture were media motivated citing the sexualized and violent content in games, problems of addiction, and views of gaming as anti-social and solitary as the main reason they do not game. Additionally, these non-gamers had an overall lack of understanding of gaming technologies in general. Similar findings were described by Yates and Littleton (1999) who found that perceptions of computer games in academia and the gaming culture focused on issues of addiction and social skills. However, studies on interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints in gaming are not the only focus in gaming research, more and more gaming studies are also focusing on the structural constraints of video games.

Many gaming studies have focused their attention on content stereotypes within the games, which can effect perceptions of gender roles and lead to further reinforce those intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints in game play of female gamers. These content stereotypes can be seen as structural constraints in leisure activities because of the game itself, and therefore content in the game is the facility in which the game is played. For instance, Ogletree and Drake (2007) found that nearly 80% of college student respondents who played video games regularly reported that nearly 70% of main

characters in games where male and female game characters were portrayed to be weaker, less aggressive, dressed more provocatively, and were placed in situations where they were more likely to be in need of rescue than were male characters (Ogletree & Drake, 2007). The authors further indicate that these video gaming stereotypes may negatively affect how adolescents perceive gender roles. Similarly, Green and McNeese (2008) secondary analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 found that females spend less time than males on weekdays and weekends than males playing video games. Additionally Green and McNeese (2008) cited one reason for this may be due to the fact that many of the games played in that study contained more male characters, and female characters typically played minor subservient roles or roles in which they were deemed as a prize to be won (Green & McNeese, 2008). However, sexism in character portrayal is typically a two-way street. Jansz and Martis (2007) study on sex roles of characters in popular video games found that the majority of male characters were depicted as extremely masculine and muscular whereas female characters were found to be more "scantly clad in hypersexualized dress" (Jansz & Martis, 2007, p 147). Although these studies do indicate sexism and stereotypes in gaming content, sexism can be seen in games in both male and female characters. However, many studies also focus on the reasons as to why females persist in participating in gaming despite the multitude of gaming constraints listed in this literature review.

The reasons females persist in gaming can be seen as a form of resistance to the gender role stereotypes perpetuated in the gaming culture. Royse et al. (2007) found that women who frequently and moderately participate in gaming do so to fulfill their needs

for mastery, competition, and sociability. On a similar note, socialization, community, identity, mastery, status, and exploration were found to be reasons why female gamers enjoy playing EverQuest, a popular MMORPG (Taylor, 2003). Furthermore, Ryan, Rigby, and Przybylski (2006) state that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are significantly related to motivations of play involving control, master, and achievement. Although many gaming studies examine the reasons why females do not game as well as explore the constraints on females who do game, there are few studies that focus on resistance as a reason why female gamers persist in participation in gaming and researching the effects of female gaming communities on female gamers may lead to a better understanding on how female gamers are resisting the socio-political gender constraints within a male dominated society (Delamer & Shaw, 2008). Utilizing Shaw's theory to help understand the social support system of online female gaming communities may shed some light as to why these female gamers persist in gaming in the first place.

Women, Social Recreation, and Gaming

Several studies have employed methods of social network analysis to explain community, relationships, and behaviors in leisure and recreation activities and spaces. For example, Hills (2007) used social network analysis methods in a qualitative design to explore the informal social networks (i.e., friendships, capital, and other social relationships) and social space of 12- and 13-year-old females in physical education class. The author found that although physical capital in the sense of competition was important for some of the females in the physical education class, those females who lacked in physical capital (i.e., skill, competence, and a competitive spirit) were provided an alternative social capital through friendship. Additionally, Hills analyzed the social

structure of the physical education class through the power relationships of individuals who were highly skilled and dominated certain activities all the way down to the individuals who were excluded from play (Hills, 2007). Although Hills utilized the structure in the analysis of the social networks involved with the females in the physical education class, she did not include the relational ties of the teacher or coaches involved in the class. Adding this relational tie may influence the dynamic of the power relationships between the individuals in the class. In studying online video game communities, it is necessary to analyze the relationships between individual gamers. Analyzing the social relationships between individual gamers is another way in which to understand Shaw's theory of resistance and how it applies to female gamers.

Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley (2002) used social network analysis to discuss the socio-cultural processes that shape the leisure space of lesbians. This study used a qualitative research design employing the snow-ball sampling method. The authors' design focused on the community perspective of space rather than the relational ties involved with the space. As a result, they uncovered the feelings and attitudes of homosexuals about the community which included feelings of empowerment and sanctuary. The authors also discovered separate attitudes of ownership in certain sections within the community (i.e., predominantly gay or lesbian bars/night clubs) (Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 2002). This study seemed to employ methods similar to those previously mentioned of Wellman's work. Taking Shaw's theory of resistance in analyzing the community may have led to a deeper understanding behind the relational ties and why the gay men in the community are perceived to be much more intimidating and how that affects the leisure behavior of lesbian women.

In analyzing the social networks of female gamers, it is necessary to include the constraints experienced during game play because this may affect the reasons why female gamers join the online female gaming communities' space. Similar to the Pritchard et al. (2002) study who described the constraints of a "hetero-sexual world" on the homosexual community when describing the lesbian space, making similar distinctions of gender roles and constraints in the space of female gamers will affect the outcome of the structure of the social networks in the online gaming communities. In a similar context, Bryce and Rutter (2003) explain that "the gendered use of spaces has particular relevance to an examination of female access to leisure and the experience of computer gaming" (p. 8).

From another perspective, Williams (2006) study on players of MMORPGs focused on the online and offline impact of online games on the social capital of gamers. Although this study focused more on physical and mental health, a small form of social network analysis was used. The author's study focused around the MMORPG *Asheron's Call 2* (AC2). The author reported AC2 was used for the purpose of using an online RPG, however, due to the shortage of players AC2 lacks the community that more popular MMOs give. Additionally, Williams (2006) reported that family networks were unaffected by game play, but friendship networks were significantly negatively impacted (Williams, 2006). Although social networks were discussed from a social capital perspective, the social network analysis was limited due to the fact that many of the gamers were first time AC2 players. Learning the aspects of a new game can significantly impact the way in which social aspect of games are experienced. First-time gamers and gamers new to the genre could experience a negative correlation with online sociality

because they are new to the genre or new to how an online game works (i.e., controls). The social network analysis in this study is limited to the fact that there is a lack of community and it would have been more beneficial to increase the length of the study from one month to three months. Increasing the length of the study would have allowed first time gamers and gamers new to the genre to create a better understanding of the sociality of the game and may have opened up an entire new list of social relationships.

Social Aspects of Gaming

As previously mentioned, current video game studies have focused on the social motivation of game play as well as social groups in virtual worlds. However, there are few studies that specifically cover the social networks of online female gaming communities. Jansz and Tanis (2007) study of online players of FPS games showed that more than 80% of respondents reported as being a part of a clan. This indicates that most of the respondents do not play in isolation. Furthermore, the authors found that amateur clan members expressed a stronger motivation for social interaction than semi-professional clan members noting that semi-professional clans provide their members with a functional social network for gaming (Jansz & Tanis, 2007). Similar results were found in Jansz and Martens (2005) study on gamers at a LAN event. The sample of 176 participants reported that more than half of the respondents actively participated in a gaming community (i.e., clan) and the social motive obtained the highest score among motives found (Jansz & Martens, 2005). Additionally, a study involving players of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) reported the highest response rate to their favorite feature of playing online games as being for social reasons

(i.e., being a member in a Guild or contact with others) (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004).

Adding to the social motivations studied in gaming, several studies have expanded on the social motivations by exploring in-game play MMOGs and MMOG communities. Chen, Sun, and Hsieh (2008) studied the hierarchical leadership structure of guilds during in-game play of online players in *World of Warcraft*. This study focused on guild members, types of members, characteristics of members as well as size and status (Chien-Hsun Chen, Chuen-Tsai Sun, & Hsieh, 2008). In comparing this to Shaw's theory of resistance, themes of self-expression, self-determination, and empowerment may show by analyzing the relationships and characteristics which could gain greater insight into hierarchical leadership structures of guilds. Similarly, a study by Cole and Griffiths (2007) explored the social interactions of gamers of popular MMORPGs. Respondents to this study reported a high percentage (74.7%) made good friend relationships and more than 80% of the respondents reported enjoyment in playing with real-life family and friends. This leaves a great opportunity to investigate the micro-level relationship ties and how they fit into the community of MMORPGs.

In analyzing the blogs of female gamers in a female gaming community as well as the gaming community's doctrines, I hope to create a better understanding, through the use of Shaw's theory of resistance, between the gaming community, social relationships of gamers, and the persistence of female gamers.

Chapter 3

Method

The design employs a qualitative methodology utilizing content analysis of gamer member blogs and clan doctrines and FAQ's through the lens of a critical perspective and feminist and resistance theory to examine how these women negotiate the identity of being a female and a video gamer in a patriarchal gaming society. The website for the PMSclan (www.pmsclan.com) is a well-known female gamer community website for gaming reviews, social networking, and gaming reviews. The website and the clan were launched in 2002 and have been increasing their member base since. The PMSclan website is a community created for the social support of female gamers at all levels of gaming. Additionally, female gamers must go through a rigorous recruitment period in order to become an official member of the PMSclan. The recruitment period consists of an application as well as tryouts. Additionally, potential official members must meet in the virtual setting of the specific game division for a minimum of 4 hours per week for practice. This recruitment period lasts for approximately 30 days, at the end of which, the leaders will decide whether the recruit is a suitable fit to be an official member of the PMSclan and will therefore add them to their ranks, or allow them to re-try. Official member of the PMSclan are considered to be elite amongst all the other members and are representatives of the community in public gaming arenas. Once the recruitment period has ended, members are then given official unique gamer tags with the PMS name (i.e. ExamplePMS) in order to be recognized amongst gamers around the world.

Sample

The sample subjects to be analyzed will be chosen from the following criteria: (1) the subject must be considered an official member of the PMSclan, (2) the subject must have gone through the recruitment process, (3) the subject must be a female, (4) the subject must have been a member for at least 4 years, (5) the subject must currently be an active member, (6) the subject must be classified as an official clan leader. The criteria were specifically chosen to identify members with the purest intentions who may have the most similar purpose of cause in direct relation to the cause of the clan founders. Throughout history many causes have been fought and those who joined the beginning of those causes show the purest intentions. Many social movement theories explain that "Social movements depend upon highly committed and engaged activists..." (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999, p. 81). Furthermore, "Public support is one of the most important resources social movements mobilize in their efforts to overcome cultural inertia and the interests of powerful actors" (Stern et al., 1999, p. 81). Additionally, these criteria cover all platforms of use by gamers including PC, Xbox, Playstation, and Wii.

Additional content analysis will be conducted on community doctrine. Doctrine in this case is classified as handbooks, rules and regulations, and frequently asked questions (FAQ's). The purpose of this is to show the initial intentions of the community and clan and how it may relate to Shaw's theory of resistance.

Procedures

The use of content analysis for this study is meant to be unobtrusive and nonreactive while being both systematic and replicable (Bernard, 2006; Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). The content analysis will include analysis of 32 PMSclan Leader

members' individual blog entries as well as analysis on clan doctrines including the official handbook, rules and regulations, and FAQ's.

Utilizing Shaw's theory of resistance, the following context units will be coded specifically for themes relating to: (1) self-expression, (2) self-determination, and (3) empowerment. These themes will be coded for directly from the data. Additionally, any other theme's that may emerge as a result of exhaustive examination of the experiences described in the text of the blogs of these female gamers will be included in the results. Only one coder will be used to analyze the data thus insuring coder reliability.

Simple descriptive statistics will be used to describe the member sample base including years as a member, any age data available, and location.

Chapter 4

Results

Sample Description

The average age posted by the gamers was 26.22 years old. The minimum age was 18 years old and the maximum age was 36 years old. No age was reported by 46% of the gamers. Many gamers reported as being from scattered areas across the United States (69%), whereas 12% were from other countries in Europe, South America, and Asia. Additionally, 19% did not report a location. The average length of membership of the gamers analyzed was 6 years 6 months, the minimum length of membership was 4 years 5 months, and the maximum length of membership of the gamers analyzed was 10 years 5 months.

Themes

Several sub-themes were found which directly reflect the three initial themes of resistance theory (self-expression, self-determination, and empowerment). These themes can be thought of as additional ways in which the women gamers and the clan itself promote resistance against the socio-political gender struggle in the male dominated society of video gaming today.

Self-expression

As discussed in the literature review, self-expression is the ability of the female gamer to express themselves freely as a form of resistance through the community blogs. In these instances, self-expression is a way of resisting the constraints which female gamers feel that society has placed on the ability of girls to play and how they play within a hyper-masculine culture. Self-expression is evident in the ways the gamers display and

express their personal feelings and ideas and how they respond to the expressions of other gamers in the blog discussion. Feelings and expressions can be seen in the ways in which gamers describe what video games mean to them and how the community has given them the strength to be themselves.

PMS Clan is here to support females in a positive environment without drama or need to attention seek. (Officer 24)

I refuse to lose! I have been in PMS since...! I may have gone casual a few times but it didn't last long!!!! I will be in PMS on my death bed! I will not lose!
(Officer 25)

In some cases, girl gamers have shown awareness of the socio-political constraints brought on through gendered stereotypes. Shaw explained resistance to leisure constraints as an important way for gamers to break through stereotypes. Just as in ways girls can play sports that were once male dominated (e.g. football, baseball, basketball, etc.).

Gaming skill has no gender. Sure more girls don't play to win and just play to have fun unlike 90% of the guys who play, but, there are girls who are at the top of the leader boards no matter who is playing. (Officer 17)

Other sub-categories found within self-expression are issues of frustration both inward and outward. Frustration can be seen within the themes of self-expression and identity. The frustration seems to stem from societal and political imbalances on the way males are treated in-game in comparison to the ways in which females are treated. Many of the frustrations come from constraints of harassment. The gamers seeking out the PMSclan

are joining for reasons of camaraderie with similar goals of rising above harassment and the "haters"(see definition) of competitive female gamers. The PMSclan community seems to promote active resistance against the frustrations that female gamers experience while gaming such as that described by Officer 28.

I'm so glad I found you guys [PMSclan]. I always kept quiet during games just because of all the heat and negative things that get said when they figure out I'm a girl. I have so much fun playing with you girls... (Officer 28)

I think the fact that I feel I have to deliver EVERY time I play online just to show that I have game is frustrating. I feels like I can't have one bad game, and if I do [that] puts me back much more then having a good game will make people look at me as a good player. Also that a lot of male gamers will always think they are better than me and that I'm always lucky if I do exceptionally good. (Officer 9)

The PMSclan provides an active place for community support of self-expression and encourages gamers to be supportive of each other. Community camaraderie is influenced through the guides and laws governing this clan and can also be seen as the heart of the community. Several examples of this encouraged support system against the engendered socio-political constraints of the gaming culture can be seen in the clan doctrines:

"Since it's inception in 2002, PMS has become one of the most recognized female oriented Clans in the world. Members from all walks of life are integrated into one community, sharing one passion – gaming." (Handbook, 2012, History section, para. 2)

"Being PMS cannot be defined by one single idea. You are a gamer, whether in first person shooters or in recreational gamers. You are a friend and sister to all gamers, regardless of gender, location, even clan affiliation." (Handbook, 2012, What does it mean to be a PMS Member section, para. 1)

"Always remember you represent every one of your fellow Clan Members in every game you play and every comment you post or make. Show respect to others, even if they do not do the [same] to you." (Handbook, 2012, Respect for Others section, para. 3)

"PMS|H2O Clan Members are expected to be respectful of not only fellow Clan Members and other members of the gaming community, but also to respect themselves." (Handbook, 2012, Always respect fellow PMS|H2O Clan Members sections, para. 1)

"PMS Clan is made up of a diverse population of women gamers from all over the world, playing on multiple platforms. We are sisters, mothers, wives, and daughters and vary in ages, ethnicity and social backgrounds. Only one common factor can be found among us: our dedication to gaming!" (FAQ, 2012, What is PMS Clan, para. 1)

In these instances, community support of self-expression is encouraged through identity (i.e. how do the gamers see themselves), respect (i.e. respect for themselves and for

others), and representation. In this case, representation is seen as a badge of honor to be a member of the PMSclan.

Self-determination

Leisure as resistance states that in order to resist the constraints experienced during leisure, leisure must be self-determined or freely chosen and the actors (gamers) must determine how they respond to constraints (Shaw, 1994). The choice of these gamers to express their personal power is seen in their choice to play highly competitive/hyper-masculine video games and to join in a community whose overall goal is to resist engendered socio-political stereotypes. Individual gamers have chosen to play video games during their leisure time and as such have the "right" to play.

Not all division members are looking to be competitive, some enjoy the social aspect while others look for more skill based practices and training. (Officer 1)

Seems to me that many of us have forgotten that we game to play and enjoy the games (&consoles). That is the reason we are gamers. (Officer 12)

There are different reasons women play games than men. Facebook games are a prime example of this where they rely on a woman's compulsion to collect (Farmville, Frontierville, etc). As much as we fight to be treated the same within games, doesn't mean everyone has the same motivations to play them. (Officer 24)

I play video games because I enjoy it. Gaming relieves my everyday stress. I want to play professionally, but I currently don't have the opportunities quite at my fingertips. Professional gaming would push me to strive for success. Because above all else, I want to help prove to everyone, especially sexist men, that women can be worthy competition when it comes to gaming. (Officer 29)

We have the same right to play video games as any guy. Its a great stress reliever and an awesome way to meet people who love the same thing you do. (Officer 17)

Although, by itself, the PMSclan cannot show self-determination, they can show support in promoting recreation and camaraderie amongst the individual gamers. This support system among the community can be seen in descriptions of identifying each individual as a part of a whole that can make a difference. In many instances the clan uses words meant to incite passion in their leisure activity promoting the identity of being a female and a gamer not just a female gamer. Additionally, the clan focuses on the individuals choice to play and joining the community in statements indicating resistance through making a difference and doing more than just playing games but also being part of a movement or a reason to rise above engendered socio-political stereotypes.

"YOU EACH have the tools, resources, and ability to personally make a difference...starting with each other and beyond." (Handbook, 2012, Hello and please allow me to say Welcome to the PMS and H2O community! section, para. 4)

"This is not just a game for me, and I pray this is not just a game for you....it should be about passion. Have passion in the belief you are supporting something greater than JUST PLAYING A GAME." (Handbook, 2012, Hello and please allow me to say Welcome to the PMS and H2O community! section, para. 5)

"Since it's inception in 2002, PMS has become one of the most recognized female oriented Clans in the world. Members from all walks of life are integrated into one community, sharing one passion – gaming." (Handbook, 2012, History section, para. 2)

"You may be a new Member, just attending orientation or a long standing Member, with years of experience behind you, but you are both here for the same reason - you believe in breaking down the long-standing stereotypes of gamers, specifically in regards to female gamers." (Handbook, 2012, What does it mean to be a PMS Member? section, para. 2)

"PMS Clan is made up of a diverse population of women gamers from all over the world, playing on multiple platforms. We are sisters, mothers, wives, and daughters and vary in ages, ethnicity and social backgrounds. Only one common factor can be found among us: our dedication to gaming!" (FAQ, 2012, What is PMS Clan? section, para. 1)

Empowerment

As previously discussed, resistance can be empowering against the gendered constraints of leisure activities. Empowerment is a political term that allows for an uprising within individuals and groups to overcome stereotypes and to reinforce and encourage the power within. The PMSclan community uses words of empowerment to give back the power to women gamers. These words give them the strength to fight for their enjoyment and equality within their chosen leisure activity of video gaming. The strength in the numbers of the community draw individual gamers to join. Additionally, the clan provides a sense of family which, in turn, empowers the individual gamers to be a support for each other.

PMS Clan is here to support females in a positive environment without drama or need to attention seek. (Officer 24)

I have been seeing so much about the PMS clan on Xbox Live I had to come check out for myself. (Officer 31)

"One thing I would like to note, PMS and H2O is more than a clan or guild, it is a family. From the newest recruit down to the original members, we share a bond that unites us across all cultural, ethnic, regional and background boundaries."

(Handbook, 2012, Letter to the Community section, para. 2)

"This is not just a game when each of you are gaining skills in teamwork, leadership, and commitment. It is not just a game when we are learning

valuable skill-sets such as time management, conflict resolution, and importance of community. It is not just a game when you can build lifetime friends—and for some of us—second families." (Handbook, 2012, Hello and please allow me to say Welcome to the PMS and H2O community! section, para. 5)

"Only one common factor can be found among us: our dedication to gaming!" (FAQ, 2012, What is PMS Clan? section, para. 1)

Acknowledgment of Gendered Constraints in Gaming

A common subtheme found in the data was that of the community acknowledgement of the gendered socio-political constraints and the reasons for persistence within the gaming culture. Several comments were made by both individual gamers and within the handbook regarding gendered inequalities and the reasons for the community to resist the common stereotypes and constraints. The industry of video gaming is well documented as being hyper-masculine and the PMSclan promotes female gamers resisting common notions of femininity in order to play extremely competitive and violent video games and enjoy their leisure time.

I know for myself, having more girls with me who know how it's like being harassed for being a female helps when gaming online. It's hard taking all the crap by yourself. So I don't see a problem encouraging girls to play together against guys, or even against each other. (Officer 9)

"PMS Clan (formerly Psychotic Man Slayerz, now Pandora's Mighty Soldiers) was born from the camaraderie of finding other girl gamers in a male dominated online gaming community." (Handbook, 2012, History section, para. 1)

"You are each helping to change a mentality in this industry, and are helping to pave the way for the next generation of women gamers, women developers, women company owners...so have passion for your own daughters of the future and support all the members who help make this possible." (Handbook, 2012, Letter to the Community section, para. 5)

"...PMS Clan is open to Members at different levels of dedication, PMS Clan remains focused on supporting female gamers in playing games considered hardcore and that are traditionally male-dominated." (Handbook, 2012, What does it mean to be a PMS Member? section, para. 3)

"Let's face it, there are tons of stereotypes that exist about female gamers running rampant in the online gaming community. We strive to combat these stereotypes by proving that girl gamers have skill, dedication, and can compete with all the guys, as well as provide a safe and fun environment. The best way to achieve these goals is to keep PMS female only." (FAQ, 2012, but why is PMS Clan female only? section, para. 1)

Community Impact on Identity

In addition to the resistance shown within the community, the community has had a direct influence on the identity of many of the female gamers. In the social networking of the community and cause and movement of which the clan represents, female gamers have been able to make an identity of what it means to be themselves as both a gamer and a female.

In the past I was often shocked of how some of my male friends could sit for hours and hours and play the same game, maybe try to get one hard mission done, and still find it fun. I would eventually get annoyed and give up. So I used to think that -maybe- males somehow had more patience when it got to gaming or something along those lines. I did spend a good amount of hours on several games, but I realized that I only really had fun in groups with people I knew. Then I joined PMS. I found out how much time I could dedicate to one game just by having a good social network. Playing co-operative or in teams with these great girls and guys made it so much more fun, and I spent hours and hours playing Halo 3. (Officer 9)

So then I found the difference between me and my male friends to be that I needed that social aspect. I still play a lot of single player games, and I used to be into FF ie. which consumes a lot of time, but I guess I'm talking more about competitive gaming. In FPS, which I still consider quite new to me, to not give up hope and to strive to get better in the competitive arena, I need a team of friends to be able to communicate and have fun with. (Officer 9)

In the words of the clan, the PMSclan is a place where females can feel safe from the gendered constraints of the video gaming culture. By using supportive and empowering words and themes, the clan has influenced the identity of many of the gamers. The PMSclan has found importance in empowering the individual and extending the strength of the family through social networking and social support. Although within the society there is a hierarchy and rules which may be in itself constraining, the overall focus and goal of the clan is "to provide a competitive, fun and positive environment to female gamers" (Handbook). Several examples exist of how the PMSclan impacts the identity of the individual gamers within the community:

"Being PMS cannot be defined by one single idea. You are a gamer, whether in first person shooters or in recreational [games]. You are a friend and sister to all gamers, regardless of gender, location, even clan affiliation. Through PMS Clan, your family is extended by hundreds of Sisters, Mothers, Daughters, Aunts, etc." (Handbook, 2012, What does it meant to be a PMS Member? section, para. 1)

Chapter 5

Discussion

As represented in the data, the female gamers represented in this study and the PMSclan promote resistance amongst its members in gaming for a cause. The findings show how being a female video gamer in a hyper-masculine gaming society is politically charged with gendered power struggles and constraints. The gamers represented found ways to overcome the constraints and struggles through joining a clan of highly competitive hard-core female gamers. The PMSclan provides a safe and empowering environment for the gamers to feel comfortable and free from harassment.

Although there are many ways in which resistance can be represented against constraints in leisure, the case of female video gamers and resistance is a particularly distinctive setting for women's resistance to gender constraints. Shaw (2001) explains resistance as an attempt by women to break down the gender-based leisure constraints they face in order to experience and enjoy the participation within their leisure activity. The most common genre played in the PMSclan is the First Person Shooter (FPS). FPS games, by definition, are highly masculine (Hayes, 2005) and violent where players can "kill" other players or NPC's, or blow up buildings, cars, etc., which are not typically considered with the common notion of femininity. As such, women are not generally seen playing games of this type. It might be considered improper of a "lady" to virtually pick off another player with a virtual sniper rifle.

The traditional notions of femininity and masculinity are well discussed in the clan doctrines. The PMSclan recognizes the inequities for girls who play video games and as a result attempt to show a community support through active incitement

statements of passion, family, and resistance. One needs only to look at the name PMS and what that means to see that the community is representing and promoting resistance. Common notions associated with the term PMS include angry premenstrual females. Using PMS in the name of their clan indicates a no-nonsense type of attitude and may also indicate an unfriendliness to the male gender. However, opposite of what the name may suggest, the clan actively promotes fairness and respect amongst their member and towards other gamers whether in the clan or not, male or female.

There are several ways in which the highly competitive female gaming community promotes resistance amongst its members. Statements of being a part of a whole, being a member of a family, and raising awareness of the inequalities in gaming are just a few ways in which resistance has been expressed. As Shaw (2001) has stated in previous literature, "resistance is both individual and collective" (p. 198). The purpose of the clan is to provide a community of collective resistance where individual acts of self-determination and self-expression provide gateways for others in similar situations of constraint in their leisure activity (Delamere & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2001; Shaw, 2007). The clan is promoting community-wide resistance through individual acts which empowers females to represent the community with the outcome of changing beliefs and values of female gamers in the gaming culture. As such, being a member of the PMSclan also means to be an active participant in supporting a cause of equality.

Throughout the website and among the individual gamers blogs, resistance can be seen in the way the individuals express themselves. Much of the displays of self-expression were backed by the fact the females playing have such a strong support system. There is a sense of pride associated with being a PMSclan member. Much of the

self-expression came in the form of frustration and this was also backed by the words of the clan in statements of righting the wrongs and overcoming the stereotypes that girls aren't strong and can't play as well as boys can. Rising above harassment was a common theme discussed amongst gamers as well as in the clan. For example, Officer 28 talked about how when she plays she felt the need to remain quiet for reasons of hearing negative comments and being virtually attacked during game play. She also stated that joining the clan allowed for her to have more fun in gaming. This is one of the reasons that PMSclan is crucial in their cause, because for the most part, individuals can easily be overlooked or discredited when trying to resist on their own, but as a group that can persist and join together in their values and beliefs for unity they are a much stronger entity. This is backed by the fact that the clan was started in 2002 by 2 women, and has grown in size and strength due to the nature of the cause and the need for social change; the clan currently has over 1250 active members with new members joining frequently.

Delamere and Shaw (2008) found that female players persisted in not being pushed out of the space that they enjoyed playing. In essence, the PMSclan is a collective shield of like minded members that protects and empowers those members as they game forward in a highly competitive masculine virtual world. "Their criticisms of traditional notions of femininity and their continuing involvement with play was a clear form of intentional resistance against the traditional ideologies of femininity" (Delamere & Shaw, 2008, p. 296). In a similar way, the female gamers of this study who have been elevated to the status of officer are actively resisting and expressing themselves against common feminine notions. In some cases, the women have felt the need to "bring it"

when playing in every game or match as stated by Officer 9 who felt she could not have even one bad game.

In addition to self-expression, resistance has been shown in the female gamers through acts of self-determination. These women are freely choosing to play. The clan encourages the individuals choice to play and be a part of the community in statements of resistance that include terms inciting "passion", "make a difference", "this is not just a game", and "dedication", just to name a few examples. For example, Officer 29 stated that she plays video games because she enjoys it and wants to help prove to sexist men that women can be worthy competition.

The clan and its members have an acute awareness of the disenfranchised female gamer and socio-political injustices of the gaming culture as a whole. Officer 9 stated that playing with other females who had also experienced harassment while gaming made gaming easier and encouraging. The focus of the PMSclan is to create awareness with the outcome of social change. As discussed in the PMSclan Handbook, "There are tons of stereotypes that exist about female gamers running...We strive to combat these stereotypes by proving that girl gamers have skill, dedication, and can compete with all the guys, as well as provide a safe and fun environment." The PMSclan uses the strength of the community as a way to empower the individual gamers. Additionally, the cause that the clan represents further incites empowerment. This empowerment of the individual gamers provides the power for the gamer to not be scared to play whether they are playing a particular game alone or with their community members.

How does this affect the identity of the female gamers? The fact that the PMSclan is female run shows a conscious socio-political choice to resist common

gendered discrimination. In a study by Delamere and Shaw (2008), they found that an all female server "created a place for resistance, where they could block gender-oriented discrimination and sexist/misogynistic behavior" (p. 296). By creating this virtual community, the PMSclan is allowing for strong and assertive game play that can be enjoyed in a safe atmosphere. As stated in the previous paragraph, the outward support of creating awareness for social change also affects the identities of the female gamers. Although the gamers come into the clan with their own values and beliefs, as many of the gamers show in the writings of their blogs, they certainly fully accept the values and beliefs of the clan and adopt them to be their own as well. This points back to Shaw's (2001) statements of resistance being individual and collective.

Conclusion

Resistance is a continual flowing concept (see Figure 1) of multiple social and personal constructs working together in order to overcome the socio-political engendered constraints within any given society or culture. In this instance the gaming culture shows how a community of female gamers can work together to create an identity for themselves while empowering others to fight against these constraints through positive acts of resistance. Additionally, it is important to note that beyond self-expression, self-determination, and empowerment, the community support and acknowledgement of gendered constraints all work together to promote resistance against stereotypes and constraints within leisure activities. These themes are not separate, but work together to form collective resistance. With these positive acts of resistance, beneficial outcomes of increased self-worth, sense of self, and understanding of identity can be seen in the writings of the individual gamers (Shaw, 2001).

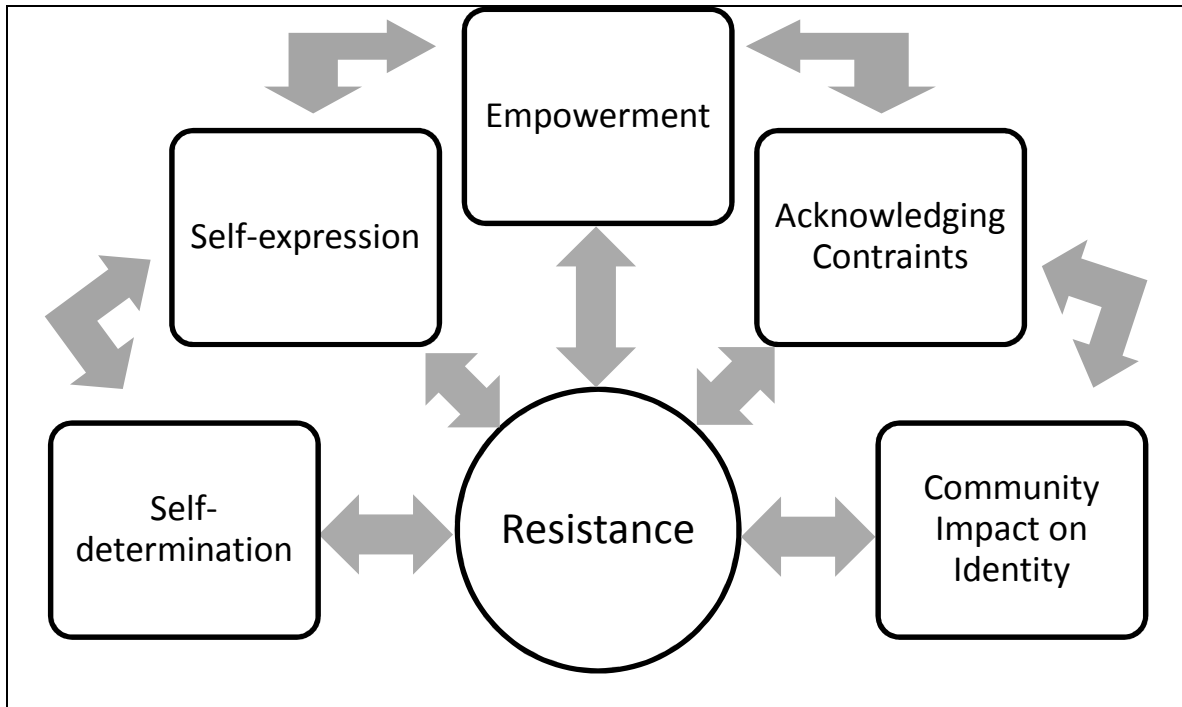


Figure 1: Resistance visualized. This figure indicates how the concepts converge together to create the global theory of resistance as a way to positively combat against socio-political constraints as well as shows how resistance incites these concepts.

Other outcomes of note are the possible effects of resistance of the PMSclan, and other female gaming clans and groups like it, on the social change of the gaming culture (Delamere & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2001). Although there are still moments of harassment and constraints while gaming, there has been an overall increase of women gamers, for example, a notable increase in female gamers can be seen from 40% of all gamers are female in 2008 to 47% of all gamers female in 2012 (Entertainment Software Association, 2008; 2012). Future research could focus on the possible outcomes of resistance of female clans on social change which may be one of the reasons behind the increase in women gamers of the last few years.

Further areas of research could focus on the sustaining of stereotypes through resistance as opposed to the challenging of the stereotypes. A possible outcome of resistance shown by the PMSclan gives way to the privileging of "masculine" ways of playing by encouraging female gamers to show strength while playing. Additionally, further research can be done on resistance during game play as shown when the community plays together. This study has shown that collective political resistance against gendered constraints while playing video games is an important part to the self-awareness and understanding of individual female gamers. Communities with a positive cause like the PMSclan will persist and will incite and encourage more female gamers and will hopefully continue to reproduce positive social change amongst the gaming community.

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