INTERSECTING OPPRESSIONS AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

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Examining the experiences of women of color in Xbox Live

Employing qualitative methods and drawing from an intersectional framework which focusses on the multiple identities we all embody, this paper focusses on oppressions experienced by women of color in Xbox Live, an online gaming community. Ethnographic observations and narrative interviewing reveal that women of color, as outsiders failing to conform to the white male norm, face intersecting oppressions in main stream gaming. They are linguistically profiled within the space based on how they sound. Specifically, Latina women within the space experience nativism, racism, sexism, and even heterosexism as many identify as sexual minorities. African-American women experience racialized sexism stemming from the duality of their ascribed identities. The women within the study have responded by segregating from the larger gaming community and have created their own clans (similar to guilds) and game with other women. The purpose of the clans depends on the type of oppressions experienced by the women within the space. This article analyzes this behavior in the context of linguistic profiling showcasing that this type of behavior can only occur within the setting of anonymity and disinhibition. With the diffusion of advanced technologies in video gaming, there has been a displacement of real world inequalities into virtuality.

Introduction

My journey begins the same as it always has, in the comfort of night with the sounds of light whirring and warmth emitting gently in my direction. It's almost soothing, white noise to a baby's ear. I continue along and enter

the world of Sera. I'm not alone. There are others who have embarked on this journey with me. We group ourselves together so we don't have to continue as individuals and become a collective, a team. We are just a group of people gathered for one cause, to save the world.

We organize ourselves for safety and many begin to talk strategy. The number one goal: stay alive! Several in the group begin talking and it's obvious one has emerged as our leader. I listen attentively and pay attention to the directions given. My first task, guard a particular area and prevent our foe from nabbing a certain weapon. My efforts were not successful. This led to the demise of my entire team, and I was disappointed I could not put up more of a fight to defeat the enemy. Fortunately for us, this magical world allows us to come back to life, giving us a chance to avenge our deaths.

We begin in another location and once again I am given instructions to help serve the team. This time, I am tasked with the safety of the leader. So I follow him and provide support. He runs naively into the opponent and I follow him as a good teammate would. This heroic attempt was foolhardy as we are flanked and killed; I am blamed for this failure once again although our team emerges victorious.

The leader begins talking rather harshly to me and is upset that I am not engaging with the team or responding to his questions. So as to not aggravate him further, I insert my microphone and begin talking. I start off by apologizing for my failures and pledge to do better. However, this conversation shifts away from my poor performance within battle to attacks against me as a person.

'Oh you guys hear this? That's why you suck. You're a fucking girl! What the fuck are you doing in my room?' Even after this initial attack, I am still apologetic hoping that the attacks will soon end (at this point, I am used to the name calling). However, the attacks get worse and other team members join in:

> Wait wait wait. You're not just any girl. You're black. Get this black bitch off my team . . . Did you spend all your welfare check buying this game? . . . Get back to your crack pipe with your crack babies.

The insults continue with a barrage of colorful stereotypical comments aimed at me as an African-American woman. The beautiful world I begin discussing is not so beautiful all the time. The journey, although mostly fun and enjoyable, frequently becomes a place full of hatred and intolerance. This journey I am referring to is the online gaming experience associated with Xbox Live – a console video game (Gray 2011, pp. 1–2). Although this is one of the most extreme displays of racially sexist speech I experienced personally, other marginalized gamers experience similar acts of racism, sexism, and other inequalities everyday inside these virtual walls.

Hegemony and identity in video games

Suler and Phillips (1998) place the blame of this type of deviant behavior on the infrastructure of many digital spaces. Specifically, chat communities are built upon certain types of software that allow for the interactive environment in which users can engage. However, those who misbehave essentially exploit the environment by utilizing sounds, visual imagery, and text abilities to harass others. In voice-based communities such as Xbox Live, there is no need to modify the infrastructure of the space to harass others (although the structure allows for it); all you have to do is speak, creating an environment that fosters linguistic profiling. Given that most digital technologies resemble real world spaces, it is easier for offline inequalities to manifest online; as Nakamura (2002) suggests, gender, class, and race hierarchies have been carried onto the internet. So even though a user may be able to leave the body behind when entering cyberspace, the real body still lingers – creating a racialized or gendered cybertype, and our 'fluid selves are no less subject to cultural hegemonies, rules of conduct and regulating cultural norms than are solid ones' (Nakamura 2002, p. 325). Kolko (2000) reinforces Nakamura's argument where she suggests that there is an inherent desire to ignore race and ethnicity in virtual worlds. She notes that the default ethnicity on most Multi User Domains (MUD) is set to White creating a default whiteness for virtual worlds (p. 216), replicating real world spaces where unmarked whiteness is the cultural norm. Additionally, massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) such as EverQuest II and World of Warcraft have actually seen the disappearance and omission of blackness from these kinds of virtual fantasy worlds.

EverQuest, an MMORPG that features a Black race of playable characters, succeeded in incorporating Black bodies into game play. However, the Erudites, the Black race, were from a segregated continent that was smaller, less appealing, and far less populated than the White continent. When EverQuest II was released, the Erudite (Black) race had evolved into a 'skeletal, Caucasoid' that was 'vaguely extraterrestrial' (Higgin 2009, p. 14). This hegemonic change re-privileged whiteness, as the narrative deployed was the devaluing of one race over another.

Kolko (2000) found it surprising that in a space that dramatized other aspects of identity such as gender and class, ethnicity was shockingly absent from most massively multiplayer online games (MMO). Debunking utopic assumptions of virtual space, Kolko argues that the internet is far from liberatory but rather a space that continues a 'cultural map of assumed whiteness' (p. 225). Kolko rightly points out that when there is an attempt to make race and ethnicity present, it is met with resistance. Additionally, as Higgin (2009) states:

> The White dominance of gamespace has been recast as a racially progressive movement that ejects race in favor of a default, universal whiteness and has been ceded, in part, by a theoretical tendency to embrace passing and

anonymity in cyberspace. When politically charged issues surface that reveal the embedded stereotypes at work amid an ostensibly colorblind environment, they are quickly de-raced and cataloged as aberrations rather than analyzed as symptomatic of more systemic trends. (pp. 7–8)

As Leonard also found within discourses on Grand Theft Auto, there is a complete lack of interest in discussing racist content in these racialized games. Blackness in MMORPG's is intentionally ignored to avoid critical issues associated with the other. This hegemony of play, as Fron *et al.* (2007) term, perpetuates the exclusion of communities as is seen in the offline world, a manifestation of real world inequalities.

Online disinhibition fuels virtual inequality

Deviance within virtual communities has been documented by scholars for years. For instance, Richard Bartle was one of the earliest scholars to provide a systematic overview of the killer, a type of user within a MUD. The killer derives enjoyment by imposing his/her self on others by player killing. As Bartle found, the more distress killers cause, the greater the killer's joy (Bartle 1996). Since Bartle's Taxonomy, others have expanded upon negative player interaction.

Griefing is another form of deviance within virtual communities and has been defined as the intentional harassment of other players within the game (Foo & Koivisto 2004; Smith 2004; Lin & Sun 2005; Warner & Raiter 2005; Myers 2007). Griefers are players who derive their enjoyment not from playing the game but from causing other gamers to become distracted during game play (Foo & Koivisto 2004).

Flaming is an additional form of player deviance and is similar to griefing. It refers to negative antisocial behaviors, including the expression of hostility, the use of profanity, and the venting of strong emotions (Thompsen 2003, p. 331). However, the only definition from the vast literature on flaming that comes close to what is experienced within Xbox Live comes from Dorwick who defines flaming as the spontaneous creation of homophobic, racist, and misogynist language during electronic communication (as cited in Thompsen 2003, p. 331). Suler and Phillips (1998) examine the overt presence of this type of speech in online spaces and found that anonymous spaces actually foster this type of environment. Anonymity on the internet disinhibits people, compelling some to say and do things that they would not otherwise do. This disinhibition can work in two ways – benign and toxic. Users who display benign disinhibition show unusual acts of kindness and generosity (Suler 2004). On the other hand, toxic disinhibition occurs when users employ 'rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, and even threats' (Suler 2004, p. 321). There are six factors that interact to lead to

online disinhibition: (1) dissociative anonymity; (2) invisibility; (3) asynchronicity; (4) solipsistic introjections; (5) dissociative imagination; and (6) minimization of status and authority. I will briefly discuss each one below.

Dissociative anonymity refers to the ability to hide your identity in online spaces. Anonymity is a principle factor leading to the disinhibition effect because users can separate their online actions from their real world selves. Whatever they say and or do can not be linked to them in the real world. Some individuals may even justify their actions by convincing themselves that they are not connected to the online persona at all.

Online environments also allow users the opportunity to be invisible as they move in and out of web sites, message boards, and sometimes chat rooms. This invisibility gives users the courage to say and do things they may not normally do. In some online spaces, your identity may be known but being 'physically invisible amplifies the disinhibition effect' (Suler 2004, p. 322).

Asynchronicity is one factor that does not directly apply to the Xbox Live community. Asynchronicity implies that communication does not occur in real time in online spaces. This is sometimes true in email and message boards where it can take minutes, hours, days or months for a reply. As Suler (2004) explains, not having to deal with someone's immediate reaction disinhibits people. However, one communication option in Xbox Live that most users employ is real time chat – synchronous communication; however, invisibility and anonymity still lead users to engage in toxic disinhibition.

Solipsistic introjection implies that the lack of face to face cues or textual communication can 'alter self-boundaries' (Suler 2004, p. 323). What this means is that a user within an online space will create a character based on the online cues present within the online space. The person may create a visual image and create a voice of the other person oftentimes filling in blanks of the other person with false information or information from their own life. Essentially the other person becomes a player in your imagination or fantasy world. Suler (2004) suggests that cyberspace may become a stage where we are merely players in other people's worlds.

Dissociative imagination is the disconnect that occurs when we view the online world as a make-believe space. Some cyberspace users separate their online lives from their offline selves suggesting that their online life is a game where the rules do not apply to real life (Suler 2004):

> Once they turn off the computer and return to their daily routine, they believe they can leave behind that game and their game-identity. They relin-quish their responsible for what happens in a make-believe play world that has nothing to do with reality. (Suler 2004, p. 323)

This occurs more easily in fantasy game environments where an imaginary char-acter is played by a user. Also this factor may not be as prevalent in a real-time

voiced-based community such as Xbox Live. But without direct testing of these factors, this cannot be confirmed.

The last factor, minimization of status and authority, reflects the reality of many online spaces – the absence of a suitable guardian supervising the space. As Suler (2004) explains, authority figures usually 'express their status and power in their dress, body language, and in the trappings of their environmental settings' (p. 324). The absence of the traditional cues reduces the impact of authority in digital spaces. Even when authority figures are known to users, the lack of physical presence and cues diminishes their power within the space. This is true for Xbox Live. Authorities appear usually when a complaint is filed – and this does not occur at every instance. Suler (2004) further argues that people are disinhibited with the absence of an authority figure leading them to speak out and misbehave. By posing the question, does greater anonymity result in greater deviance, Suler and Phillips (1998) answer 'yes', suggesting that this increased anonymity allows a person to release their deviant side.

Linguistic profiling

Because the Xbox Live space allows for real time, voice communication, much of the racism and sexism that emerge stem from linguistic profiling. Similar to racial profiling, linguistic profiling occurs when auditory cues as opposed to visual cues are used to confirm and/or speculate on the racial background of an individual (Baugh 2003). Scholars have long studied linguistic stereotypes, finding discrimination based on accents and dialects against speakers of various ethnic backgrounds. What is seen in the American context is that voice discrimination and linguistic profiling used as effective means to filter out specific individuals. For instance, the executive director of the National Fair House Alliance noted that insurance companies, mortgage companies, and other financial institutions may refuse to extend services to you if you sound Black or Mexican. Now this discrimination is more subtle as they will not come out and say it to you directly, but rather they will not return your phone call or respond to written correspondence (Baugh 2003).

Within the virtual world, Joinson (2001) suggests that the anonymous spaces of the internet compel users to disclose personal information about themselves knowing that the party on the other end will never find out the true identity. However, in virtual communities where voice can be heard, much of our personal information is automatically emitted into virtuality. Voice-based communities are unique from their text counterparts. Text-based communities rely on users to type information or upload textual information. In voice-based communities, certain information is revealed automatically when someone speaks. In the current study, the virtual community under investigation is a voice- and text-based community with many users employing the voice option to communicate.

Although some users may have the ability to alter the voice, the console does not automatically come with this feature. So your real world voice can be heard. As many women and people of color explain, this mere technological advance creates the most havoc in their virtual lives – racism and sexism.

In sum, virtual gaming spaces have been constructed as White, masculine power structures having hegemonic control with the ability to reproduce dominant ideology. Xbox Live is one such community that will be examined for its potential to deploy this ideology. While evidence of these oppressive structures has been established, Microsoft has yet to admit there is a problem within the space creating isolation for many marginalized bodies within the space. Given that, I am guided by the following research question:

1. How significant is the voice in fostering linguistic profiling and creating an inequitable space for marginalized bodies?
2. How have women of color as a marginalized population within this online gaming community responded to dominant narratives and social inequalities present within the space?

I hypothesize that the women within this study experience multiple oppressions within this virtual gaming community based merely on how they sound and will respond in a manner that reflects resistance and survival tactics displayed by marginalized women in the real world.

Methodology

The current study employed commonly used ethnographic methods as outlined by Prus (1996): participant observations and narrative interviewing. Adhering to the principles of ethnography, my hope was to examine observable patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life by immersing myself into the day-to-day activities of the community. Because I studied a variety of communities comprising females of all colors, I was able to create a multi-site ethnography (Hine 2000). In conducting all of the research, I had a first hand, day-to-day view of the Xbox Live culture as well as a segment of its members for a period of seven months.

The sample was drawn from the Xbox Live community and of all the individuals who agreed to participate, only 12 were able to be included in the study (given the nature of gaming, many individuals were under the age of 18 and were excluded). The original participant solicitation only generated three interviews but I relied on snowball sampling to collect a larger population. Although this is a rather small sample, this is an unknown population and the research is merely exploratory. This research was used as a baseline to measure the experiences of women within Xbox Live. The data-gathering process comprised individual and group interviews about identity, linguistic profiling, and inequalities

TABLE 1 Demographic summary.

Gamertag	Age/gender	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Clan name
MissUnique	28/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
ThugMisses	31/F	AfrAmer	Hetero	Conscious Daughters
cdXFemmeFataleXcd	29/F	AfrAmer	Bisexual	Conscious Daughters
ShedaBoss	26/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
MizzBoss917	23/F	Latina	Lesbian	Puerto Reekan Killaz
XpkX RicanMami	23/F	Latina	Lesbian	Puerto Reekan Killaz
XpkX MammaMia	20/F	Latina	Lesbian	Puerto Reekan Killaz
YeahSheBlaze	19/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Puerto Reekan Killaz
Patroa917	22/F	Latina	Bisexual	Puerto Reekan Killaz
BossMama	22/F	AfrAmer	Lesbian	Puerto Reekan Killaz
xxxTooTrill4uxxx	21/F	AfrAmer	Hetero	MM
UReady4War2	26/F	AfrAmer	Bisexual	MM

and oppressions in Xbox Live. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was granted prior to conducting any interviews.

Results and analysis

The data within this study were collected from the interviews of twelve women – eight African-American and four Puerto Rican although they all identified racially as Black. Descriptive information on these women is listed in Table 1 (pseudonyms were created to not reveal actual gamertags although my actual gamertag is used within this paper).

These women had grouped themselves into clans within Xbox Live. A clan is similar to a guild as seen in computer gaming and is a group of players who play together in online gaming. Many clans coordinate matches to play other clans and log their scores into online scoring systems. From my observations, this coordinated activity does not occur in all games and is seen most often in first and third person shooter games such as Gears of War and Call of Duty (all installments).

Many game researchers have studied the motivation behind joining guilds and clans within online gaming and found that most players join guilds to strategize within the game and complete difficult objectives (Ducheneaut *et al*. 2007); guilds are also very popular given that Seay *et al*. (2004) found that 78 percent of online gamers were members of guilds. Guilds/clans are not organized in this manner within Xbox Live and clan membership is not imperative to completing objectives. However, from my observations, clan membership is imperative to women in Xbox Live to ensure a positive gaming experience.

All the participants agreed that the problem within Xbox Live is based on linguistic profiling although they did not employ this term. They suggested that when a motivated offender hears a female or a Black sounding individual, then that motivated offender would begin a process leading to acts of racism, sexism, and other inequalities.

Linguistic profiling and intersecting oppressions

> *RQ1: How significant is the voice in fostering linguistic profiling and creating an inequitable space for marginalized bodies?*

From my observations and interviews, Black women in Xbox Live experience discriminatory acts resulting from the label of deviance placed upon their ascribed identities as recognized through their voice. Once their voices are heard within the space, they experience inequalities. Additionally, these women perceive males as the oppressor to avoid and White women as passive bystanders not understanding of their own victimization. Many women respond to males by avoiding and self-segregating or by engaging in griefing behavior if they encounter a male; however, this griefing behavior was not at all organized or collective. Furthermore, their actions were largely dependent on their clan membership.

As I began systematically studying the organization of different clans, I uncovered many important features of the clan I am a member of, Conscious Daughters, which forced me to check my assumptions about the experiences of women of color within Xbox Live. Most importantly, many women in Xbox Live were not aware of their own marginalization within the space although many women created their own gaming spaces within Xbox Live to avoid gamers who may engage in racist or sexist language. When Conscious Daughters became aware of the marginalization of women of color within Xbox Live, they made it their purpose to reveal this marginalization to other gamers in Xbox Live. However, the purpose was lost many times as the following dialog between me (*Mzmygrane*) and *MissUnique*, an original member of Conscious Daughters, will reveal:

> *Mzmygrane:* Earlier you said that Black women in Xbox live had a slave mentality – that they didn't know they were free. Now we laughed when you said this, but what did you mean?
>
> *MissUnique:* You know exactly what I mean. It's like the woman who gets beat and never leaves her husband. She doesn't see anything wrong or she is so powerless she thinks she can't do nothing about it. I think people have slave mentalities when they experience something bad but don't do nothing about it. And white folks can have slave mentalities too.
>
> *Mzmygrane:* Do you have any specific examples from your experiences gaming in Xbox?

> *MissUnique:* Hell yeah! I got a fucking ton of 'em. You remember when we were playing that one clan, *Hot Girls* or *Hot Bitches* or some shit like that?
>
> *Mzmygrane:* Yeah
>
> *MissUnique:* Well I friended a couple of them and started private chatting with one. Well she was talking shit about us saying we wasn't that good and we make women in Xbox live look bad. So you know I was pissed especially when I'm trying to just reach out to make some new friends. And I told her we just like getting on to have fun. We aint hard core gamers or nothing like that we just like to chill with 'ar [our] folks. So she said that they practice wit dudes to make them better and I went into the whole spill about how we don't really fuck with dudes no more in here and I told her why. I told her I was tired of being called bitch, black bitch, dyke bitch, or any variation of bitch. She told my black ass to deal wit it. That's just how it is. She tried to tell me I was being too got damn sensitive. And I told her she was a fuckin dumbass. So we went on and on with that for a while then she said we were better than them cuz we in college and shit. So she took that shit to a whole 'notha level.
>
> *Mzmygrane*: Oh this was the girl that called us sell outs cuz we sound white?
>
> *MissUnique:* Yeah that bitch. So to me, she looking at the wrong shit. She so focused on us that she ignoring who the problem is.

Our initial experiences with other women of color stemmed from our failure to address the privilege of our ascribed identities: educated, mostly heterosexual, and White-sounding. Personally, I neglected the fact that I embody virtual whiteness so being critical of hegemonic whiteness to others posed a problem. But aside from that oversight, this excerpt illustrates the failure of many women to see, recognize, and address the inequalities they experience within Xbox Live. The focus immediately went to the privileges held by other women as opposed to the privilege of being a male within the space. As *MissUnique* pointed out, the woman she encountered could not see that males posed a problem within the space. Further, many women directed their anger within the space towards one another as opposed to directing their energy towards males within the space. Many women within the study directed their energy towards those with privileged identities as the following discussion of Puerto Reekan Killaz will explain.

The Puerto Reekan Killaz created a space that is essentially free from racism, sexism, heterosexism, and nativism. To ensure this space stays safe, they are strict in who they friend and let become a member of their clan. Even more importantly, these women are critical of anyone who does not understand

their struggles as Latinas and will avoid these individuals. This may seem rather discriminatory but it is an appropriate response for them to deal with their negative experiences. It is similar to women avoiding sexist men or Black's avoiding racist Whites. These women also avoid African-Americans who are insensitive to their citizenship status although they are US citizens. From my observations and interviews with Puerto Reekan Killaz, I found that their intersecting experiences were amplified by not just their gender and race, but also by their citizenship and linguistic (in)abilities.

> *XpkX RicanMami:* All I know is that only people just like you understand you. So there's no way you can understand where we coming from. Now I know you being African-American and all you understand some of the struggle. But since we Latina as well, we got added shit to deal with. Again, not to take away nothin' from you as a Black woman. Ok? So don't get mad, I'm just being real like you want me to right?
>
> *Mzmygrane:* Yes that's all I want. Digame. Let it out. Tell me how you feelin.
>
> *XpkX RicanMami:* . . . the point I was makin first is that people look at me and assume I'm not American. They think I'm a fucking illegal just cuz I'm Latina. So I got the race thing, the gender thing, and the citizenship thing to deal wit.
>
> *Mzmygrane:* I feel you. Language too.
>
> *XpkX RicanMami:* Shit yeah you right. Just cuz I talk with an accent people think I can't speak English good. I just wish more Blacks would understand where we comin from. We aint trying to take over as the most oppressed. Ain't no damn contest who the most fucked up minority is in this country. We all fucked up. I just wish people would recognize that we got it hard too. Especially Black people.

From their experiences, they recognized the inability of males and other ethnic minorities to empathize with their experiences within the space. Individuals with privileged identities oftentimes take their privilege for granted. African-Americans have the privilege of citizenship over ethnic minorities who migrate from black and brown countries. This privilege leads to incidences of oppression in some cases as is seen above.

The ideological framework of Militant Misses (MM) is a major shift from the other clans within the study. As women of color, they would rather play with males and endure racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other inequalities. MM explain that these acts of hate are a part of the gaming experience and women like me were too sensitive and should not be playing if I could not endure the hardships of the male space.

The members of MM have a unique standpoint and although it varies from other women, it is not an unreasonable stance to take. No one wants to be referred to in a racist or sexist manner and they have figured out a way to avoid that. By excelling in the game, they have shifted the conversation so the focus is on the game – not who's playing the game. However, the process involved to reach this point is problematic. The approach taken by the MM places the onus of the deviant body on women and places the burden of reducing inequalities in the space on us as well. Another interesting point to note is that no member of MM had a gender signifier in their gamertag further reducing their association with female gamers. The women within this clan did not share prior stories of discrimination with me as they refused to discuss that aspect of gaming. They did not engage in questions I had on identities or oppressions and would only answer questions related to the game. The members who did participate were once members of Conscious Daughters. As a favor, they conducted the interviews although they would not let me engage in this type of conversation with other members of MM.

When asked the question 'what could be done about inequalities within the space', the MM responded saying that increased gaming skills would reduce instances of hate within Xbox. The following conversation outlines their stance:

UReady4War2: Now mzmygrane, when you gon join our clan? I see you getting better?

Mzmygrane: Nah I'm good. I remember playing wit yall one time and yall got mad at me cuz I couldn't get no kills.

UReady4War2: (Laughing) Well you got yo' game up now, so you don't have to worry about that.

Mzmygrane: But that's what I've been trying to ask you. Why is that so important to yall?

UReady4War2: Because we won't be taken seriously – duh.

Mzmygrane: Taken seriously by who?

UReady4War2: Dudes.

Mzmygrane: Why is that so important to you? Do you feel you need a man to confirm who you are?

UReady4War2: Hell naw.

Mzmygrane: Then what is it. Explain it to me. Your entire thought process. Why yall practice so much. Why you so mean to the girls? Why yall won't play other girl clans?

UReady4War2: Ok ok ok chill. Everytime I talk to you, you always bringing up how women aint taken seriously. You always bring up all that racist and sexist shit. But you know they only bring that up when they aint got nothing else to talk about. Seriously, kiki, if you pay attention to when men do all that shit talking to yall, its because yall pissed them off by sucking

(*begins laughing*). Nah I'm just joking, kinda. But we aint had no dudes talk shit to us like that in a long time. They still talk shit, but they be mad that we just whooped dey ass in the game. We make them mad. They don't make us mad anymore.

Mzmygrane: But why are you so hard on women who just want to play for fun – like me?

UReady4War2: Because there is a solution. There's a way to not experience all that negative shit. Just get better at the game. Why wouldn't you do that?

Mzmygrane: Because I shouldn't have to. Guys don't have this burden. We do. And you are putting it back on us to deal with the burden. We're not the problem. They are.

UReady4War2: Fair enough. Just be ready to still be called bitch (*laughing*).

The MM did not enjoy being oppressed within the space and had identified a means to avoid inequalities. However, as is outlined in the above excerpt, the responsibility falls upon women to alleviate the oppressions.

The women of Puerto Reekan Killaz also discussed the heterosexism they experienced by Black males. From conversations witnessed during my observations, many Black males assume that many female gamers are lesbian and tailor their speech to match this assumed view. Even though the Latina women in the study did identify as sexual minorities, there is no way to know that in the space. Preview the following excerpt to gain additional understanding:

XpkX RicanMami: Dey assume dat we lesbians.

XpkX MammaMia: Bitch we are.

(*all laughing*)

XpkX RicanMami: But dey don't know dat. Dey assume dat because we don't take no shit from dem. If you a strong black woman den you gotta be lesbian.

YeahSheBlaze: The fact dat dey can't control us make dem mad. So they start disrespectin us and we talk shit back. I tell dem dat I can fuck dey bitch or my bitch look better and dat make dem so mad.

XpkX MammaMia: You right. Dats why dey get mad. They feel like we takin dey manhood.

This excerpt reflects the continued view of many Black men and their fear of their manhood being usurped by Black women. Going back to traditional Black feminism, Black males were hesitant to incorporate Black women into the liberation movements as they viewed racism as the loss of manhood without considering the sexist experiences of Black women. Chicana feminists experienced a similar conflict as they were asked to vow loyalty to the culture

as opposed to being asked to embrace their racialized, gendered realities (Nieto Gomez 1997; Roth 2004). Even more disturbing, Conscious Daughters explained how many Black males are inclusive of women but only when they agree to fill a subservient role. There is an inherent desire for women to serve as mascots – reflecting an inferior view of women within this space. This is also a perspective seen in other areas of life as well, especially in male dominated spaces. The participants were not willing to be submissive and refused to be continued victims of discrimination which also impacted their decisions to create their own spaces. The above conversation also introduced the view of White women within the space. I was disheartened that no White women agreed to participate within this study to give voice to their own experiences within Xbox Live. But the women within the study did not shy away from discussing their opinion of White women within the space.

From what the participants reveal, White women either do not view their experiences in the space as sexist or do not acknowledge it. They accept it as part of gaming in the male universe, very similar to MM. Many women within the study also realized the problem associated with unifying as a female collective recognizing that White women are not entirely comfortable in the racialized gendered space that also frequently doubles as Black lesbian space – similar to the failure to unify during early feminist movements. Audre Lorde (2001) realized that the only way to build community and raise consciousness is to embrace each other's differences. This failure is also present within the Xbox Live community. The participants could not understand why White women would not want join their gaming world as opposed to subjecting themselves to discrimination. But the Black women were not a unified group either and did not recognize this contradiction. But from the Black female perspective, White women encourage their own victimization by continuing to engage with their oppressors.

Several women within the Conscious Daughters clan created two ways to explain White women's interactions with males within Xbox Live: tokens or trophies. From their view, trophies were attractive women that gamed with males but were mostly an invisible population. But when they do speak, they become immediate victims of sexual harassment and other acts of sexism. Tokens were viewed as females whose gaming skills were superb but were exploited at the hands of her male counterparts. They were bragging points for males within the space. From what the participant suggested, the women were proud to be viewed as equals to males and assumed that the exploitation was just a part of being 'one of the guys'.

From the interviews, many White women within the space refused to see males as the dominant oppressor. But White women did not in turn become the oppressor as was seen during the feminist movements (Roth 2004; hooks 2009). Black women stated emphatically that White women never discriminated against them because of their race nor did they use racist language towards them.

The Black women within the space only experienced racism and/or sexism at the hands of males – Black and White – within the space.

Conclusions and future directions

This project originated from my personal experiences with racism and sexism within Xbox Live as the opening narration revealed. Because many game scholars have taken a utopic or neutral approach to virtual communities, there has not yet been a critical study to document the negative experiences of marginalized bodies within virtual communities. Black feminist standpoint theory as well as intersectional theory were utilized to give voice and meaning to the complex issues of race, racism, gender, sexism, and other 'isms' that exists in virtual communities. Linguistic profiling was also used as a means to understand the origins of the inequalities within the space.

The findings from my research indicate that there is a need to critically assess the experiences of non-traditional gamers in online communities. First, stakeholders (Microsoft, game developers, marketing industry) need to recognize the diversity of its console gaming population. They must also recognize that members of the default gaming population are deploying hegemonic whiteness and masculinity to the detriment of non-white and/or non-male users within the space. Before discussions on how to counteract racism and sexism can ensue, these things must be acknowledged especially given the popularity of Xbox Live.

Scholarship must also move beyond the utopic view of online communities recognizing anonymity can no longer be fully achieved. Advanced technology within Xbox Live allows for gamers to hear one another (voice chats) and see one another as well (video chat). Identities can also be linked to the avatar although many gamers can opt for the avatar to bear no resemblance to the true self. As has been disseminated in the literature, there is this mythical idea that the internet can help solve all of society's problems. The 'No one knows you're a dog' line has been overplayed and disputed on several occasions. But as Everett identifies with her research on Black women organizing in virtual space, the potential for positive change is there (Everett 2009). But within this online gaming space, who is responsible for ensuring equality? Audre Lorde discusses the problem with the view that women are responsible for extending their own equality which was a stance taken by many women within this study, namely the MM:

> Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear it is the task of women of Color to educate white women-in the face of tremendous resistance-as to our

existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a
diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. In
light of these facts, the women decided to forge their own movement, the
Black Feminist Movement. (Lorde 2001, p. 27)

Lorde has accurately assessed what occurred with many Black women within the
Xbox Live gaming space. Noting Lorde, many gamers suggested that it was not
their responsibility to have the normative gamer notice her within the gaming
spaces. Nor does she feel it is her responsibility to educate White women on
sexism. Because they are the continual victims of intersecting oppressions
within the Xbox Live gaming space, many refuse to be continued victims.

Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's work, the women in this study have
understood their oppressed status and have made sense of their experiences.
This actually negates the prevailing view held of oppressed groups – that they
identify with the powerful and have no valid interpretation of their own oppres-
sion (Collins 1998). This view also holds that the oppressed are less human than
their rulers and are incapable of articulating their own standpoint (Collins 1998).
As Collins confirms, Black women have refused to become victims and have
resisted becoming passive bystanders. This resiliency continues throughout the
lives of Black women and they have translated this to the online gaming space
of Xbox Live.

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Kishonna L. Gray is a Lecturer in the Department of Criminal Justice at Eastern Kentucky University. She received her PhD in Justice Studies at Arizona State University with an emphasis on identities, inequalities, and new media. She has conducted research on the racialization of disaster myths during Hurricane Katrina, social inequalities in online communities, online resistance strategies, and she is currently developing a Black cyber feminist theory to understand the experiences and responses of women of color online. She has published in a variety of outlets including *Crime, Media, Culture* and the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. Her current research trajectories surround the status degradation of social media as well as racialized rhetoric surrounding SB1070 and SB6, state level immigration legislation. *Address*: Department of Criminal Justice, Eastern Kentucky University, 521 Lancaster Avenue, Stratton 467, Richmond 40475, KY, USA. [email: kishonna.gray@eku.edu]