TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY:

NON/PARTICIPATION IN EVE ONLINE

KELLY MARIE BERGSTROM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, CANADA

SEPTEMBER 2015

Abstract

This dissertation addresses a gap in the academic study of digital games whereby investigations remain focused on current players and the experiences of former or non-players are rarely accounted for. Using *EVE Online* (EVE), a massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) known for its difficult learning curve and homogenous community as a case study, I conducted an investigation of who does/does not play this particular game and their stated reasons for playing or not. I argue that while EVE is positioned in the MMOG market as a "sandbox" style game where in-game activities are only limited by a player's imagination, in reality only a very particular type of play (and player) is publically acknowledged by EVE's developer (CCP Games), the gaming enthusiast press, and academics investigations of this game, emphasizing just how little is known about who plays EVE beyond the stereotypical imagined player.

Drawing on literature from leisure studies to articulate a framework for exploring barriers/constraints to gameplay and theoretically informed by feminist theories of technology, I conducted an Internet-based survey to capture the thoughts and experiences of current, former, and non-EVE players. A total of 981 participants completed the survey. In my analysis of open-ended responses, I found that current players described the game in a way that emphasized its exceptionality, relied heavily on jargon, and assumed their reader was already familiar with EVE, its player community, and its surrounding norms and conventions. Non-players who were familiar with the game described their perceptions of EVE being an unwelcoming community meant they had opted out of playing without ever downloading the trial. Former players fell into three groupings: ex-players who had permanently quit EVE, a group who want to play

but felt forced to take a temporary break due to external constraints (e.g. exams at school or financial limitations), and a third group would consider returning if changes to their personal circumstances and/or the game happened in future. Ultimately this research complicates what it means to play or not play MMOG, opening up avenues for future research about how access and barriers to digital game play inevitably shift over time.

Acknowledgements

Without Jennifer Jenson's tireless support and expertise in navigating the most frustrating administrative hurdles, this dissertation would not exist. No matter how far down a bunny trail I would go, Dr. Jenson managed to get me back on track and made sure I crossed the finish line in one piece and she played an important role in my successes in obtaining Ontario Graduate Scholarship and Social Science and Humanities Research Council funding to support the writing of this dissertation. Working with Dr. Jenson has shown me how much labour goes into being a dissertation supervisor and I hope one day I will be able to pay it forward. Thank you.

Celia Pearce and Chloë Brushwood Rose pushed me to think about my research in new ways and remind me that there would be light at the end of this tunnel. My supervisory committee felt like the dream team, thank you for joining me on this wild adventure through New Eden.

Mia Consalvo, my external examiner, was in the audience at one of my very first conference presentations about *EVE Online*. At that meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers, Dr. Consalvo asked me to articulate how the study of *EVE Online* can push game studies forward. Five years and 200+ pages later, here is an answer to that question.

To all of my participants, thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences. This dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I have been fortunate to meet so many amazing, smart, and generous people along this journey. Many years ago Richard Smith and J. Adam Holbrook supervised my

undergraduate honours thesis about *World of Warcraft*, setting me on my path to graduate school. Richard Hawkins and Patrick Feng supervised my MA thesis about the same MMOG, and provided space in the Innovation Lab for me to articulate my growing interest in EVE. Fern Delamere first introduced me to leisure studies, and I am sad that she is not here to see how influential her work has been to my own. Nick Taylor and Suzanne de Castell, along with Jennifer Jenson, hired me to work on the VERUS project and so much of that work helped to shape my thinking about EVE. Stephanie Fisher, Felan Parker, Alison Harvey, Maren Hancock, and the rest of the VERUS RA team, thank you for the amazing memories. Long live Guardian Academy.

Despite EVE having a reputation as being a cutthroat game, the community who researches it is the most cooperative, kind, and friendly group of game scholars I know. Marcus Carter, Darryl Woodford, Cat Goodfellow, and every author on the table of contents for *Internet Spaceships are Serious Business*, I look forward to all of our future collaborations.

There are so many people who deserve thanks and I wish I could name them all. This will be an incomplete list, please forgive me Florence Chee, thank you for being there whenever I needed to Skype, the silly cat pictures when I needed a laugh, and reminding me that above all "I need dis". Christopher Paul, Mark Chen, Todd Harper, TL Taylor, Adrienne Shaw, Shira Chess, and so many more amazing scholars I have met at the Association of Internet Researchers, you have all inspired me. I often describe AoIR as my "summer camp" and every year in October it truly feels like I'm returning to my scholarly home. I also want to thank my fellow Oxford Internet Institute attendees for voting me "most likely to be the next Judy Wajcman" – I hope this dissertation is

worthy of that honour. Renee, Megan, Angela, Crystal, Emily, Dennys, Jennifer, and anyone else on the Snark Squad that I am missing, I look forward to when our paths will cross again. Jane Griffith and Cristyne Hebert, thank you for being my library buddies and not actually making me go on that Jim Brickman cruise. I'm so happy that we are all crossing the finish line together. Jenn, Paul, Beth, and the rest of the jerks: thank you for making *World of Warcraft* fun again.

And of course I thank my family for their constant and unwavering support. Whether it was on the dusty Intellivision or the Sega Game Gear he somehow managed to procure, my brother, Skylar, always let me have a turn to play. Now that you are a father I am so happy to see that Devyn has inherited your love of games. My parents, Dorothy and Richard, always encouraged me to further my education. You can now say that you have TWO doctors in the family.

Finally, I must thank my husband, Richard Hydomako. Every time I wanted to quit, he was quick to remind me that I wouldn't let him abandon his PhD so I had to finish my own. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) are a genre of digital games in which thousands of players participate simultaneously in a shared, persistent online world.[1] The popularity of MMOGs has led some educational researchers to argue that the inclusion of these games (and games broadly defined) as part of curriculum design is an ideal way to motivate students who do not find traditional classroom learning engaging (Gee, 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Prensky, 2001a, 2006; Squire, 2011; Steinkuehler et al., 2011; Steinkuehler, Alagoz, King, & Martin, 2012). The extremely successful commercial MMOG *World of Warcraft* has been used in educational settings to provide students an opportunity to learn how to conduct ethnographic research (Delwiche, 2006), to improve their technical writing skills (Shultz Colby & Colby, 2008), to practice a second language (Suh, Kim, & Kim, 2010; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009), and to promote civic education (Curry, 2010). Perhaps the best example of how this shift towards game-based learning has captured the imagination of educators is the "*World of Warcraft* in School" project,[2] a collaborative website providing templates and a place for teachers to share in-class activities, assignments, and ideas about assessment using this MMOG.

A theme running through discussions about learning and MMOGs is the idea that games are a powerful educational tool because they are compelling to students who were raised in an increasingly technologically mediated environment. The idea that most

---

[1] A discussion about vocabulary and abbreviations used throughout this dissertation are compiled in Appendix A.
[2] More information about the *World of Warcraft* in School project can be found online at http://wowinschool.pbworks.com/w/page/5268731/FrontPage

youth can be classified as "digital natives"[3] (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2001b, 2001c) or that today's youth belong to the "net generation" (Tapscott, 1998, 2009) is built on the assumption that because youth are growing up surrounded by digital technology, they will be more comfortable interacting with current technologies, and they will be better suited to learning new digital skills than someone who was introduced to technology later in life. In order to address the unique skills and needs of this new generation of students, the argument has been made that classroom practice must specifically accommodate the 'digital affinity' of the net generation who are connected, creating, and likely know more new technological developments than their teachers (Jenkins, 2006, 2009). The belief that youth exhibit an inherent digital affinity undergirds the push towards an inclusion of digital games in the classroom. Supplementing a curriculum with games, as described in the previous paragraph, is built on the assumptions that these digitally connected youth are already playing games in their leisure time and that games are somehow more engaging than the books, worksheets, or lectures commonly used as teaching tools (Prensky, 2006; Steinkuehler et al., 2012; Steinkuehler & King, 2009).

While some regard games as an exciting new frontier for classroom education, questions still remain for how best to accommodate students who do not demonstrate the same degree of digital affinity as their peers. For example, how will a game-inspired curriculum engage students who *do not* want to play? Will students who do not have access to digital gaming technology at home find themselves at a disadvantage when

---

[3] I use this term to link back to larger conversations about youths' apparent affinity for technology, but do so with hesitation because of the colonial assumptions intertwined with the uncritical use of the term "native". Therefore, for remainder of this dissertation I will use "digital affinity" in place of "digital native".

assessed alongside their already playing peers? And what would such a curriculum make of students who are *disinterested* in games? As Jenson, Taylor, and Fisher (2010) have so clearly demonstrated, digital affinity is intertwined with very specific socio-economic circumstances and some students do not enter a classroom with prior exposure to technology in their home and/or leisure spaces. Despite consistent reports that students are not equally exposed to and/or equally comfortable with digital technology (Facer & Furlong, 2001; Hargittai, 2010; Holmes, 2011), the assumed digital affinity and/or aptitude of youth continues to undergird the push towards the inclusion of digital games in the classroom.

The promise of learning from games also extends outside the classroom. Beyond a prescribed curriculum, digital games are argued by James Paul Gee and others to be a site for informal learning for *all* ages as they enable 'affinity spaces' where players bond through a shared interest in a particular subject or activity (Duncan, 2010; Gee, 2005; Hayes & Duncan, 2012). Gee stresses that affinity spaces are not bounded by physical spaces, providing the example of a community of players coming together around a shared interest in a particular game to create strategy guides and unofficial websites to share information (2005, p. 224). Drawing on many of the same sorts of arguments Jenkins (2006, 2009) has made about participatory culture, Gee focuses on interactions made possible by connective technologies (especially those afforded by an online game) to create a space for deep learning that inspires participants to collaboratively produce and share knowledge. These technologically mediated affinity spaces are of interest to Gee because they allow for a wider variety of participation (e.g. peripherally or centrally depending on interest and amount of time available to participate) and leadership

3

opportunities than afforded by a traditional classroom (2005, p. 228). He also notes that online affinity spaces often allow for some degree of anonymity, and therefore a participant's contribution to and interaction with the rest of the group does not necessarily foreground their race, gender, dis/ability, or social class unless they explicitly decide to share this information (p. 225).

Gee argues that affinity spaces are a site where effective learning takes place, and that these spaces provide a possible model for those interested in revising classroom practices to include more participatory approaches to education, especially by including digital games in the curriculum. This argument, however, is still built on the idea that youth and digital affinity are linked, and assumes students will be more interested in playing a game than participating in traditional forms of classroom activities (e.g. listening to a lecture, worksheets, etc.). But before questions of what sort of learning is facilitated by gaming-inspired affinity groups or whether a game-inspired curriculum can be inclusive of non-players can be answered, *non-participation* in digital games should be accounted for. Who are the players that opt out of playing games? What can be learned from former players and their reasons for quitting a particular game? Furthermore, who are the players that would like to play, but are barred from doing so and for what reason(s) is their participation impeded? Much like the questions posed above about the classroom use of MMOGs, the barriers to participating in games used for informal learning environments remains underexplored. In order to make informed decisions about where digital games can (or should) be added to a curriculum, more information is required about former and non-players. This dissertation is intended to

serve as a starting point for investigations into who do not participate in games, and their reasons for opting out.

Blind Spots and Oversights in Game Studies

The opening pages of this dissertation question the place of former and non-players in discussions about games for learning, and these unexplored subject positions extend far beyond researching games in an educational context. Very little is known about non-players or former players; I argue that the voluntary nature of play has meant that the study of those who do not play games remains underexplored. Rather than assuming non/participation in particular leisure activities such as gameplay is merely about choice or interest, in this dissertation I argue that there is much to be learned by asking players about what games they *do not* play and their reasons for quitting and/or never purchasing or downloading a particular game in the first place. In this dissertation I demonstrate that the decision to play or not to play a particular game can be influenced by a variety of external factors (e.g. how the game is positioned by its developers in the marketplace, press coverage about the game, how current players describe the game) can lead to some potential players assuming a particular game is not "for" them.

The work presented in this dissertation draws on the academic field collected under the label of "game studies". While the broader study of play has a long history with roots in (but not limited to) anthropology (Huizinga, 1955), childhood studies (Sutton-Smith, 2001), psychoanalysis (Winnicott, 1971), and sociology (Caillois, 1961),

the study of play within digital games is a more recent addition to the academy.[4] A loosely defined and multidisciplinary field, my interest is how the study of games provides a means for studying social relations (Boellstroff, 2006) ranging from interpersonal interactions of dyads and small groups (Bardzell, Bardzell, Pace, & Reed, 2008; Eklund & Johansson, 2010; Nardi & Harris, 2006; Yee, 2008) to social network analyses of thousands of players (Kolo & Baur, 2004; D. Williams et al., 2006). In particular, I am interested in how player-to-player interaction in and around digital games (such as participation in official game forums or unofficial discussion groups) provides an opportunity to learn more about sociality, and also provides an opportunity to learn more about how an individual's social values influence their interactions with others. This approach to games studies is also useful for the study of communities, whose participation is seen as legitimate, and more importantly, who is pushed to the margins. Research to date indicates that it is often women who are pushed to the edge, such as Andrea Braithwaite's (2014) documentation of some *World of Warcraft* players actively opposing the inclusion of non-sexist representations of women within MMOG gameworlds, or ongoing work by Kishonna Gray (2012a, 2012c) who has documented the experiences of how women navigate the online communities associated with First Person Shooters, a genre of game thought to be and experienced as a "boys club".

This dissertation intervenes in two particular areas that have been persistently underexplored by game studies: a lack of investigation of the barriers or constraints that may prevent those who wish to play from participating fully in their game of choice, and

---

[4] This is not to say that the study of non-digital games does not happen or is not important. However, to maintain a manageable scope I have narrowed my focus to the investigation of digital games. From this point on, the use of the term "game studies" or "games" should be taken to refer to digital game studies or digital games, unless otherwise stated.

the relative lack of research focusing on former players who have quit participating in a particular gaming community.

Constraints on Digital Game Play

MMOGs are, largely, a voluntary leisure activity.[5] However, the voluntary nature of play does not necessarily mean these gameworlds are equally open to all. Barriers prevent certain populations from freely accessing MMOGs, and yet the personal or structural constraints that may impede access to play remain largely unaddressed in MMOG research to date. For example, the financial costs associated with MMOG play are rarely acknowledged; little is known about the economic constraints faced by those who wish to play, but do not have the financial means to purchase a high-end computer or cannot afford the monthly subscription fees required to play many MMOGs. Also, many games require a credit card to create and then maintain a monthly subscription, preventing access from potential players who do not have the financial profile required by most banks to be granted a credit card. Geographic factors may also limit a potential player's access to the high-speed Internet connection required to access an online gameworld, or a particular game may not be accessible to certain regions do to global copyright restrictions. Of course these are not the only possible limitations to play, but rather are intended to serve as examples to the types of obstacles that are easily taken for granted unless explicitly acknowledged.

---

[5] I acknowledge this might not be the case for those who play games professionally, but playing for money (e.g. professional e-sports or gold farming) falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

Less tangible but equally effective at constraining play are structural barriers created by an industry that despite women making up an increasing percentage of the game playing community (Grundberg & Hansegard, 2014; Romano, 2014), continues to focus on creating games featuring white male protagonists (Ivory, 2006; Waddell, Ivory, Conde, Long, & McDonnell, 2014; D. Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009). Furthermore, some potential players may be turned off by communities that remain hostile to those who fall outside of the stereotypical idea of who plays games (i.e. young white males) (Consalvo, 2012; Kubrik, 2012; Vanderhoef, 2013). Feminist researchers have argued that representation is an important factor for creating a sense of belonging (Nakamura, 2012; Shaw, 2010b, 2013) but while critical feminist scholars have long studied the impact of gender-based stereotypes on digital game participation (reviewed as part of Chapter 2), these sorts of questions have yet to be taken up by those working without an explicitly feminist agenda – *especially* researchers using extremely large datasets consisting of data collected at the server level.

The lack of diversity when conceptualizing who plays (or does not play) games is concerning because of the homogenizing effects that quantitatively driven, server-side research can have on the way the sort of interactions observable within a MMOG are characterized. Through claims of neutrality such as avoiding of sampling bias, or preventing the "tainting" of data that occurs when players know they are being observed (i.e. the Hawthorne Effect), large-scale studies of MMOG players carry with them an air of "authenticity" (D. Williams, 2010). These studies claim to get at previously inaccessible "truths" about in-game behaviour that allow them to deduce something about the offline lives of players. Even proponents of large-scale studies such as Dmitri

Williams (forthcoming) grapple with how best to account for the ways coding and design of MMOG gameworlds can influence player behaviour in unseen ways (p. 13) and wonder if the expense and time required to run queries in large datasets is "overkill" and certain questions would be better answered by smaller-scale efforts (p. 15).

I draw attention to the assumptions that underpin this approach to research and how it shares similarities with claims being made about "big data" and the power of algorithmic research that extremely large data sets collected from MMOGs (or social media services such as Facebook or Twitter) are somehow representative of an entire population. For example, Eszter Hargittai (2015) highlights how many of these big data investigations rely on data collected from only one site, citing Williams, Kennedy & Moore's (2010) investigation of the offline characteristics of *EverQuest II* players as an example of a MMOG study relying on a single game. She argues that this study provides information about players in a very particular setting, but cannot be used to generalize beyond the site of data collection (p. 64). Furthermore, she goes on to critique the designs of big data studies of social networking sites with limited sampling frames:

> If a study draws its participants, that is, its sample, from the users of a specific site, such as Twitter, then the sampling frame is that site, and anyone who does not use the site by definition is not part of the sampling frame and thus is not included in the study. That is, the characteristics, behavior, and perspectives of a person who does not use the site are excluded from the investigation by design. (p. 64)

When studies exclude non-users and/or do not take into account that certain users gravitate towards particular social networking sites depending on the perceived or actual demographics that populate said sites, even millions of data points cannot save a study from selection bias or make the results generalizable to a larger population.

Returning to the questions I raised earlier about what educators advocating for a game-based curriculum would make of a student who is not interested in play, a similar lack of acknowledgement of non/former players is present in quantitative studies relying on server scrapes or other extremely large data sets. These massive datasets provide an accurate representation of who was present in the gameworld on the day the data was collected. Not captured in these datasets are those who previously played but have since quit, or those who would like to play but do not or cannot because of the barriers that remain unacknowledged and unaddressed. What is missing, as I have argued above, is any sort of investigation about how MMOG players came to be playing that particular game on the day the data was collected, if the avatar is being played by the same person that was playing on the date of previous server scrapes,[6] and what barriers exist for others who wish to play, but are unable to do so. As these questions have yet to thoroughly investigated by game scholars, Chapter 2 provides a literature review where I turn to leisure studies to provide a vocabulary and framework to begin to conceptualize barriers to participation in game play.

<u>Why do players quit?</u>

A search for literature about "games" and words related to "quitting" (including quitting, disengagement, ceasing participation, etc.) infrequently leads to explanations for why players quit playing games. For example, "disengagement" in the context of

---

[6] Server-scrapes as a method of studying players assumes that there is a one to one ratio between avatar and player. This assumption is troubled by more qualitatively-driven studies such as Wong et al.'s (2009) finding that 57% of their survey participants reported sharing their *World of Warcraft* account with other players.

games is primarily focused on anomie or moral disengagement (Greitemeyer & McLatchie, 2011; Greitemeyer & Mugge, 2014; Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Richmond & Wilson, 2008). Beginning with the premise that the consumption of violent media imagery (e.g. playing violent games) will lead to an increase in anti-social, aggressive, or morally ambiguous behaviours, "disengagement" in this particular instance is used by social psychologists to describe whether and how playing games will lead to dehumanising other players and/or people in the offline world, rather than other definitions of the word such as boredom, extraction, or quitting a particular gaming community. Literature making specific reference to "quitting" is heavily steeped in questions of dependence – quitting playing digital games is like the need to quit drinking, smoking, drug use, or other addictive behaviours (Hellman, Schoenmakers, Nordstrom, & van Holst, 2013; Stetina, Kothgassner, Lehenbauer, & Kryspin-Exner, 2011; Turner, 2008; Van Rooij, Meerkerk, Schoenmakers, Griffiths, & van de Mheen, 2010) and is equally unhelpful.

It is perhaps unsurprising that very little work has been done about former players, as it is difficult to locate potential informants after they have discontinued their participation in a particular game. And yet, Celia Pearce's (2009) investigation of the *Uru* community who found new places to congregate after their virtual world of choice was shuttered and Nathan Dutton's (2007) analysis of forum posts where players announced their intentions to quit *World of Warcraft*, shows this is a difficult but not impossible task. Furthermore, Pearce and Dutton's work are invaluable as they both act as a refutation that players (and their play choices) are static, never subject to change over time. I will return to the idea of barriers and constraints in Chapter 2 in my review

of leisure studies literature about impediments to leisure participation. In the next section I describe the specific gameworld I have chosen to investigate in this dissertation.

Filling in the Gaps: A study about EVE Online

To learn more about how players come to their particular game of choice and why others leave, I focus my attention on *EVE Online* (EVE), a game that has developed a notorious reputation for being a difficult community for new players to access and an equally notorious reputation for having an extremely homogeneous demographic. A space-themed MMOG that has been commercially available since 2003, EVE's player population has slowly (but steadily) grown to 500,000+ active accounts. While this is a much smaller number of active accounts than other popular MMOGs such as *World of Warcraft* which peaked at 12 million (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010; Reilly, 2010) and has since declined to a still respectable 7.8 million subscribers (Karmali, 2014), EVE has a player base that is fiercely loyal and dedicated to their MMOG of choice (Paul, 2011, p. 262). Rather than focusing solely on current players of the game, this research asks who does *not* play, and for what reasons. This, I argue, is a necessary piece missing from current research on MMOGs, which to date has yet to substantially engage in questions about who does not play and their reasons for opting out.

Research Questions

The research documented in this dissertation began as an attempt to investigate why so few women play EVE. With only a 2-4% female player population, this game is

an ideal case study to explore gender disparity within online communities. Rather than focusing exclusively on the experiences of women, how they come to this game, and their reasons for leaving this particular community, the topic of this dissertation has widened in scope as my preliminary investigations highlighted that EVE is off-putting to *most* people who attempt to play the game. Taking this information into consideration, the research questions guiding this dissertation were reformulated as follows:

1. How is EVE positioned in the MMOG market?

2. Who are the current players of EVE? What demographics are/not represented within the player population?

3. How do current, former, and non-players describe EVE?

4. What reason(s) do former players give to explain discontinuing their participation in this game?

These questions are investigated from multiple perspectives that I describe in the next section, which provides an overview of the dissertation.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation has been organized as follows:

Chapter 1, *Introduction,* has provided an overview of the sorts of questions frequently taken up by educational scholars interested in digital gameplay. It also identified a gap in the academic study of digital games where investigations remain overwhelmingly focused on current players and the experiences of former or non-players are rarely accounted for. As game scholars have yet to thoroughly investigate these topics, this introduction serves as the rationale for reviewing literature from leisure studies in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2, *Leisure and "Choice",* is a literature review that draws on the field of leisure studies to provide a framework and vocabulary to discuss non-participation and drop out from games, a framework and vocabulary not yet articulated by game scholars. Beginning with an overview of the literature surrounding barriers/constraints to participation, I narrow my focus to the study of women's leisure to demonstrate how leisure can be constrained by internal and external forces. From there, I take up the question of girls and women's "lack of interest" in games. Using critical feminist scholarship on games, I point to the way that women's (defined by the gaming industry as if to assume women are a homogeneous group with shared interests) disinterest in games is primed through a culture and industry that tells women that their participation is not as legitimate as that of male players.

Chapter 3, *EVE Online and the Myth of the Sandbox,* provides context for how EVE is discussed by three separate parties: the developer (CCP Games), selected examples from the gaming enthusiast press, and how EVE has been approached to date in academic writing. This is done to address the first research question: "How is EVE positioned in the MMOG market?" By considering how EVE is positioned in these three different venues, this chapter sets the backdrop for the questions asked in this dissertation about how current, former, and non-players conceptualize the game and its community of players. I argue that while EVE is positioned as a "sandbox" style game where in-game activities are only limited by a player's imagination, in reality only a very particular type of play (and player) is publically acknowledged, pre-emptively

undermining any efforts to diversify this online community.[7] The information and

analysis provided in this chapter provides the rationale for the study I undertook and

report on in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 4, *Theoretical Framework and Study Design*, describes the theoretical

framework underpinning this research and analysis, as well as details the study design,

and recruitment methods used to conduct this research. Using the lens of feminist

theories of technology and building on the evidence detailed in Chapter 3 that a very

narrow demographic of players represent the majority of the bandwidth of EVE-related

discussion, this chapter outlines how I recruited responses from a variety of potential

participants for the *MMOG Experience Survey*, my primary tool for data collection.

Chapter 5, *Survey Demographics,* provides summary statistics to contextualize

who completed the *MMOG Experience Survey.* In this chapter I discuss the

demographic information of survey participants to answer to the second research

question: "Who are the current players of EVE? What demographics are/not

represented within the player population?"

Chapter 6, *Imagining EVE Online* is a qualitative analysis of how current and

non-players describe EVE, answering the third research question: "How do current,

former, and non-players describe EVE?" I draw attention to how current players rely

heavily on jargon and assume that the reader of their response may not have played

EVE, but has most certainly heard of it. I argue that current players are invested in

---

[7] A sandbox style game is a game where players drive the in-game activities. This is in contract to "theme park" style games where the developer sets out a series of tasks that players can complete, and these tasks usually have an optimal order in which they should be completed. Chapter 3 and 6 provide a much more detailed discussion of "sandbox" style games, but I note that this is a term that has been used to describe a wide variety of games to the point that the term has become rather meaningless.

maintaining the exceptionality of EVE and assume that it is a game that is not of interest to "most other people". Non-players ranged from those who knew very little about EVE, to those who were well versed in the game and its players and this knowledge informed their decision *not* to play this MMOG.

Chapter 7, *Quitting EVE Online is (Sometimes) Hard to do,* discusses the diversity of ways former players describe EVE in answer to the third research question: "How do current, former, and non-players describe EVE?" This chapter also addresses the fourth research question: "What reason(s) do former players give to explain discontinuing their participation in this game?" I describe how former players participating in this research clustered into three groups: those taking a temporary break from EVE, those who have made a permanent departure, and a third group of participants who are unsure about whether or not they will return to EVE.

Chapter 8, *Studying a Moving Target,* concludes the dissertation, provides a summary of what has been covered in the previous chapters, and revisits the guiding research questions. I also articulate the original contributions of this research and summarize my thoughts about the shifting nature of participation, access, and preferences in games. I conclude his dissertation with an outline of my future trajectory of research that is not as reliant on the category of "former player", which I found does not necessarily hold under scrutiny.

In sum, the project of this dissertation is to use EVE as a means to centre questions of non/participation in particular leisure activities, namely participating in a MMOG. To better situate this conversation of barriers and access, I now turn my attention to Chapter 2, the literature review.

CHAPTER 2: Leisure and "Choice"

As previously stated, the goal of this dissertation is to unpack both the subtle and overt ways the EVE community maintains its homogeneity. Of particular interest to this investigation is an exploration of who drops out of this game and for what reasons, a topic that has yet to be thoroughly investigated from a game studies perspective. While an extensive body of literature exists about non-completion and withdrawal from educational environments (e.g.: "dropping out" or "quitting school") including investigations as to why students leave the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math) (K. R. Malone & Barabino, 2009; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011), formal schooling is usually mandated until a certain age. As this dissertation is focused on a non-mandatory activity, I turn to leisure studies to provide the relevant vocabulary to articulate the internal and external forces leading to non/participation in EVE.

As games are a leisure activity, playing or not playing a MMOG is largely viewed as a choice motivated by preferences for how one spends their time not occupied by work or domestic obligations. It is unsurprising that a rhetoric of "choice" and "interest" surrounds EVE, specifically that only a very particular demographic will be interested in this MMOG (to be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 6) – however literature about how a player is drawn to participate in *any* game is scant. This oversight by games scholars is perplexing, as leisure scholars have long studied access, barriers, and non/participation in leisure spaces. In this chapter, I begin with a review of literature about non/participation from the perspective of leisure studies. I also survey the growing body of literature about women's non/participation in leisure activities to serve

as an example of how access to leisure is constrained by both external and internal

forces. The literature review concludes by bridging the gap between leisure and game

studies, providing an overview of critical feminist literature about digital game play to

illustrate how "lack of interest" in games can be misread as an individual choice to not

participate, obscuring the social forces that consistently write gameplay as a primarily

heterosexual white masculine pastime.

Non/participation in Leisure Activities

Leisure studies is an area of research and theory-building concerned with

activities that fill one's time outside of work and domestic responsibilities. These

activities typically fall into the following areas of investigation:

> **Sports:** Usually understood to be some sort of physical activity that includes a set of rules and/or competition against others, leisure studies investigates "sports" from a variety of perspectives. This includes the players themselves, spectators at live sporting events, but also more passive consumption of sports-related information, such as reading about one's favourite teams on the Internet or reading match summaries.

> **Tourism:** Travel for recreational (as opposed to business) purposes. This covers local, domestic, and international travel, as well as investigations about the hospitality industry. I also note that leisure scholars frequently collaborate with the government workers who run Provincial or National Parks, and this body of literature would often fall under the "tourism" umbrella.

> **Leisure/Hobbies:** The broadest of the three groupings, but includes activities not captured by the previous two categories but are activities that are undertaken outside of one's work or domestic responsibilities. Examples in this category would also include non-competitive physical activities (e.g. yoga or gardening).

This field has a robust sub-area devoted to investigation of barriers/access and

non/participation in a variety of recreation activities ranging from organized sports to

accessing national park facilities. In this literature, there is some debate about whether

the term "barrier" is nuanced enough to capture all possible reasons as to why a person

may be unable to participate in an activity of their choice, and therefore "leisure constraints" has been suggested in its place (Jackson, 1988). For some scholars, this new term carries with it a critique of the out-dated "relic" of barriers research, for example Jackson, Crawford and Godbey (1993) take issue with what they argue is an implicit assumption that barriers are "effectively insurmountable obstacles to leisure participation" (p. 2) and instead argue that constraints are continually negotiated and not necessarily permanent. With both terms still circulating, I use "barrier" and "constraints" interchangeably throughout the remainder of this literature review to reflect the word choice of the author being discussed.

An important caveat to this review is that leisure scholars often investigate outdoor recreation activities, and therefore the specific barriers faced by their research participants may not directly map onto a study of barriers faced by MMOG players. For example, the high costs of sporting equipment and activity fees (Coalter, 1993; Jackson, 1983) or decreased mobility/physical strength as one ages (Risser, Haindl, & Ståhl, 2010) may not be as pressing when applied to the much less costly and more sedentary nature of MMOG play. Indeed, the expenses associated with outfitting a growing child with a new set of hockey equipment each season may not be directly comparable to the cost of a computer and monthly MMOG subscription. Therefore, the focus of this review is not necessarily the specific circumstances preventing leisure participation, such as having children (Bellows-Riecken & Rhodes, 2008; Brown, Brown, Miller, & Hansen, 2001; O'Mullan Wayne & Krishnagiri, 2005; Reis, Thompson-Carr, & Lovelock, 2012) or a physical disability (Burns, Paterson, & Watson, 2009; Smith, 1987). Instead, this review focuses on how this area of leisure studies provides an interesting and useful

toolset to be mobilized in my own study of non/participation in EVE, especially when put into conversation with existing game scholarship about women's play that uses a critical feminist lens.

<u>Creating a model of barriers/constraints to leisure</u>

Moving beyond identifying specific circumstances that impede participation in leisure activities, scholars have articulated models to classify and categorize types of barriers/constraints. The most influential conceptual model for leisure barriers was put forward by Crawford and Godbey (1987) as an update to models of individual barriers to participation articulated by Iso-Ahola (1981) and Iso-Ahola and Mannell (1985). By relocating discussions of barriers to the family unit (rather than the individual), Crawford and Godbey created a model that attempts to articulate the internal and external processes by which access to or barriers preventing leisure occur, rather than merely identifying that access (or barriers) exist for a particular individual. Crawford and Godbey's framework is as follows:

> **Intrapersonal Barriers**: Individual psychological states and attributes such as stress, depression, anxiety, religious beliefs, prior socialization into specific activities, subjective evaluations of the "appropriateness" of available leisure activities.
>
> **Interpersonal Barriers:** The product of interpersonal interactions and/or relationships, such as joint leisure decisions made by a romantic couple or the effects of family size on ability to participate in specific activities.
>
> **Structural Barriers:** External barriers include one's work schedule or financial resources. (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, pp. 122–124)

This teasing out of barriers ranging from the self to societal is important; it immediately refutes the idea that non/participation is exclusively a "choice" based on a particular

level of interest in an activity. However, even Crawford and Godbey cannot completely

escape the stickiness of choice, in that they claim strong personal interest is enough to

overcome a structural barrier. The authors argue that at the structural level, if the

preference for a particular activity exceeds the perceived structural constraints, the

leisure activity may still be taken up despite the presence of barriers (p. 124). This

assertion is problematic and if taken to its logical conclusion, begins to mimic the

neoconservative narrative that poverty and adversity can be overcome simply by pulling

yourself up by your own bootstraps. Crawford and Godbey could be used to argue that

all that would be needed to overcome the economic barriers to becoming an ice dancer

(e.g. coaching fees, ice time, skate rentals/purchases) and overcoming stereotypical

ideas of who makes an ideal ice dancer (read: young white bodies; medium to high SES)

would be a strong enough personal desire to learn to figure skate. Similarly, Crawford

and Godbey state that personal barriers, in particular the self-evaluation of whether a

particular leisure activity is "appropriate" or not, can change over time (p. 122). While

Crawford and Godbey's model provides a foundation for which a conversation about

access and/or barriers can be more formally investigated within game studies, the three-

factor structure of their model artificially separates the personal from the social, and as

demonstrated through research on the particular experiences of women that follows in

subsequent sections of this literature review, gender-based stereotypes can become

internalized and "self-imposed" constraints may not be so easily shed.

Subsequent work by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) address the

limitations of their earlier three-factor model by revisiting and reframing it as an

integrated model where constraints can be encountered simultaneously (p. 313). I also

note that in this revision, their word choice shifts from barrier to constraint.

Recognizing that their earlier model artificially separated constraints, this updated

approach explicitly acknowledges that leisure participation is contingent on multiple

factors, and accounts for a hierarchy of social privilege (p. 315). Also important in this

updated model is that it moves beyond the binary of participation/nonparticipation and

acknowledges that constraints may still continue to effect one's participation:

> …constraining factors will directly influence subsequent aspects of
> engagement, such as the person's frequency of participation, level of
> specialization, level of ego involvement, and even his or her definition
> of the situation. (Crawford et al., 1991, p. 315)

This refutes the idea that participation is black and white, and that there is a large grey

area that needs to be teased out to determine whether one views themselves as an

insider or outsider in particular leisure communities. Crawford et al. go on to re-

contextualize earlier work on amateurism by Robert Stebbins (1979), describing how

one's social privilege (or lack thereof) will influence whether they imagine themselves as

a legitimate participant in the activity, or if they will merely remain a "dabbler". The

authors define a dabbler as "a person whose active involvement, technique, and

knowledge are so meagre as to be barely distinguishable from others in the public at

large" (Crawford et al., 1991, p. 317). While the specific term "dabbling" is not used by

game scholars, similar ideas of who considers themselves an insider verses outsider in

gaming cultures are mirrored in research into who self-identifies as a "gamer" (Shaw,

2012). I will return to this idea of "dabbling" again in a subsequent section of this

22

literature review, describing how women's gameplay is frequently derided as being

"casual" or not as legitimate as the play of their male counterparts.[8]

<u>A gap in the literature: "lack of interest"</u>

Leisure scholars have done an excellent job at demonstrating that leisure

activities are not universally accessible, as evidenced above. However, there remains a

persistent gap in the literature surrounding non-participation and "lack of interest".

When interviewing or surveying non-participants for their lack of involvement in a

particular activity, lack of interest is usually provided as an explanation for non-

participation, but rarely are research participants probed to further unpack what they

mean by this answer. Missing information includes whether the respondent has

previously tried the activity and decided they did not enjoy it, if they are basing their

assessment on second-hand knowledge, and/or stereotypical ideas about who

participates in this activity has coloured their decision about whether or not it is an

appropriate activity to express interest in. The difficulties in teasing out the specifics of

non-participation due to self-identified lack of interest is described in a review paper by

Jackson (1988), summarizing the ten years previous of investigations of constraints on

leisure participation:

> It is not unlikely that a substantial proportion of survey respondents
> who check this item are, in fact, providing a shorthand and superficial

---

[8] While the models provided by Crawford and Godbey (1987) and by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) helped to formalize the study of constraints to leisure participation, they are not without their critics. Just as writing about game players – unless explicitly stated otherwise – seems to assume a white, straight, and male subject, Philipp (1995) critiques Crawford and Godbey's model and its uptake by the field of leisure studies for its failing to directly engage with issues surrounding race. This lack up uptake of issues surrounding race is something that is mirrored in game studies and will be returned to throughout this dissertation.

response that masks the effects of true constraints. In a very real sense, these people may indeed be quite severely affected by constraints on participation, even though they themselves may not recognize it. Yet they might exhibit the potential to participate if obstacles were removed. **Questionnaire checklists, however, frequently fail to capture such constraints, thus overestimating lack of interest and underestimating the effects of other constraints.** [Emphasis mine] (p. 211)

This is indeed a weakness in the literature I have reviewed, as many leisure scholars rely on large surveys distributed to a randomized sample. It is therefore not surprising that questionnaires with checklists would be used to better facilitate the processing of such large response pools.[9] Without a framework that specifically accounts (or even looks) for larger structural issues that may be preventing participation, "lack of interest" is taken literally. I now turn to a separate yet related area of leisure studies, the investigation of women's participation in leisure activities, to further elucidate how gender-based stereotypes work to impede women's access to leisure, and yet these impositions may continue to be read as "lack of interest".

Women and Leisure: Exploring Constraints

In the previous section, I provided a brief overview of how Crawford and Godbey's model has been mobilized by leisure studies to explore barriers or constraints to leisure participation. I now turn my attention to the more narrowly focused investigations of women's leisure as an example of how both internal and external forces can influence to what extent one participates in particular leisure activities. This is a

---

[9] I will return to the design and implementation of the survey used as the primary data collection tool for this dissertation in Chapter 4. However, at this point I would like to highlight the quote bolded above and my decision to use primarily open-ended responses rather than multiple-choice answers when designing my survey.

relatively new area of focus for leisure studies – the specific investigation of women's

relationship to leisure has only existed for approximately 30 years (Henderson &

Gibson, 2013, p. 116). While girls and women's participation in digital games is not a

topic that has been investigated by women's leisure scholars, I note that these two areas

of literature have developed along a similar trajectory. Both areas of investigation

started with documenting where access did/did not exist (e.g. why women may not feel

entitled to their own leisure time or in the case of game studies, why women did not feel

entitled to participate in gaming cultures), with researchers in both areas moving

towards a more intersectional approach to the study of women that recognizes a

diversity of experiences when attempting to access leisure spaces or gaming spaces. I

will return to the study of women and digital games participation in a subsequent

section of this chapter, after I briefly summarize the relevant literature about women

and leisure access below.

Karla A. Henderson has spent considerable time reviewing and summarizing the

literature pertaining to the leisure experiences of women. She and her co-authors divide

this literature into five distinct phases of theoretical development: empowering women

through access to leisure time and activities (Henderson, 1990); a shift away from

understanding leisure as some sort of universal experience shared by all women or as

the review's title states, "one size doesn't fit all" (Henderson, 1996); the introduction of

an intersectional approach to the study of women and leisure by integrating studies of

race, class, and cultural specificities (Henderson, Hodges, & Kivel, 2002); an increasing

complexity to the theoretical underpinnings of the literature allowing for more nuanced

discussions of gender performances, as well as deeper consideration of the larger social

and ideological forces that shape leisure as a gendered practice i.e. leisure is political

and cannot be bracketed off from the day to day realities of women's lives (Henderson &

Hickerson, 2007); finally, the most recent review summarizes a turn towards more

explicitly feminist intersectional investigations of gendered leisure (i.e. both femininities

and masculinities) including where and how leisure participation reinforces norms

and/or provides an opportunity for resistance/social change (Henderson & Gibson,

2013). As Henderson and Gibson (2013) conclude, the study of women's leisure has

become increasingly complex and they are cognisant that gender is only a small piece for

understanding the intersectional identities that influence each woman's experiences and

their relationship to leisure.

In keeping with this dissertation's focus on non/participation, what does the

literature have to say about leisure constraints experienced by women? Earlier work in

this area, including research summarized in Henderson's (1990) first stage described

above, found that women often did not feel entitled to a clearly delineated leisure-

specific time (Deem, 1986; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989;

Henderson & Dialeschki, 1991; Shank, 1986). This lack of a sense of entitlement,

Henderson and Dialeschki (1991) argue, is a constraint and therefore encouraging

women to feel entitled to leisure is directly related to encouraging women's sense of

empowerment (p. 53). Updates to this literature stress that it is not being *a woman* that

leads to a lack of entitlement, but instead it is the externally imposed social expectations

and gender-based stereotypes that lead to women to feel less entitled to leisure than

men, i.e. what Crawford and Godbey (1987) might call structural barriers. Specifically:

> Gender may be said to be the "cause" of some leisure constraints, not
> necessarily because of biological sex, but rather because of the social

expectations (women are still primarily responsible for childcare in our society) and social controls (women make less money than men) associated with gender. (Jackson & Henderson, 1995, p. 48)

However, while Crawford and Godbey argued in their original three-factor model that enough personal interest in an activity could be enough to overcome structural barriers, research focused specifically on the experiences of women are more aligned with Crawford, Jackson and Godbey's (1991) updated model, demonstrating that in many cases these barriers are multilayered and not so easily circumvented.

As this area of research inquiry advances, the literature about women's access to leisure has grown to reflect a more intersectional approach to understanding barriers to reflect that gender is an isolated structural barrier that may work to prevent access to leisure. This multifaceted approach to the study of women's access and barriers to leisure has investigated intersections between gender and race (Bialeschki & Walbert, 1998; Russell & Stage, 1996), socio-economic status (King, 2011; Tirone, 2003), and/or sexuality (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997). For example, gender, race, and class intersect in Bialeschki and Walbert's (1998) historical exploration of the role of leisure in the lives of black and white working class women living in the Southern United States in the early 1900s. While women generally had less access to leisure than men, they found that black women's opportunities for leisure were more constrained than their white counterparts, as employer-built housing for their workers remained racially segregated and only white housing was provided specific leisure spaces (p. 91). This intersectional approach to the investigation are examples of what Henderson (1996) characterized as a turn away from "one size fits all" approach to understanding women's lived experiences and are

27

illustrative of the shift towards a much more nuanced and critical understanding of women's leisure and non/participation within this academic field of study.

In the previous section I discussed how "lack of interest" is unproblematized in some areas of leisure studies, but as this review of the study of women's leisure has illustrated, internal and external forces cannot be discounted in a discussion of constraints. In the following section, I discuss critical feminist literature about digital game play to provide an example of how "lack of interest" is misread as a *choice* to not participate in gameplay and/or gaming cultures. And yet, this "choice" is often anything but. Through a review of game-specific literature, I link back to the assertions made in the above studies of women and leisure barriers, specifically that it is not necessarily one's status as a 'woman' that impedes access to games, rather, it is the larger social construction of gender-based expectations about what is or is not an appropriately feminine leisure activity.

Stereotypical Gamers and Constraints to Play

The stereotype of who plays video games remains persistent (Bergstrom, Fisher, & Jenson, 2014; Kowert, Griffiths, & Oldmeadow, 2012) despite frequent reports in the popular press about the "surprising" diversity of players who make games part of their leisure activities (Grundberg & Hansegard, 2014; Romano, 2014). Just as Jackson and Henderson (1995) argue that women's leisure participation is constrained by socially constructed expectations about what is and is not a proper "feminine" leisure activity, de Castell and Bryson (1998) demonstrate that girls are socialized from a very young age about what is considered appropriately feminine (read: not digital games). Similarly, ongoing work by Shira Chess (2009, 2010) has found that when women play games,

their choice of games is assumed/expected to be productive (e.g. practicing domestic

skills in *Cooking Mama* or personal development-oriented games such as the logic

puzzles of the *BrainAge* series) rather than leisure for leisure's sake. Alison Harvey

(2015) builds on this work, interviewing parents and children about their gameplay

practices, in turn demonstrating that gendered assumptions about and policing of who

plays (and what games they play) begin in the home. Recognizing that there is an

overlap between leisure studies and feminist research about gender and digital

gameplay, the goal of this section is to provide an overview about how representation

and participation work to reinforce gendered notions of who is the ideal and/or

expected game player, what constitutes appropriately feminine leisure activities, and

how reduced (or non) participation is consistently read as girls' and women's lack of

interest in playing games.

Representation is important for creating a sense of belonging in a particular

game community (Nakamura, 2012; Shaw, 2010b, 2013) and it is perhaps not surprising

that content analyses of digital games has consistently shown that protagonists are

predominantly male (Dietz, 1998; Ivory, 2006; D. Williams, Martins, et al., 2009).

When a game features a female protagonist she is often sexualized (Miller & Summers,

2007; Summers & Miller, 2014), and the most iconic example continues to be the *Tomb

Raider* franchise protagonist Lara Croft. Croft has become a touchstone case study for

academic discussions of female protagonists in games (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Kennedy,

2002; MacCallum-Stewart, 2015; Mikula, 2003). Other female protagonists are

frequently depicted in stereotypically feminine roles or displaying stereotypically

feminine traits. One such example is Flo, the protagonist in *Diner Dash,* the sole

employee of a restaurant who is responsible for cooking and simultaneously catering to her customers' emotional needs (Chess, 2012). The underrepresentation of female protagonists is unsurprising given a report by game journalist Ben Kuchera that implies that games with female leads are doomed to fail from the start. He found not only do the majority of game protagonists continue to be white males, but when games with female protagonists *are* produced, they are routinely given half the marketing budget as games with a male lead (Kuchera, 2012, para. 15). Given this finding, it is unsurprising that the female Non-Player Characters (NPCs) populating a MMOG are underrepresented, but when they do exist, they are used to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Not only is there a lack of parity between male and female NPCs within *World of Warcraft* (Corneliussen, 2008), but the female NPCs are assigned stereotypically feminine jobs such as a nurse (Bergstrom, McArthur, Jenson, & Peyton, 2011) and far more likely to appear as a priest (a support role) than a warrior (often the de facto leader of a group) (Bergstrom, Jenson, & de Castell, 2012). In addition to a lack of gender parity, racial equity is also missing within the fictional, designed online worlds that these games take place within. Recent research by Waddell et al. (2014) found that a non-human character was more likely to appear within a MMOG than a female or a non-white human character (p. 11). This is a trend that follows across all game genres, with a lack of racial diversity and a reliance on racist stereotypes being demonstrated by content analyses by both Higgin (2008, 2012) and Brock (2011). To reiterate, representation is important. Seeing oneself reflected (or not) in a game's avatars or NPCs is way of determining if a developer sees you as the intended audience of their game.

This continued replication of gendered stereotypes and the general lack of diversity within games can be traced to what Fron et al. (2007) refer to as "the Hegemony of Play". Arguing that a particularly limited idea of what constitutes both a "game" and who gets to be considered a "gamer" is reinforced by the white, male-dominated, corporate, and cultural elite who have a vested financial interest in maintaining the status quo, Fron et al. call to other game scholars to address "the proverbial elephant in the living room" (p. 1). Specifically, they cite the need for greater researcher reflexivity:

> Because we often study games that are created by the Hegemony of Play, we not only critique and analyze, but also often embrace, valorize, and fetishize the cultural production of the Hegemony of Play. Yet we seldom analyze or critique the power structures from which they emerge. These power structures shape us and our discourse, and it behoves us to be more reflexive about the ways in which they do. (Fron et al., 2007, p. 2)

The authors suggest that by paying greater attention to what games are (not) studied, what questions are (not) asked by researchers, and by reflecting on whether one's research practice is reinforcing or undermining this hegemony, game studies can help facilitate a greater diversity of play. Fron et al. end their paper on a positive note and suggest that new game systems such as the Nintendo Wii (in 2007) offer up "hope for the future" as they represent a new paradigm of play (pp. 8-9). Unfortunately this hope was short lived, as research on these new game systems describes how quickly they have been ghettoized as "casual" games, the domain of non-gamers (i.e. children, the elderly, women) (Chess, 2009, 2010, 2012). The "hardcore" verses "casual" debate is one that is largely informed by stereotypes about what constitutes legitimate gameplay. Jesper

31

Juul, in his investigation of the proliferation of casual gaming, breaks down the stereotypes:

> The stereotypical casual player has a preference for positive and pleasant fictions, has played few games, is willing to commit small amounts of time and resources towards playing games, and dislikes difficult games.
>
> The stereotypical hardcore player has a preference for emotionally negative fictions like science fiction, vampires, fantasy and war, has played a larger number of video games, will invest large amounts of time and resources towards playing video games, and enjoys difficult games. (Juul, 2010, p. 29)

He argues the increase of casual games being brought to market is evidence that games have been reinvented and opened up to a wider audience. However, members of this new, wider audience are not necessarily viewed as equally entitled to consider themselves under the wider umbrella of "gamer". With the stereotypical casual player being attributed stereotypically feminine traits (e.g. interested in collaborative rather than competitive play) by the larger gaming culture, it is then easier to delegitimize the gameplay of those who fall outside the assumed demographic of "real" gamers (teenage white males) (Consalvo, 2012; Kubrik, 2012; Vanderhoef, 2013). Whether or not the boys and men playing games actually exhibit the stereotypical attributes of a "hardcore" player doesn't actually matter, as Fron et al. (2007) remind their readers that the construction of gamers is an oversimplification (and homogenization) of a particular demographic of players that is mobilized in the service of selling more games by an industry financially motivated to maintain the status quo.

Just as gender-based stereotypes circulate through gaming cultures to reaffirm women's apparent disinterest in all but the most casual forms of gameplay, stereotypes about women's assumed preferences and play styles make appearances in academic

32

investigations. Indeed, studies of players that take gender into consideration seem to fall into two groups: studies of female play that often invoke gender stereotypes in their study design, analysis, and/or conclusion that begin from the assumption that males and females will play games differently; and critical explorations of gender as it intersects with gameplay, including studies that do not use gender as a variable in their analysis, or studies that acknowledge a larger culture of gender based stereotypes that may be influencing their observations. This former grouping of research begins from the assumption that there is a discernable difference between "male play" and "female play", such as the work of Yee et al. (2011) and Williams et al. (2009). This pattern of academic research has been critiqued by the latter grouping, such as literature reviews by Jenson and de Castell (2008, 2010), who identify the ways researchers reinforce gender stereotypes and frequently perpetuate stereotypical claims about the preferences of girls' consumption of technology.

When gender is *not* used as a variable, a different result may be observed, providing alternate explanations for what is frequently presented as "female" gameplay preferences. For example, when observing play within an after school gaming club and comparing the behaviour of girls to other girls (instead of being compared/contrasted to male participants), Jenson et al. (2011) argue that what is typically described as archetypical female play actually reveals itself to be *novice* play. The young girls in their study did not have unfettered access to gaming consoles in their own home, and when first observed playing as part of a girls-only gaming club, demonstrated a preference for cooperative play (a "stereotypically" feminine approach to gameplay). However, after being given the opportunity to practice playing in a supportive girls-only environment,

33

they began to feel more confident in their play. Soon enough, the girls were observed

playing *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (a fighting game) and trash talking, hogging

controllers, and being ultra-competitive with each other, demonstrating behaviour

typically associated with "masculine" play. Perhaps even more surprising is that this

behaviour held when boys were re-introduced to the gaming club. Rather than assuming

collaborative play is linked to femininity, Jenson et al.'s open ended study design

allowed for the possibility to observe that what is frequently described as feminine play

(co-operative, non-competitive) is actually more likely to be attributed to one's level of

experience playing digital games, rather than one's gender.

　　Despite research that indicates that stereotypically feminine play may not

actually be rooted in gender, it is extremely difficult to move conversations away from

the idea that girls and women need to be targeted with a specific, "female-friendly" style

of game and/or gameplay. When "games for girls" are described the industry, it is often

done so with little evidence that a diversity of play, play-styles, interests, etc. are

exhibited by this demographic category. Flanagan (2005) critiques this use of the term

"girls" by the industry as it is underpinned with the assumption that there is some sort

of universal experience, ability, and taste shared by all female-identified players (pp. 1-

2). Flanagan's criticism of the assumed "one size fits all" in terms of the young female

game player's interests harkens back to Henderson's (1996) critique of early studies of

women's leisure that focused on the assumed universality of women's experiences.

Therefore I stress that this perceived universality of women's tastes and interests is not

an artefact of the games industry alone.

The assumed default audience for games continues to be male, and the otherness of female players is maintained by research that perpetuates the idea that pink and purple games are an ideal way to foster an interest in gameplay. Given that gaming continues to be understood primarily a "boys club" that is reinforced by an industry that perpetuates a Hegemony of Play (Fron et al., 2007),[10] it is unsurprising that women who publically identify as female through voice or text chat often face harassment for encroaching on a "traditionally male space", such as the racist and sexist slurs documented in Kishonna Gray's (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c) research of Black female Xbox Live players. It is equally unsurprising that much of the interventionist research on player cultures focuses on 'safe spaces' created for women to play without fear of harassment. For example, Kara Behnke's (2012) ethnography of a female-inclusive guild finds that most of the participants were specifically attracted to the guild she studied as they viewed it as an opportunity to play without being exposed to the "hardcore masculinist rhetoric" pervading the larger *World of Warcraft* community. Through their guild participation and its supportive environment, many participants spoke of their

---

[10] Examples of the games industry continues to be a "boys club" can be seen in the use of female dancers for entertainment at industry parties/networking events associated with annual game developer conventions as recent as 2013 (Pinchefsky, 2013; Webber, 2013) or the use of "booth babes" or promotional models to work at booths on the convention floor.

The "boys club" is also reinforced among players, as evidenced in a recent study of *Halo 3* players that found low-skilled male players were more likely to lash out at and be hostile towards their female-voiced team members yet behave submissively towards more skilled male-voiced players (Kasumovic & Kuznekoff, 2015). This report was not well-received by certain online communities that discuss games and a recently post by Futrelle (2015) whose blog documents online misogyny, found evidence that some self-described gamers were unhappy with Kasumovic and Kuznekoff's findings and despite the authors of the study being two men, turned this into an opportunity to lash out at women who are seen as invading previously male-dominated spaces (e.g. by referring to the authors as women or emasculated men). The common rebuttal to Kasumovic and Kuznekoff's piece is that women do not understand the difference between trash talking and bullying. I note that this dovetails with Gray's (2011) work on racism in Xbox Live voice communication and how players using racist language deflect by claiming it is only a form of trash talking and not meant with racist intent.

newfound willingness to experiment with parts of the game they previously felt were off limits, such as participation in the modding community (p. 289).[11] That a supportive environment of one's peers is necessary is made most evident by Gray (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), whose documentation of the harassment faced by Black players is a reminder of the sexist and racist discourse that often gets brushed aside as "merely trash talking". For example, in her description of playing *Gears of War* online via Xbox Live Gray (2012a) describes the linguistic profiling that happens over voice chat, transcribing the racist abuse faced by players who are thought to "sound black". Here she found that racist acts via Xbox Live voice chat frequently followed a pattern, beginning with a question ("are you black?"), attempting to provoke a response from the player whose race is being questioned (often in the form of targeting their avatar for repeated attacks or harassment), moving on to racist speech acts and then an abrupt end to the conversation (usually where one player has been removed from the channel) or an attempt to goad other players into a "virtual race war" (pp. 267-268). In Gray's work, similar to earlier research on female *Quake* players by Helen Kennedy (2011), female only "clans" act as both a haven from harassment, but also a support system to draw upon when harassment inevitably occurs. Also important to note is that Gray's work is one of the few studies that focus on female African-American players.

All of the studies referenced in the paragraph above are useful for underlining the importance of a supportive space in encouraging continued female participation in

---

[11] "Modding" involves altering the content of a video game from the version released by the developer. In the case of *World of Warcraft*, the game's developer permits modding (colloquially known as "add-ons"). These are third party extensions to the game's software that modify and/or customize the game's interface to streamline the display of information to the player as they interact with the gameworld. For further discussion of add-ons in the context of *World of Warcraft* see Taylor (2009) and Chen (2012).

games that are known for their hypermasculine cultures. However, these studies are focused on current players of the game, and do not account for how and under what circumstances a particular player came to join that particular community, or why a former player has since left. In the closing section of this review, I detail how two seemingly disparate areas of research (leisure studies and critical feminist game studies) can be combined to allow for a more nuanced understanding of why players quit or never begin playing a particular game in the first place.

Putting Leisure Studies and Game Studies in Conversation

Leisure studies has investigated barriers and constraints to participation for quite some time now. The widespread adoption of Crawford and Godbey's (1987) model allows for comparison across multiple studies, something that Warmelink and Siitonen (2011) have argued is still missing from empirical games research, and necessary for the field of game studies to 'mature'. The work of feminist scholars to date has provided examples of how girls and women's gameplay rarely occurs entirely on their own terms. Whether it be expectations about what is an appropriate game topic e.g. simulations of domesticity, such as those described by Chess (2012) or the assumption that female players prefer cooperative play (Flanagan, 2005; Jenson & de Castell, 2010), female gameplay is shaped and constrained by structural expectations surrounding appropriateness, interpersonal barriers blocking or reducing access to gaming systems in the home, and intrapersonal roadblocks where gameplay being unfeminine is something that has been experienced and ultimately internalized.

These constrains are not exclusive to digital games. The idea that games are the domain of men is hardly new – in the opening paragraph of H.G. Wells' *Little Wars*

(1913), an instruction manual for a table top war game played with miniaturized

figurines, he explains:

> [This game] can be played by boys of every age from twelve to one
> hundred and fifty—and even later if the limbs remain sufficiently
> supple—by girls of the better sort, and by a few rare and gifted
> women. (para. 1)

Wells' intended audience is made explicit in the full title of the book, *Little Wars*: *A*

game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more

intelligent sort of girl who likes boys' games and books. While it may be tempting to

view Wells' piece as an example of an antiquated view of gender roles, the idea that

games (especially digital games) are by default masculine pursuits has often been

repeated (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Burrill, 2008; Ivory, 2006; Lucas & Sherry, 2004;

Steinkuehler et al., 2011; Terlecki et al., 2010; D. Williams, Consalvo, et al., 2009). As

the review of investigations of women's leisure from the perspective of leisure studies

provided earlier in this chapter has illustrated, no matter the activity, women's access is

frequently impeded if not outright denied.

In the previous section I described how critical feminist game studies has

persistently shown that the narrative of the female outlier obscures the reality of play. I

argue that leisure studies can be mobilized to provide a model for much larger-scale

projects to better illustrate the pervasiveness of systemic barriers. Just as Searle and

Jackson (1985) argue that any attempt to remove barriers to leisure activities needs to

take into account the experiences of non-users to ensure that attempts to increase access

is not based on the assumptions of the manager/provider of such activities (p. 228) the

review of critical feminist literature on gaming participation shows that an

understanding of girls' and women's (lack of) participation should not be explained

away by assumptions about what constitutes an idealized female player. Despite these investigations, a persistent gap in the literature remains – what are the experiences of those who have participated but since withdrawn from a gaming community, or those who have never participated at all?

I end this literature review on a hopeful note. The fusing of leisure studies and critical feminist game studies provide a vocabulary to better discuss the role of non-participants in gaming cultures, but also creates space for intervention. Critical feminist investigations have shown that if the right conditions are provided, this "disinterest" can become interest and/or skill (Jenson and de Castell 2011). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jenson and de Castell demonstrate that even when elementary-aged girls do not have unfettered access to gaming in their leisure time, an intervention in the way girls are introduced to games shows they will flourish if given the opportunity to skill up in a space specifically designated for them. Similarly, the recent work of Fisher and Harvey (2013) has shown that even when the initial conditions of a female-only games creation incubator seem to be reinforcing patriarchal and hegemonic norms, the ability to imagine an alternative to the status quo lead to the formation of a successful activist-oriented group of female game designers. However, the increased participation of women in independent or mainstream development communities is only the first step forward. Still needing to be fixed is a toxic gaming culture where women's creations are seen as not being legitimate or are faced with hostility

The importance of intervention and the imagination of an alternative to the status quo is key to any feminist project (including this dissertation), and something I will return to in Chapter 4. Before I discuss my theoretical framework and study design,

39

I first provide a description of EVE in Chapter 3. While this MMOG may be marketed as a sandbox where players are free to follow their own path, this game and its homogenous community serve as an ideal case for which examples of barriers/constraints to play can be foregrounded.

CHAPTER 3: *EVE Online* and the Myth of the Sandbox

In this chapter I situate EVE within a broader sociotechnical context. While EVE is often described as a sandbox, that is, an open world in which players are said to have free reign to choose their own in-game activities based on what they find most interesting ("Find Your Path in the Sandbox," n.d.), in this chapter I argue the "sandbox" is more myth than reality. I begin by detailing how this particular game is positioned in the MMOG marketplace via the developer's websites. Through an analysis of these texts, I argue the official marketing implies that potential new players are assumed to already know what EVE is before visiting CCP's websites. Moving on, I turn my attention to one possible source of information where potential players may learn more about EVE, namely, websites that report on games and their related news. Here I present a summary of a year's (May 2013 to May 2014) worth of articles and opinion pieces mentioning EVE to provide a thumbnail sketch about what sorts of descriptions of EVE circulate most freely. Finally, I conclude with a review of the academic literature that uses EVE as its primary object of study. Through these investigations of how EVE is discussed in three different sites, I argue that a particular construction of what constitutes EVE and its associated gameplay has emerged. Rather than exhibiting the qualities of a sandbox game where players are free to decide what sort of play style best suits their preferences, I argue that certain types of play are privileged and ultimately are seen as being more legitimate representations of EVE than others.

A Note on the "Difficulty" of EVE Online
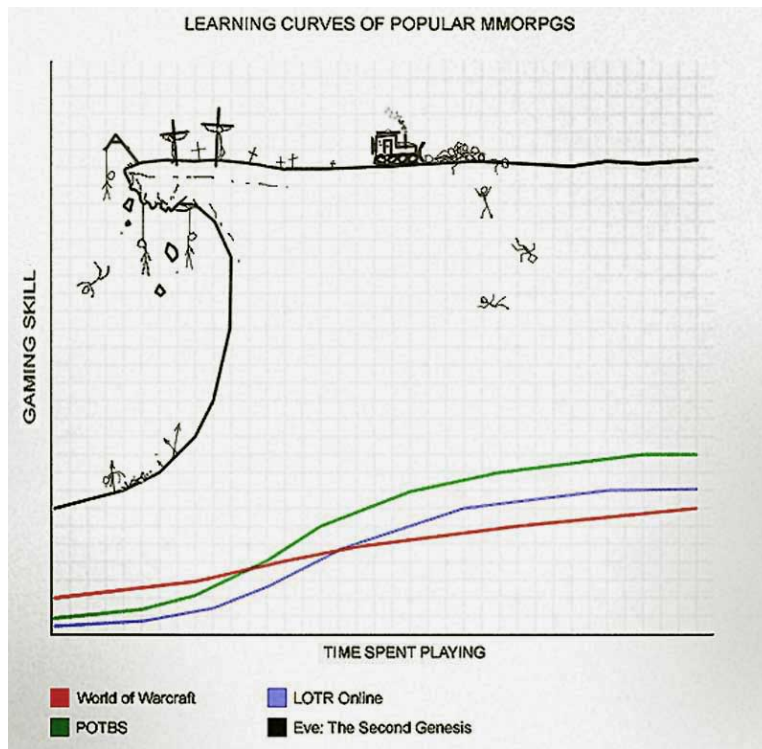
Figure 1: The notorious *EVE Online* "learning cliff"

If there were a ubiquitous image associated with EVE, it would be the image

depicted in Figure 1. The "*EVE Online* learning cliff" is an image that has been so widely

circulated and shared that the original author is no longer known.[12] Here the learning

curves of four popular MMOGs are graphed. While *World of Warcraft*, *Lord of the*

Rings Online (LOTR Online), and *Pirates of the Burning Sea* (POTBS) are represented

as having a fairly shallow learning curve, EVE has stick figures hanging off the side of

the cliff, and a tiny bulldozer shovels bodies out of the way. The punch line is that

learning to play EVE is so difficult that it is not a curve, it is a cliff and that there is a

---

[12] While the image shares a similar style to and is frequently attributed to the webcomic XKCD.com, this is actually a misattribution. This image has been shared and re-shared so many times it is no longer possible to determine the original author and therefore I cannot say for certain if it was created by a player, or an outsider looking in on this community.

trail of casualties along the journey of learning to play this particular game. This is arguably the most well known visualization of EVE, and also serves as a visualization of why playing (or writing about) the game can be so difficult. This difficulty stems from an incomplete "how to play EVE" tutorial, a user interface that is difficult to navigate, in-game mechanics such as permanent death and a constant risk of having your ship destroyed every time you leave the safety of a space station. I elaborate on these and other features of EVE below and throughout this chapter.

A Brief Introduction to EVE Online

CCP Games released *EVE Online*, a space-themed MMOG, in 2003.[13] Playing EVE requires an active Internet connection and a computer (Mac or PC) capable of running the game's software. First, a copy of the game software must be purchased through a one-time fee and then activated by registering for a monthly subscription. Originally the software could be purchased by buying a physical box that contained a CD-ROM with a copy of the game on it, but now EVE can be downloaded via CCP's website or through digital distribution platforms such as Steam. The monthly subscription can be paid by using a credit card, or by exchanging in-game currency (ISK) for PLEX (pilot license extension). This ability to use in-game currency to pay for subscription time allows for a conversion rate between ISK and US dollars, which is something I will return to in a subsequent section of this chapter. Each copy of the game allows a user to have a maximum of three characters, and therefore it is not uncommon

---

[13] It is worth noting that *Second Life* was released in 2003, and *World of Warcraft* was released in 2004. Both titles have received (and continue to receive) a large amount of academic attention from game scholars, especially when compared with how little EVE has been investigated, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

for experienced players to have multiple active EVE accounts (N. Taylor, Bergstrom, Jenson, & de Castell, 2015). It is not against the terms of service for a player to own and operate more than one EVE account, but each account requires its own monthly subscription (e.g. there are no volume discounts for operating multiple accounts).

Unique features of *EVE Online*

The game breaks from four key conventions of the MMOG genre. These deviations include how a player is represented within the EVE gameworld, the method by which a character increases in skill and abilities, the relative lack of developer intervention in the game, and finally, the server structure of the game. I will now briefly elaborate on these features before moving on to a wider discussion about how CCP positions EVE in the MMOG marketplace.

The first way EVE departs from MMOG conventions is how players are represented in New Eden. For much of the game's history, players were not represented in the gameworld with a humanoid or anthropomorphized avatar, a feature commonly found in other MMOGs. Instead, players interacted with each other and the gameworld via a spaceship. In the expansion "Incarna", released June 2011, CCP introduced fully rendered humanoid avatars and a sophisticated character creator that allowed players to modify their avatar's body in great detail, providing control right down to the level of modifying muscle group development. However, due to the graphical limitations of the game software, this new avatar is only visible to an individual player as they walk around inside their personal "Captain's Quarters"; it is not accessible to other players. As of the most recent EVE expansion ("Rhea", released December 2014), players

continue to interact with each other via their spaceship and Captain's Quarters remain inaccessible to other players.

The second way EVE departs from MMOG conventions is how an avatar increases in strength. In most MMOGs, killing computer-controlled monsters (frequently referred to as "mobs") and completing quests to gain experience points are the primary means of advancing in the game and improving their character's abilities. As players earn more experience points their character will become exponentially stronger until they have reached the plateau colloquially known as the "level cap". At this point their character will no longer increase in strength or skill; all players (no matter when they started playing) eventually reach the level cap and are on a level playing field. Character development in EVE dramatically departs from this convention. In EVE, skills are earned as a direct result of the amount of time a player spends training a particular skill. New skills are learned by purchasing a "skill book" from NPC vendors; activating the book initiates a training queue. As the level of skill advances, the length of time needed to earn higher ranks of that particular skill increases exponentially. A basic level 1 skill may take 15 to 20 minutes of training time. It is not uncommon for an advanced level 5 skill to require training times 30 days or longer. Because only one skill can be trained at a time, there is no "plateau" like in other MMOGs, and skill development is directly related to the amount of time spent training skills, newer players will never be able to "catch up" to others who have been playing EVE for a longer period of time.

The third way that EVE does not follow MMOG conventions is that the developer, CCP Games, remains relatively hands off when it comes to regulating play. Taking a

laissez faire approach to the gameworld and its players, CCP will rarely intervene in player activities except in the most extreme cases (e.g. attempts to modify the game's software code). Scamming is permitted; if another player double-crosses you and steals an item or in-game currency, CCP will not return your lost items. Similarly, CCP will not intervene in behaviours that would typically be understood in other games as "griefing", e.g. harassing another player, destroying their ship and escape pods repeatedly, or otherwise engaging in behaviours that prevent others from participating in their preferred in-game activities are not against the rules in EVE and will not result in punishment by the developer. This is noteworthy because avatar death in EVE has particularly harsh consequences – when you are attacked (either by other players or hostile NPCs) and your ship sustains enough damage, it will explode. This will destroy everything you were carrying in your cargo hold, but your avatar can attempt to escape the wreckage via an escape pod. This escape pod is also vulnerable to attack. If the pod is destroyed, you must start again with a clone of your avatar held in stasis at a space station somewhere else in the galaxy. While some areas of the EVE gameworld have NPCs that will come to your aid if another player attacks you, there is always a danger of being killed any time you venture out of a space station and fly around the galaxies of New Eden. The lack of developer intervention and such high-stakes play is something that is relatively unique in the broader MMOG landscape.

The fourth and final way EVE departs from MMOG conventions is how its server is structured. It is common for MMOG developers to spread their player populations over multiple servers; EVE is played on a single server (commonly referred to as a "single shard"). Most players interact in a single persistent universe, capable of handing

over 50,000 simultaneous connections to the server.[14] Unlike most MMOGs where players are divided into multiple smaller servers that house parallel versions of the gameworld, all EVE players are on the same server and can interact with each other. In other games, multiple servers allow players to create "a clean slate" by transferring their avatar to a new server, but that is unavailable to EVE players who are unwilling to start from scratch and begin their long training queues a second time. Each of these qualities point towards a gameworld in which players become heavily invested in a single avatar. As avatar death carries harsh consequences, interpersonal relationships are also key to one's survival in this particular gameworld.

These structures and mechanics are four of the reasons commonly cited when describing EVE as an "outlier" in the MMOG marketplace. To better contextualize how EVE is positioned in relationship to other MMOGs, I now turn my attention to how CCP Games presents their game via their official websites.

Positioning EVE Online in the MMOG market

In the previous section I provided a brief description of the basics of EVE. To learn more about how CCP describes EVE to potential new players, I investigated the official CCP websites. I began by visiting the official *EVE Online* website, www.eveonline.com. Figure 2 is a screen capture of the main landing page (what a visitor would see upon navigating their web browser to this particular URL). It is immediately apparent that this page is missing an introduction to EVE or a clearly

---

[14] CCP's expansion into the Chinese market has necessitated a second server that is only open to players connecting from (or emulating) a Chinese IP address. This division is necessary to accommodate the extra regulations required for a MMOG to operate within China, as well as the technological limitations resulting from the Chinese government's firewall.

marked frequently asked questions (FAQ) available for first time visitors to the site. Clicking on each of the links at the top of the website leads to texts and images that do contain information about the game, but are written with such specialized language that they are likely impenetrable to someone unfamiliar with EVE. For example, clicking on "one universe" loads a star map of New Eden, the virtual universe of EVE. This map is presented without annotation, and does not include an explanation of the game's single shard server and/or how this adds to a unique gameplay experience.[15]
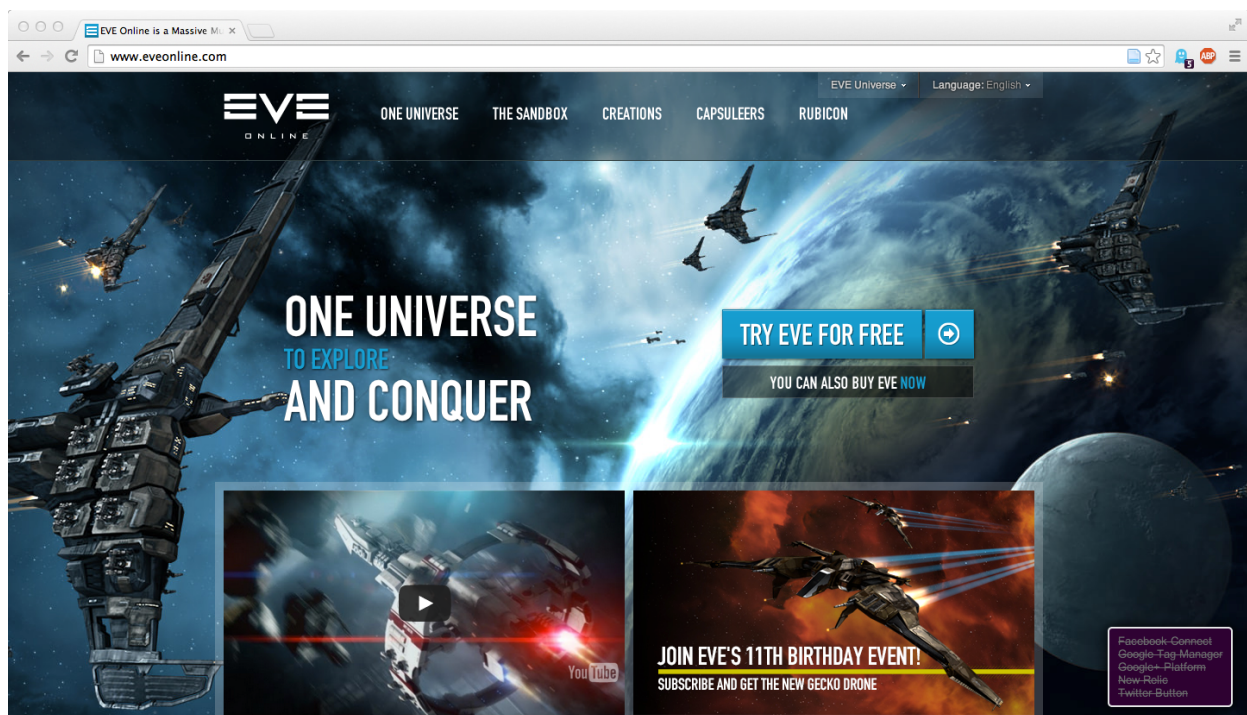
Figure 2: Screen capture of www.eveonline.com taken May 14, 2014

This lack of acknowledgement of the new player experience is especially apparent when contrasted with the official website of rival MMOG *World of Warcraft*

---

[15] After I completed data collection I re-visited the official EVE site in February 2015 and the "one universe" page has been revised to remove the star map. An additional update to the site in March 2015 replaced the link to "one universe" with "the universe" and now contains a link to the backstory/lore of the *EVE Online* universe.

(www.worldofwarcraft.com). Figure 3 is a screen capture of the main landing page for the official *World of Warcraft* website. Similar to the EVE website, there are clickable links at the top of the screen that lead the viewer to sub pages containing more detailed information about the game. However, on the *World of Warcraft* website, clicking on the second link, "game guide" marked with the book icon, leads to a comprehensive introduction to the game and all its component elements (Figure 4). At the very top of this game guide is the answer to "What is *World of Warcraft*?" which not only explains the specifics of the game, but also acts as a general introduction to the typical features of the MMOG genre more generally (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014). The information is presented in an accessible manner and especially when viewed alongside the EVE site, illustrates that the *World of Warcraft* website is far more accessible to potential new players.
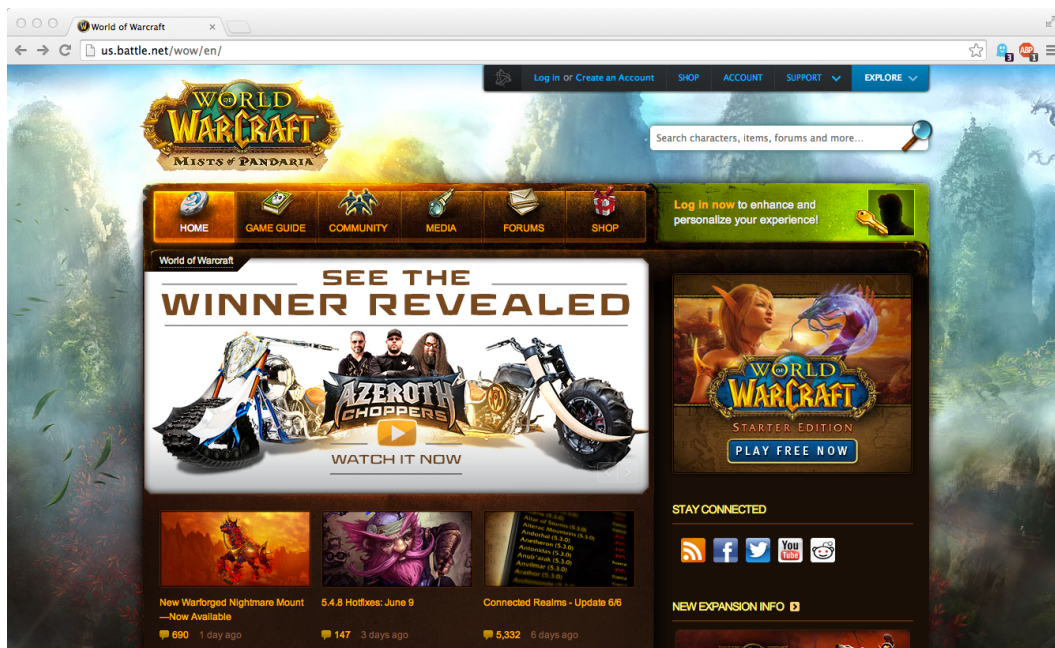
Figure 3: Screen capture of www.worldofwarcraft.com taken June 13, 2014
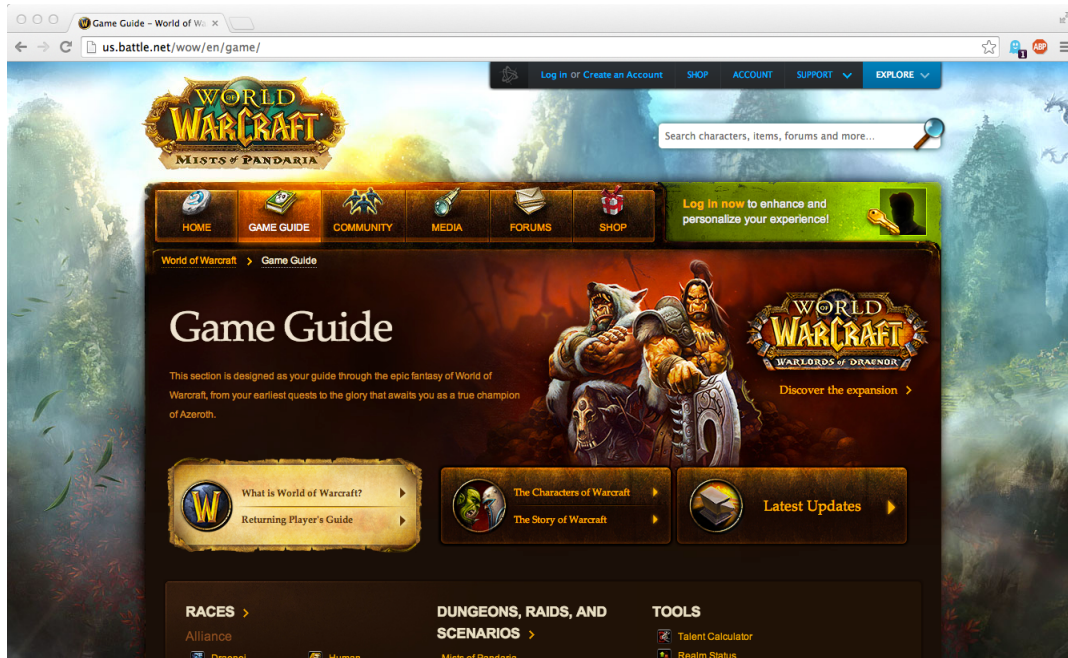
Figure 4: Screen capture of the *World of Warcraft* website's "game guide" taken June 13, 2014

While the *World of Warcraft* website has been designed to easily acclimatize a player unfamiliar with this particular game or with the MMOG genre, the official EVE website assumes a degree of familiarity with the game and MMOGs. This lack of foothold for new players, I argue, is evidence that the official EVE website is intended to primarily serve *current* players and/or players who have already been introduced to the game by some other means (e.g. current EVE players, write-ups on other websites, etc.), rather than serving as an introduction for those who have yet to be initiated to this particular MMOG. If the imagined readership of the official EVE website is current players of the game or those already "in the know", what about non-players who are seeking more information about what sort of game EVE is? Instead of finding this basic information on www.eveonline.com, a potential player could navigate to CCP games' corporate website to find a brief synopsis of the game. Hosted on a completely different

domain (www.ccpgames.com), a summary of EVE can be found under the "products"

heading. Below is a direct quote of this summary of the game and its associated

footnotes:

> *EVE Online* is set in space, in a far away future, in a world of
> unprecedented depth and magnitude. Your aim is to establish yourself
> as a major mover and shaker, trusted by your friends and respected by
> your enemies. Your means of accomplishing this will lie in your
> business acumen, social skills, Machiavellian thinking and cunning
> combat strategies. To back that up, you have access to an array of
> sophisticated equipment, deadly weapons, state of the art spaceships
> and connections to mega-corporations and crime syndicates.
>
> *EVE Online* was published in May 2003 and has been consistently
> growing since launch. EVE Online has won numerous awards and has
> received critical acclaim worldwide.
>
> *EVE Online* is in many ways different than other massively multiplayer
> games on the market today. The setting is Science Fiction, whereas
> most current offerings are Fantasy based. EVE does not employ
> sharding[16] or instancing[17] to split content and resources between
> players. This means that all players can interact with each other if they
> choose to do so. It also means that if you are famous in EVE, you are
> known by the EVE community, not by the population of one game
> server. (CCP Games, 2011)

This quote is the only description of EVE by CCP on either of their official websites. In

this quote, CCP describes the goal of EVE ("your aim is to establish yourself as a major

mover and shaker…"), without any real explanation of what that actually entails. The

next sentence alludes to the ruthless nature of EVE play, and by making reference to

weapons, implies that combat will be important to gameplay. The final paragraph

emphasizes that EVE is different from other games, and this is further fleshed out in the

---

[16] Sharding is the practice of creating separate copies of virtual worlds each of which cannot interact with
each other. Makers of virtual worlds often resort to sharding to reuse content or to increase scalability as
each world is smaller and thus more manageable. *EVE Online* does neither.
[17] Similar to sharding but deployed on smaller content segment, like a dungeon. Two different parties of
players appear to enter the same dungeon but do not see each other, as they are in their own dungeon
(instanced space) and cannot interact with the other party. Makers of virtual worlds often deploy
instancing to manage access to popular content and limit crowding. *EVE Online* does neither.

footnotes (also replicated as footnotes above in this text). However, nothing in this quote seems to provide any real introduction to what EVE is, or provide enough information for a non-player to better understand if this is a game that they should download and investigate further.

CCP may very well be banking on new players taking the offer of a free trial, displayed prominently on the main page (see Figure 2). Playing the trial (rather than reading a description on the CCP website) would give potential new players firsthand experience about what EVE's gameplay consists of, but previous research on the EVE new player experience has found that the in-game new player tutorial is incomplete. Paul (2011) has argued CCP's lack of information in the tutorial forces newcomers to seek out support from existing players. Those who are able to find an in-game community to help them through the EVE learning cliff (Figure 1) are more likely to become long-term EVE players. This has the effect of creating a tightknit (yet homogeneous) community, which I investigate further in Chapter 6.

In this section I have argued that very little information is available about EVE on the official CCP websites. To learn more about what sorts of information about this MMOG circulate in the larger gaming landscape, I investigate how EVE is described in the gaming enthusiast press, described in the next section.

Space Battles and Press Releases: EVE Online as described by three popular gaming websites

To better understand what can be learned about EVE outside of CCP's official websites, I conducted an analysis of how EVE is portrayed in the gaming enthusiast

press.[18] I selected three websites that feature daily news about MMOGs: a general

gaming website that provides coverage of a wide variety of games and game genres

(Kotaku.com), a niche website that only covers MMOGs (Tentonhammer.com) and the

nested MMOG-specific site belonging to a more general games/technology network

(Massively.Joystiq.com).[19] The three websites were selected to capture a range of

coverage and because they occupy differing places in the MMOG-news landscape, as

evidenced in their mandates (replicated in

Table 1 below). Kotaku is a highly trafficked website, currently within the top 600 most

visited sites in the United States (according to Alexa.com). Its mandate also makes

explicit reference to inclusivity, and so I selected it to see if the coverage by Kotaku

would offer a diversity of opinions/coverage about EVE. Ten Ton Hammer is a long-

running site and one of the top results returned by Google for the keywords "MMOG

news site". Massively by Joystiq (shortened herein to Massively) is a multimedia site

that offers both news and editorials, and was selected because it hosts an EVE-specific

column ("EVE Evolved", written by long-time player Brendan Drain) that appears on

the main page of the Massively site. I purposefully did not choose any websites or blogs

that write exclusively about EVE, as I was interested to see what sorts of information is

accessible and available that is not necessarily intended for current players of the game.

---

[18] "Gaming enthusiast press" is the closest term I could find to articulate my interest in writing about EVE found in publications specifically devoted to games and written by authors who specialize in games journalism. For example, enthusiast press is defined by Carlson (2009) as that which "… produces consumer-oriented publications that focus on publicizing specific categories of goods, often high-end technological products (such as video games, computers, or cars)" (para. 4.1). Put another way, I'm not interested in how EVE is described by someone who does not frequently write about games (e.g. one off coverage for a newspaper or a general interest magazine). Instead, I'm interested in how EVE is portrayed by journalists for whom writing about games is their speciality or "beat".

[19] Joystiq and its nested sites (including Massively) were shuttered in early 2015 through downsizing measures by the site's owner, AOL (Tach, 2015; Wawro, 2015).

Using the NCapture extension to the Nvivo qualitative analysis software suite, I

archived all articles with the topic tag of "EVE Online" appearing on each of the three

sites between May 2013 and May 2014 and coded the topics discussed in these articles.

A summary of the articles collected is included below in

Table 1. Between May 2013 and May 2014 a total of 267 articles tagged with the

descriptor/keyword "EVE Online" appeared on the three websites, with over half of the

articles (N=178) appearing on Massively. This large number of articles is in part due to

the bi-weekly EVE-specific column hosted on Massively "EVE Evolved" (N=42). Ten

Ton Hammer posted 56 EVE-tagged articles within this time period, and 33 appeared

on Kotaku. Neither Ten Ton Hammer nor Kotaku have a specific column or specific

writers dedicated to covering EVE and/or its players.

Website	Website's Mandate	# of Articles
Kotaku www.kotaku.com/tag/eve-online	Thank you for reading *Kotaku*, a news and opinion site about games and things serious gamers care about. We're here to inform you and, sometimes, entertain you. We aim to be an inclusive site for gamers of any ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. We expect our writers and commenters to treat those they write about as they would if they met them in person. For more on what that means, on the values we embrace and on what lines we expect writers and commenters not to cross, please read this. (http://kotaku.com/whats-a-kotaku-who-works-here-458637663)	33
Ten Ton Hammer http://www.tentonhammer.com/eve	Ten Ton Hammer was founded in the spring of 2004 as part of the Master Games Intl. network of gaming websites. Massively-multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs) are our passion, and we aim to provide the best and most relevant information possible to our readers daily. (http://www.tentonhammer.com/about)	56
Massively by Joystiq	Massively is an enthusiast blog focused on the massively multiplayer genre of online gaming. In addition to providing	178

	the latest MMO-related news, we produce informative and entertaining editorials, guides, features, livestreams, podcasts, and more, all from writers dedicated to playing and writing about MMOs and multiplayer online video games. The blog was founded in November of 2007 as part of the Joystiq network, which also includes Joystiq and WoW Insider. We pride ourselves on upholding a strict set of ethical standards that aren't found at traditional games media outlets. We don't accept stipends or travel expenses from game studios, we don't do score-based reviews, and we don't control advertising or giveaways (AOL's ad team does). Joystiq's ethics policy likewise extends to us. (http://massively.joystiq.com/team)	
http://massively.joystiq.com/category/eve-online		

Table 1: Summary of the site mandates for the three websites selected for the study. This table also includes the number of EVE related articles and opinion pieces appearing on each of the three selected websites between May 2013 and May 2014.

After archiving the articles using NCapture, I read through all of the articles and coded them according to the article's primary topic. The top five results of this coding are described in detail in

Table 2. While these five topics make up the majority (75.6%) of the articles included in this investigation, the remaining 65 articles cover a range of topics including recent changes to the EVE new player experience (N=11) and coverage of the monument that CCP built in downtown Reykjavík to honour the EVE playerbase, which was unveiled at the 2014 Fanfest celebrations (N=10). In order to maintain a manageable scope this section's analysis will remain focused on the five topics that made up 75.6% of the coverage about EVE on these three sites.

Code and Description of Code	# of Articles
Press Releases Articles where content is taken directly from the official EVE website or blog posts made by CCP developers ("dev blogs")	93
Miscellaneous Articles tagged with "EVE Online" but EVE is not the primary subject of the article	37
Other titles by CCP Games Articles tagged with "EVE Online" but the primary subject matter is another game	28

previously, currently, or projected to be developed by CCP Games: *EVE Valkyrie* (N=16); *Dust 514* (N=9); *World of Darkness* (N=2); *Project Legion* (N=1)	
Space Battles Articles focusing primarily on large-scale PVP battles	26
Fanfest/EVE Vegas Articles specifically about Fanfest and/or EVE Vegas, the annual developer-sanctioned player meetups held in Reykjavik and Las Vegas.	18

Table 2: Summary of topic analysis coding of the 267 EVE-related articles included in this dataset.

The most frequent type of coverage about EVE took the form of reproducing press releases or other content produced by CCP Games, such as the replication of content from CCP employee's blog posts (colloquially referred to as "dev blogs"). Editorial comment was infrequently offered. Instead, articles coded in this category took the form of "news flashes" where either the entirety or a selection of the developer's text was replicated on the website, and a link to the press release or dev blog was provided. This heavy reliance on CCP's own statements meant that the topics of these articles remain clustered around the announcements of a new expansion e.g. "EVE Online: Rubicon coming November 19th" (Olivetti, 2013) and "CCP Announces EVE: Rubicon Expansion Coming November 19th" (Martuk, 2013b) or announcements about forthcoming in-game changes such as "EVE Online warns supercarrier pilots of impending changes" (Lefebvre, 2014). These topics may be of interest to current EVE players, but given how tightly focused they are about in-game events, would likely be of little interest (or even be easily accessible) to someone with only a passing interest in the game. When comparing across the three websites, Ten Ton Hammer's coverage about EVE consisted almost entirely of reproducing CCP's press releases. Massively had a more equal split between press releases and other types of coverage, while Kotaku did not replicate any press releases in the year's worth of articles coded.

The second most frequent topic code was "miscellaneous", a catchall category I created for articles where the main topic was not EVE or its players. Rather than excluding or discarding this set of articles, I draw attention to a trend of using EVE as a counterexample to either highlight how different the game is from the rest of the MMOG marketplace, or mentioning EVE once but never referring to it again through the rest of the article. Articles tagged with the keyword "EVE Online" yet coded as miscellaneous appeared primarily on Massively (N=33), with the remaining four on Ten Ton Hammer. For example, "EVE Online" is listed as a keyword in the header of a Massively editorial published as part of the weekly *The Soapbox* column entitled "Actually, that isn't really an MMO" (Drain, 2013) where the author (who is also the author of the *EVE Evolved* column mentioned above) offers his opinion about where the line should be drawn on what does and does not constitute a MMOG. And yet, specific mention of EVE does not appear anywhere within the actual text of the article, only in the keywords. In another example, a different posting of *The Soapbox* mentions EVE a single time as an example of a game where those players who own a long-term active account have a demonstrable advantage over newer players (Foster, 2013). That miscellaneous was the second most frequent category provides evidence that beyond the officially sanctioned comments made by the developer (i.e. replication of CCP press releases and dev blogs) there is little engagement with this particular MMOG by the gaming enthusiast press.

This lack of deep engagement follows in the third most frequent type of coverage of EVE, which like the miscellaneous category above, are articles tagged as about EVE but are decidedly *not* about EVE. Here I note that the content of 28 articles labelled with the "EVE Online" tag were actually about other games previously, currently, or

forecasted to be under development by CCP Games.[20] The majority of this coverage was about *EVE Valkyrie*, a dogfight simulator set in space for the Oculus Rift. Originally put on display at Fanfest 2013, this prototype was so popular with attendees that CCP decided to develop it as a standalone product. From this, I interpret that for these sites, "CCP Games" and "EVE Online" are synonymous and interchangeable, and that a fan of EVE is assumed to be interested in all other activities by its developer.

The fourth and fifth most frequent topics feature articles that engage with the EVE beyond replicating CCP press releases or mentioning the game in a superficial manner. Specifically, these articles were about large-scale player verses player (PVP) battles (N=26) and articles about Fanfest (the annual player convention hosted by CCP in Iceland) or EVE Vegas (the annual player convention organized by fans but attended by CCP employees in Las Vegas) (N=18). Despite being marketed as a "sandbox" game by CCP, the coverage on EVE's gameworld and/or its players does not demonstrate this diversity of play. Instead, coverage is heavily focused on PVP, specifically the extremely large battles that do not seem to be so readily observed in other popular MMOGs. Furthermore, this coverage also tends to highlight the destruction caused by such battles, frequently providing a US dollar conversion so those not familiar with EVE can better understand the scale of such fighting. Indeed, 11 trillion ISK would likely be meaningless to a reader unfamiliar with EVE, but if translated to US dollars would allow them to be much more appreciative of the cost of PVP in EVE. For example:

---

[20] These other games are *Dust 514* (released in 2013), a first-person shooter for the PlayStation 3; *EVE Valkyrie* (in production), a dogfight simulator for the Oculus Rift; *Project Legion* (in production) a PC-only successor to *Dust 514*; and the MMOG *World of Darkness* (cancelled). I will return to *World of Darkness* in Chapter 6, as the game was cancelled over the course of writing this dissertation and is significant for describing the sorts of player demographics CCP is attempting to capture in their player base(s).

> This week saw the largest record-breaking battle to date as a total of 7,548 players belonging to EVE's two largest megacoalitions fought for control of an innocuous dead-end solar system in the Immensea region. **A total of 11 trillion ISK in damage worth over \$310,000 USD was inflicted during what has now become known as The Bloodbath of B-R5RB and is allegedly the largest PVP battle in gaming history.** The odd story of how the fight started and its record-breaking destructive scale are both big news, but the unsung heroes of B-R5RB are the people who work behind the scenes to ensure that the server can remain online during major battles. (Drain, 2014a, para. 2)

"The Bloodbath of B-R5RB", the large-scale PVP battle that lasted for days mentioned in the excerpt above, is the primary topic in articles in this dataset about PVP in EVE. While not the first (and likely not the last) large space-battle in EVE, the fighting in B-R5RB and subsequent destruction of in-game items captured the attention of mainstream press far beyond the three sites selected for this study, which is discussed further in Taylor et al. (2015).

Finally, the fifth largest cluster of articles focused on Fanfest and EVE Vegas, the annual EVE player conventions held in Reykjavík and Las Vegas. These articles would likely be of little interest to someone not familiar with EVE, but perhaps would be of interest for current players unable to make the journey to Iceland or Las Vegas or are considering attending in a future year. Articles ranged from those that exhibited similar traits as the press releases discussed above, such as announcing the events e.g. "CCP Announces EVE Vegas 2013" (Martuk, 2013a) or a rundown of activities at the events e.g. "CCP Announces Plans for Epic Celebration at EVE Fanfest" (Martuk, 2014), but also included some more editorial style pieces about the author's experiences at one or both of the events. These editorials were primarily positive, with one notable exception that is discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Through this investigation of a year's worth of articles about EVE, it becomes clear that the coverage in the enthusiast press does not engage with this MMOG as if it were a "sandbox". Instead, coverage replicates CCP press releases, is focused on only one possible in-game activity (large-scale PVP battles), or is focused on topics that would be interested to a narrow audience (CCP's other games, or EVE player conventions) – if it even engages with EVE at all (as was the case with the miscellaneous category). In the following section I describe how EVE was characterized in the articles collected over this one-year period. Rather than being a sandbox with limitless options for play, descriptions of this MMOG seem to be more in line with the "learning cliff" (Figure 1) that was included at the beginning of this chapter.

Characterizing *EVE Online*

In addition to categorizing the articles by topic, I also made note of particular characterizations of EVE, including specific descriptions of the game being hard, boring, or different than other games. In some cases, the headline helps reinforce the ruthlessness of EVE, such as Jason Schreier's (2014) "A look at the insane history of EVE Online" appearing on Kotaku, which details Andrew Groen's kickstarter campaign to fund his documentation of and subsequent book about the oral history of EVE. The text of the article makes mention of "giant space battles", "digital warfare", "virtual warfare", and "politicking", but makes no mention of any of the player verses environment (PVE) activities that one can participate in EVE (e.g. mining, manufacturing). Similarly, the headline for another article on Kotaku article covering the release of the Darkhorse Comics and CCP Games collaborative project based on

60

actual events that have happened within the EVE universe invokes a similar sentiment about people who play this game: "A comic that perfectly captures the evil genius of EVE Online players" (Narcisse, 2014).[21]

The characterizations highlighting deviant or ruthless actions by EVE players appeared more frequently on Kotaku, and less so on Ten Ton Hammer and Massively. Kotaku, to repeat, is a more general interest gaming site, Ten Ton Hammer is a MMOG-specific site, and Massively is a MMOG-specific sub-site nested within the Joystiq network. These sites occupy different positions in the enthusiast press landscape, with Ten Ton Hammer and Massively sharing some degree of overlap. The coverage on Kotaku between May 2013 and May 2014, while not replicating the press releases or dev blogs authored by CCP employees, tended to focus on the more sensational aspects of EVE. This focus on sensational in-game events also happens in academic writing about EVE, and elsewhere I have argued that such in-game events tend to be the most easily understood and accessible to non or novice players (Bergstrom, Carter, Woodford, & Paul, 2013). "EVE players doing horrible things to each other" make for exciting headlines and such coverage requires little knowledge of the in-game affordances or rule structures other than a loose grasp on the idea that EVE is a lawless space. By consistently presenting EVE in such a manner, Kotaku helps to maintain the idea that EVE is a game of interest to players who are interested in ruthless play and can encourage such players to investigate this game further. Potential players who would prefer a more collaborative (or, less of a "fend for yourself") gameplay experience will

---

[21] The stories included in *EVE Online: True Stories* were selected by current EVE players, via pubic debate on the official game forums. The process of this selection is described in detail by Carter et al. (2015).

likely self-select out of EVE long before they would consider downloading the free trial and playing through the EVE tutorial. Despite EVE being marketed as a sandbox game offering an immersive and self-directed play experience, the coverage on Kotaku does not present it as such. To learn more about how EVE is characterized by those who have opted out of trying the game, I included a branch in my survey design to capture the opinions and descriptions of EVE for those who indicate they are familiar with EVE but have never played it. The study design will be described in detail in Chapter 4, and I will return to these characterizations of EVE by non-players in Chapter 6.

At the other end of the spectrum are Ten Ton Hammer and Massively, where coverage of EVE is much more focused on replicating the official press releases and words written by CCP employees. By relying on the jargon familiar to current EVE players, this sort of coverage also works to signal that EVE is a game likely of interest to some people more than others. Much like the official EVE website described earlier in this chapter, such coverage offers little foothold for new players to learn about the variety of play made available within this MMOG's gameworld. Based on this analysis of reporting about EVE over a one-year period, it would seem that coverage in the enthusiast press has very little middle ground and instead clusters around two extremes: shallow sensationalist coverage of ruthless play that does little to contextualize the diversity of experiences that a "sandbox" game purports to offer, and highly technical and jargon-filled coverage seemingly written with the imagined audience of a current EVE player in mind, often purloined directly from EVE or CCP's own web sites.

An outlier in the dataset

There is one article that was part of this dataset that warrants a special note, Keza Macdonald's (2014) "I watched ten game developers get demolished by an MMA champ", published on Kotaku. Written in the form of a personal narrative of her visit to the 2014 Fanfest celebrations, MacDonald emphasizes both the weirdness and outlier status of EVE common in other Kotaku articles about the game, but also serves as the only article in the dataset that acknowledges the gender imbalance of the community and the game's development team. Specifically, MacDonald writes of the mixed martial arts (MMA) fight that was a scheduled event at Fanfest 2014, where ten members of CCP staff were pitted against Gunnar Nelson, a famous Icelandic MMA champion. She argues that an officially sanctioned MMA fight as part of a gaming convention works to highlight the assumed masculinities of this particular MMOG's audience:

> I look around the auditorium as the audience cheers and Gunnar lifts his trophy, uncomfortably aware that I'm one of the only women in the room. At that moment, I feel like I'm watching EVE's masculine power fantasies wrought flesh. It is the purest real-world reflection of its hyper-masculinity that I could imagine - there's an undercurrent of male competition running through the whole of Fanfest, usually just under the surface, occasionally coming up for air as its attendees chant "DESTROY! DESTROY! DESTROY!" at the end of a keynote or square up to each other after one too many beers on the pub crawl. (MacDonald, 2014, para. 12)

The topic of this dissertation has expanded beyond my original proposed question about why so few women play EVE, yet gender (and gender based stereotypes about who does/does not play games) remains unavoidably threaded throughout my investigation and analysis. In the previous chapter, I reviewed the leisure studies literature, including research about women's leisure and barriers to access. The sorts of interactions described by MacDonald overlap with the assumptions described by critical feminist

game studies literature also reviewed in Chapter 2, whereby the imagined player continues to be young white males. In the Hegemony of Play, Fron et al. (2007) argue that a "core audience" of game players have become a very narrow yet desirable demographic chased by most mainstream game developers. And yet, this stereotypical conceptualization of the wants and interests of who plays (and buys) is not necessarily representative of the majority of players, including most males who play games.

MacDonald's article also invites further reflection about the types of masculinities that are found in gaming cultures. The specific study of masculinity remains underexplored within game studies, indeed my own experiences studying gender and games usually result in conference panels detailing research about the play practices of girls and women. This points to a much larger issue where men/masculinity is seen as the default and it becomes easier to focus on the "outliers" e.g. women, children, and anyone else who falls outside the assumed "typical" game player. When masculinity is interrogated from a games studies perspective, it is often combined theories of masculinities informed by feminist theory (Connell, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Such work highlights the "hypermasculine" culture associated with games showing how masculinity is performative and often exclusionary (Burrill, 2008; Huntemann, 2002; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Witkowski, 2013), such as the investigation of competitive *Halo 3* play by Nicholas Taylor (2010) where the rules of the gaming convention required young men to sit in close proximity to each other, yet he observed how the men took great care to avoid touching each other, reaffirming each other's

heterosexuality in a homosocial space (pp. 206-212).[22] MMA fighting is also a homosocial space where an emphasis on violence, physical dominance, and intimidation is needed to distract from two scantily clad men grappling on the ground, serving as entertainment for a (largely) male audience.

The inclusion of a MMA event at Fanfest seems to indicate an assumed demographic of EVE players an even narrower demographic than the presumed player described in Chapter 2 beyond being straight, white, and male, but also attracted to a culture of aggression and intimidation. CCP's conceptualization of their core demographic of player as being someone who would enjoy watching a MMA fight. In my contribution to the forthcoming edited anthology *Internet Spaceships are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*, I apply the framework of hegemonic masculinities to EVE to show how certain types of play (the competitive, cutthroat PVP style of play) are valorized, while the more collaborative activities of miners or industrialists are derided or actively prevented from participating in their preferred in-game activities (Bergstrom, forthcoming). I will return to the policing of particular playstyles throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

MacDonald's editorial stands in stark contrast with the rest of the coverage on EVE that I have explored in this chapter. I argue that it is only by looking at the outliers, in this case MacDonald's description of a MMA fight, that the homogeneity of this community's composition (and coverage of this game and its players) becomes apparent. It also serves as an example of how easily gender drops from public

---

[22] *Halo 3* is a first person shooter played on an Xbox 360 console. The Xbox 360 can be played via a wireless controller, allowing players to sit back away from the television screen, but the rules of this competition required players to use USB wired controllers. This rule resulted in the competitors having to sit in close proximity to each other, as the USB wire is only 9 feet long.

conversations and how this particular game's very small female player base is rarely given thought, except to reaffirm the stereotype that women don't like competitive play and they most certainly do not like science fiction or spaceships. In the next chapter I will describe how my investigation of this MMOG community is framed by a feminist research philosophy, and how this philosophy of research allows for an imagining of an alternative beyond the status quo. This replication of particularly narrow narratives about what EVE is and who plays it is also present in much of the academic writing about this MMOG, which I discuss in the following section.

Academic Investigations of EVE Online

Now that I have described how EVE is positioned by CCP and the ways it is written about by the enthusiast press, I conclude this chapter with a review of the academic literature on EVE. For the sake of brevity, I sidestep the literature that uses EVE as a passing example that shares the same qualities as the "miscellaneous" category above; I have noted in previous work that in-passing references make up the majority of positive hits for "EVE Online" in various academic databases (Bergstrom, de Castell, & Jenson, 2011). Instead, this literature review only covers articles, chapters, and conference papers that use EVE as a substantial case study or as its sole object of study. This review is also limited to work appearing in English, but I note that some literature does exist in Icelandic, such as the graduate work by Oli Gneisti Sóleyjarson (2009), which was conducted with the aid of CCP.

When I began my doctoral program in 2010, there was very little writing about EVE. Since then, the number of academic investigations of EVE has increased, but as this review demonstrates, much of what has been investigated remains narrowly

focused. Very little is known about who plays EVE and for what reasons and even less about those who once played but have since quit; the survey component of this dissertation research (discussed further in Chapter 4) will fill in such gaps about this player community.

While EVE was released in 2003, academic publications about the game only began to appear around 2007, beginning with Feng, Brandt & Saha (2007) who collaborated with a CCP employee (Brandt) to investigate "churn", the rate at which new players join and existing players quit EVE. By tracking patterns of how often players connect to the game server, Feng et al. found they could predict which players would cancel their EVE account. Their primary finding is that 70% of new players will quit about a year after creating an account (p. 22) and players quit at a rate slightly less than new players joining (p. 23). It is important to note that player churn is not something unique to EVE and has been studied in relationship to other popular MMOGs including *World of Warcraft* (Debeauvais, Nardi, Schiano, Ducheneaut, & Yee, 2011; Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2006) and *EverQuest II* (Kawale, Pal, & Srivastava, 2009). I also note that Feng et al.'s investigation does not look into the particulars of *who* drops out, as no demographic data is used in their analysis.

A very different approach to EVE appears in the same year. Ashley John Craft (2007) uses a particularly notorious in-game betrayal as their case study to discuss morality within virtual worlds:

> Members of The Guiding Hand spent a year infiltrating a rival organization before assassinating their leader and stealing in-game assets valued at 16,500 US dollars, effectively shattering the trust within the organization's social network setting its members back months of playing time. (Craft, 2007, p. 205)

This specific case study is significant, as it is drawn from an article entitled "Murder Incorporated", first published in 2005 by *PC Gamer* magazine in their print magazine and now archived online at <u>www.computerandvideogames.com</u> (Francis, 2008). While the value of the ship destroyed pales in comparison to the damage caused in "The Bloodbath of B-R5RB" described in the previous section, this coverage by *PC Gamer* sets the tone for subsequent reporting about EVE and the ruthless play that happens within New Eden.

The use of a particular in-game case study to build a larger argument about the overlap between offline and online worlds is not limited to Craft's discussion of virtual morality. A similar structure is used by Ethan White (2008) where another notorious in-game event is used to frame their introduction, this time a player's defrauding of 8.9 trillion ISK from Ebank (an in-game player-run bank), worth between $80,000 to $170,000 USD (pp. 237-238). White uses this example from EVE as his case study to argue that victims of in-game fraud should have access to offline recourse in a civil court.

Both the actions of The Guiding Hand and the player that defrauded Ebank, along with other notorious events in EVE's history such as the infiltration and subsequent dissolution of a powerful corporation (Band of Brothers) appear in the introduction of Melissa de Zwart's (2009) investigation of virtual world governance models. While the subsequent analysis in de Zwart's exploration relies heavily on examples from *Second Life*, EVE was used as a hook in the introduction and then reappears to serve as an example of a game that has a committee of active players (the Council of Stellar management or CSM) that serve as a liaison between CCP and the

68

larger EVE community. These three articles offer a much deeper analysis of in-game events than the journalistic coverage discussed earlier in this chapter. However, much like the coverage by Kotaku discussed above, these three authors still rely heavily on sensational stories that require little specialized in-game knowledge to understand and reinforce the idea that EVE is worthy of investigation *because* of the shocking actions of the people who play it.

It is interesting to note that missing from de Zwart's account is an explanation of *why* the CSM exists. For this, I turn to the use of EVE as a case study within Bridget Blodgett's (2009) larger discussion of virtual world activism and online protests. This council of EVE players are elected by their peers for a one year term where they interface with CCP (primarily online, but they are also flown to Iceland multiple times per year). The CSM is expected to provide "a player perspective" to CCP in their decision-making, but also serves as an oversight community to ensure that CCP employees do not offer unfair advantages to some players over others, as was the case described by Blodgett. In her description of how the CSM was initiated, Blodgett recounts how an EVE player known as "Kugutsumen" gained access to a private message board and collected evidence that a CCP employee had been conspiring with a group of players to give them advantages (e.g. powerful in-game items, in-game currency) over their rivals. As a direct result of the public outrage caused by this leaked information, and to become accountable in preventing such collusion from happening again, CCP created the CSM to act as a democratically elected "watchdog" group composed of nine active EVE players. For Blodgett, this controversy provides an example from which to discuss the social contract between game developers and players, and explore whether

CCP is legally and/or ethically obligated to go to such lengths to appease their player community.

In the academic investigations of EVE I have discussed thus far, authors have relied on the re-telling of events either via the popular press (Craft, 2007; de Zwart, 2009; White, 2008) or forum posts (Blodgett, 2009). Two investigations of EVE that take a much more descriptive approach to the play experience are Christopher Paul's conference paper "Don't Play Me" (2011) and a chapter in William Bainbridge's book entitled *The Virtual Future* (2011). Both authors write about EVE based on their personal experiences playing the game. Paul focuses specifically on the textual content and underlying messages being conveyed to the new player in the EVE tutorial system. Describing how the tutorial leaves out crucial information required for a player's success, Paul argues that this is done purposefully to drive new players to find more experienced players to act as guides and create inroads to the existing community. Those who are not successful in finding mentors (or choose to go at it alone), Paul claims, are much more likely to quit the game:

> Should a new player fail to seek out other people or external resources for help, they are not likely to stay long in New Eden, a decision that decreases the size of the likely audience for *EVE,* while making the player base more homogenous and stickier for those who fit the narrowed target demographic. (Paul, p. 264, 2011)

Paul's description of the game casts EVE as an exclusive universe – only a "select few" make it through the trials and challenges of learning to play it. This speculation is corroborated by Feng et al. (2007) who report that 30% of new *EVE* players will quit after one month, and 70% of new players will quit about a year after creating an account (p. 22). Paul's qualitative description offers a potential reason as to *why* these players

might be quitting. When viewed together, Feng et al. and Paul's studies begin to lay the groundwork for investigations of player theories about EVE being a difficult game that few will play long enough to master, a topic that I investigate in Chapter 6.

While Paul used his own play experience to describe why some players might quit, Bainbridge draws from his play experience to discuss EVE lore and narrative. Alongside other MMOGs such as *World of Warcraft, Star Wars Galaxies* and *Star Trek Online*, Bainbridge recounts his experiences playing EVE as a new player. Bainbridge largely ignores gameplay and spends a significant portion of his text treating EVE (and the other MMOGs in his study), as an unfolding narrative. He writes in the third person and describes his play with two different EVE avatars, which he presents as two separate and distinct personalities. This creates an impression that Bainbridge is narrating the adventures of characters in a story rather than a recounting of his own play within an online interactive game. For Bainbridge, it is the story that drives play, arguing that the rich narrative provides a sense of purpose and rationale for the game's notable PVP environment: one must kill other players aligned with "enemy" forces to assure survival in New Eden. Rather than painting the EVE universe as being purposely difficult to dissuade all but the most dedicated players (as is the case in Paul's characterization of EVE) Bainbridge recasts the inhospitality as a plot device that asks new players to insert themselves into the gameworld's narrative, fighting (and killing other players) for their own survival.

Missing from Bainbridge's characterization of PVP in EVE is a discussion of the game's reputation for "griefing"[23] and antagonism between player communities that coexist within the confines of this particular MMOG that is foregrounded in much of the other work I reviewed earlier in this section. However, EVE does make an appearance in Nick Webber's (2011) theorizing of griefing in virtual worlds. Using Goonswarm[24] as one example of his definitional work on grief play, Webber (2011) describes the tactics used by some *EVE* players to complicate the idea of griefing. According to Webber, prominent members of the *EVE* community use the label "griefer" to describe those that do not conform to the "accepted" or "community norms" for behaviours and play style. This, he argues, acts as a way of delegitimizing certain player activities. For example, Goonswarm, a group of players who are notorious for willfully and publically disregarding the norms about how a PVP battle "should" unfold, are accused by "traditional" corporations of breaking the unofficial rules of the game and therefore are griefers. Webber, however, does not agree that Goonswarm's critique (and shunning) of conventional EVE play styles is synonymous with griefing. Instead, it is a way for new players to reject the more traditional expectations about how EVE should be played (expectations that largely favour players that have been playing the game for an

---

[23] One of the four player types characterized by Bartle (1996) in his typography of MUD player types, "killers" are described as taking extreme pleasure in tormenting other players. While the term "griefer" does not appear in his original piece, Bartle's definition of "killers" has since become synonymous with grief play. Despite being formulated based on his experiences with MUDs, Bartle's player types are often referenced in studies of griefing in MMOGs, such as Lin and Sun's (2005) study of *Lineage* and *Ragnarok Online*, Meyer's (2007) study *of City of Heroes* and *City of Villains* and Chesney et al.'s (2009) study of *Second Life*.

[24] Goonswarm is a powerful in-game Alliance. Players are primarily recruited from the *Something Awful* message board. I will return to a discussion of Goonswarm and their notorious reputation in the EVE community in Chapter 6.

extended period of time and put new players at a serious disadvantage in PVP battles),[25] as a means of inverting power structures and giving new players a "fighting chance" to survive in PVP battles.

In 2012 a shift in the sorts of writing about EVE begins to emerge. Despite Darryl Woodford's (2013) description of the difficulties of conducting ethnographic work in a non-avatar environment such as EVE, articles and conference papers drawing on interviews with current players start to appear at this time. In some cases, such as publications stemming from Marcus Carter's (2013, 2015) doctoral research, this literature remains focused on the more ruthless elements of EVE play, but rather than building an argument based on coverage of a notorious event in the popular press, Carter draws on ethnographic data. For example, EVE figures prominently in Carter et al.'s (2012) investigation of the multiple usages of the term "metagame" by academics and players.[26] Highlighting the importance of out of game communication and interaction, the authors draw on interviews and participant observation in Dreddit, a well-known and large corporation aligned with Goonswarm. Carter et al. argue that the metagame is what keeps longtime players interested in EVE and maintaining an active subscription. Because so much of what draws EVE players to the game actually exists outside of the gameworld, Carter et al. argue the metagame of EVE contributes to its reputation as a difficult game (p. 16). Elsewhere, Carter and Gibbs (2013) have drawn on

---

[25] Gurto, Ryan & Blair (2011) mention briefly that new players are at a similar disadvantage economically, as they lack an entry point into the cartels and alliances that are a key component of financial success in EVE.

[26] Carter et al. do not provide a definition of "metagame" instead their analysis starts from the position that too many conflicting definitions are currently used in academic gaming literature. Metagame is frequently defined as being a strategy for playing a game that transcends beyond the formal rules of a particular game. The detailed Wikipedia article for this term is suggested to be read in conjunction with Carter et al.'s paper to provide additional context: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metagaming

ethnographic investigations to discuss e-sports in EVE (EVEsports), specifically that spying on other teams or bribing opposing players to throw the match are not only acceptable, but common practice. Finally, Carter (2014) has also looked at player-created texts, specifically those modeled on wartime propaganda posters, to recruit new players to join Dreddit.

In my own collaborations with Carter, we use propaganda as an example of the way particular playstyles are normalized and have become reflective of the outward facing representations of what EVE play consists of (Bergstrom, Carter, Woodford, et al., 2013). In "Constructing the Ideal EVE Online Player", an earlier iteration of the argument presented in this dissertation serves as my contribution to the collaborative effort of that paper. Negating the idea that EVE is some sort of "special flower" that is attractive to a "special kind of bee", my co-authors and I examine the ways that conscious design decisions by CCP compel certain behaviours from the game's players, and that particular behaviours are normalized as what playing EVE "should" look like. This idea is picked up once again in another collaborative investigation, where my co-authors and I present the first investigation of the miners and industrialists who produce the raw materials required for the EVE economy to remain functioning (N. Taylor et al., 2015). Drawing on interviews and observations of play both in lab and LAN settings, this paper demonstrates that the in-game work of players who *do not* participate in the large-scale space battles that populate much of the other writing about this MMOG is at best ignored by CCP, and at worst, actively denigrated by those players who prefer to PVP. Finally, I draw attention to the work of Catherine Goodfellow (2014) whose investigation of the Russian-language EVE community clearly articulates the

casual and overt racism that exists within this player community. Goodfellow's ability to conduct fieldwork in both Russian and English allows for a cross-cultural comparison of this player community, something that has been completely overlooked to date.

While earlier academic work on this game seemed to rely heavily on third party descriptions of controversial in-game events, the closing paragraphs of this section has shown that there is an emerging body of literature that complicates the perspective that EVE play consists entirely of lying, cheating, scamming, and assassinating other players.[27] This body of literature is still developing and will require time before it overtakes the highly cited earlier academic work on this game. However, the future of EVE scholarship should hopefully move beyond the sensationalist stories described in the first part of this section, as two workshops (Bergstrom, Carter, & Woodford, 2013; Carter, Woodford, & Bergstrom, 2013) have resulted in a forthcoming edited anthology to be published by University of Minnesota Press.

Bringing the Threads Together

Returning to the positioning of EVE in the MMOG market, the fact that this is a "sandbox" style game is frequently stressed by the developer and players alike. While the official website provides little help to explain to a new player about what the game entails, clues about the imagined audience are found on CCP's presence on other sites around the internet, including the company's YouTube page where lyrics from the CCP-

---

[27] This is not to say that this characterization of EVE has disappeared completely, as using controversial events in EVE to serve as a case study appear in recent publications by Suzor and Woodford (2013) who are writing about the use of bots within a MMOG. Similarly, de Zwart and Humphreys (2014) use the words and actions of a notorious EVE player to conduct an investigation quite similar to Blodgett's (2009) description of the CSM discussed earlier in this chapter.

employee band call for players to "harden the fuck up" and that killing fellow players is "just a form of communication". These two quotes are pulled directly from the choruses of songs performed by Permabanned, a band made up of CCP Iceland employees. Permabanned creates music videos that are featured on CCP's YouTube presence, and plays live each year at Fanfest.

Throughout this chapter I have investigated EVE from three different perspectives: official marketing from CCP Games, coverage by the enthusiast press, and finally a brief review of the academic literature that has investigated this particular game as its primary object of focus. By paying closer attention to how EVE is both officially positioned in the MMOG market, but also what sorts of discussions specifically reference this game, I have endeavoured to illustrate that the so-called limitless sandbox of EVE is rarely discussed. Instead, this chapter has demonstrated that dominant narratives characterize this game in a way that is likely of interest to only a very narrow demographic of players, specifically those that are interested in player-verses-player combat and/or the more insidious elements of gameplay. Missing is any real discussion of the players who participate in the less hostile elements of gameplay, such as mining, manufacturing, exploration, role-play, or other activities less reliant on PVP combat. In the next chapter I describe my methods, including the recruitment and survey protocol, which were designed to learn more about how certain players come to EVE, and in turn, how others decide *not* to participate in EVE.

CHAPTER 4: Theoretical Framework and Study Design

I approach this research through the lens provided by Science and Technology Studies (STS) as it invites investigations of the interconnectedness between CCP's decisions about particular technical/software affordances of EVE and the larger sociotechnical contexts in which this MMOG and its resultant community exists. Specifically, I draw on the intersectional frameworks provided by feminist theories of technology situated within STS. Using the lens offered by feminist theories of technology provides a framework to simultaneously explore experiences of players at the margins of this community (including non and former players, as well as those who do not fit the ideal EVE player set out by CCP and the larger community), the technical affordances, assumptions made by the developer, and the positioning of this particular game within the larger MMOG marketplace that results in maintaining the homogeneity of the EVE player base.

This chapter begins by describing the guiding theory I used in creating my study design. After detailing the theory that underpins my research choices, I move on to describe the study design that resulted in the data collected and analyzed in Chapters 5 through 7. To contextualize how I came to the final design of this investigation, I provide an overview of the work I participated in as a graduate research assistant that was influential to the study design of my own project. After providing this context, I move on to describe the study designed specifically for this dissertation and an overview of the analytical techniques used to parse the survey responses and elucidate some of the obvious (and not so obvious) constraints to participating in EVE's communities.

Making Feminist Research Choices

Underpinning this study design is a feminist approach to conducting research. "Feminist research" in the broadest of terms, is a program of research informed by feminist philosophy. As Sandra Harding (1987) argued quite some time ago now, there is no distinct "feminist method of inquiry" and a feminist *methodology* can be applied to any number of specific methods (p. 3). In the introductory chapter to her edited volume *Feminism & Methodology*, she writes that feminist methods avoid the "objectivist" stance that attempts to make the researcher unseen in their own research, instead:

> ...the researcher appears to us as not an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests. (Harding, 1987, p. 9)

A similar position is taken by Donna Haraway in her critique of 'the god trick' where researchers attempt to see without being seen (1988, p. 581). For example, in the introduction of this dissertation I described how big data approaches to MMOG research use information about player behaviours collected at the server level to attempt to avoid the Hawthorne Effect (i.e. research subjects changing their behaviour because they know they are being observed) – quite literally an attempt to see without being seen. I mobilize feminist methodology in this dissertation as a reminder that no research or data collection method is value-free (Hekman, 2007), and that a feminist methodology is one concerned with research for social change (Naples, 2007). Keeping these thoughts in mind, this chapter chronicles my experiences (and missteps) leading up to the final dissertation study, rather than presenting the project described herein as springing forth fully formed.

While feminist research often centers on the experiences of women, I use its principles here as a way to re-center the experiences of those non/players on the margins of the EVE community, especially those whose experiences and thoughts about this particular game are left out of the dominant narratives discussed in Chapter 3. This approach to research was also influential as I sat down to design my survey, guiding decisions to use primarily open-ended questions instead of multiple-choice answers, and allowing participants to select multiple gender identities from a non-mandatory demographic question rather than requiring participants to make a single choice from a male/female gender binary. Furthermore, the advantage of open-ended questions was highlighted in Chapter 2 during my review of the leisure studies literature, as a checkbox for "lack of interest" in surveys does little to articulate the larger sociocultural reasons that may lead an individual to decline to participate in particular activities.

Before a more detailed discussion of the events preceding this research and the influence of feminist methodology on my study design, I first articulate how I understand the sociotechnical assemblages of MMOGs. To do so, I briefly describe how STS frames the broader themes of this dissertation. I then narrow my focus to feminist theories of technology, arguing that it is through the lens provided by the integration of feminist theory and STS, combined with the lessons taken from leisure studies described in Chapter 2, that the constraints to participating in EVE become more clearly illuminated.

Do gameworlds have politics?

My first introduction to STS came via Langdon Winner's (1980) "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" read as part of my MA coursework where we were asked to consider if particular ideologies can be embedded in technological artifacts. While Winner's most famous anecdote about a bridge designed to allow only a certain socioeconomic stratum access to a particular beach has been contested (Joerges, 1999), this text continues to serve as a reminder throughout my research to consider how intention and design are intimately linked. Choices made about what (or what not to) include when designing a particular piece of software (e.g. a MMOG) can be subtly or overtly influenced by a designer's personal beliefs (T. L. Taylor, 2003a). But, the gameworlds of MMOGs foreground the social interactions with other players, and the conscious design decisions made by developers can fade into the background. I first touched on this in Chapter 3, which brought decisions made by CCP back into this conversation about who plays (or does not play) EVE, and I will return to CCP's decisions again in Chapter 6.

To illustrate the power of using a STS framework to study a MMOG such as EVE, I begin with a thought exercise provided by Albert Borgmann. In his reflections of how technology shapes society, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Borgmann (1984) uses the Device Paradigm to explain how the inner workings of a technology become obscured from view. Borgmann draws a distinction between "things" and "devices". Things are objects that we engage with directly that have multiple usages – here he gives the example of a hearth. Not only did it provide warmth, it was "a place that gathered the work and leisure of a family and gave the house a centre" (p. 42). A device, on the other hand, is single purpose but more

importantly, its component pieces are concealed from view. In comparison to the hearth as a thing, he describes a heating plant (i.e. furnace) as a device (p. 42). The particular mechanical processes by which a furnace is able to keep a house warm are not known to the average consumer, nor is it their concern – it simply works. The primary purpose of this device is to keep a building warm without any particular attention required from the occupants of said building.

I argue that for the vast majority of players, scholars, or anyone else who interacts with the public facing side of a MMOG, the software of the game is treated like a device and the particular processes required for a MMOG to function are rarely foregrounded. This is to be expected -- players do not need to think about the technical processes required to keep a MMOG's gameworld up and running. What happens after one loads the game's software on their local machine, enters their user name and password, and clicks the "connect" button is not of concern. The reality that an arsenal of servers and employees are working in the background to keep gameworlds functioning typically only comes to the forefront of conversations about MMOGs when they *stop* working. For example, *World of Warcraft* released an expansion in the final quarter of 2014. Between the large numbers of users attempting to play at the same time while Blizzard was simultaneously experiencing a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack, the *World of Warcraft* servers quickly succumbed to the unexpected loads. Players unable to access the servers voiced complaints, and there was considerable press coverage about the troubles plaguing the launch and Blizzard's subsequent efforts to appease their angry customers (Chalk, 2014; Elise, 2014; Pitcher, 2014; Prescott, 2014). In addition to the expected coverage of the expansion's rocky launch, some reports also

included an analysis of the technical backbone of *World of Warcraft*, such as Adam

Holisky's (2014) editorial about how the game's servers work, the mechanics of a DDoS

attack, what would be considered a bug (and fair to blame Blizzard for), and what was

out of their hands. As Chapter 3's analysis of reporting on EVE illustrated, this sort of

coverage about the technical affordances of MMOG software is not a typical topic of

conversation. The cracks in the black box become apparent when it stops working; the

rest of the time the software of an MMOG largely remains a Borgmannesque device.

A lack of attention to the behind the scenes workings of a MMOG should not

necessarily be read as neglect on the part of researchers as the software of a MMOG –

including the vast online worlds in which players meet and interact – is intentionally

designed to fade into the background. Indeed, much of the research about player

behaviour within a MMOG has focused on the sociality of players within the gameworld

such as the interactions of dyads and small groups (Bardzell et al., 2008; Boellstroff,

2006; Eklund & Johansson, 2010; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Nardi & Harris, 2006; D.

Williams et al., 2006, p. 200; Yee, 2008) as well as social network analysis of thousands

of players (Kolo & Baur, 2004; D. Williams et al., 2006). Celia Pearce (2009) notes that

the majority of these studies do not account for the software or interfaces where such

social interaction takes place (p. 56), and yet her own investigation of the *Uru* diaspora

illustrates that the tools afforded by a game's software are intimately linked to the types

of social interactions that can be observed.[28] Another notable exception is Jonas

---

[28] While not necessarily interested in the content of the social interactions that occur within the
gameworld computer scientists have tracked the way that information travels between the game servers
and players' computers to learn how to create more efficient and faster network connections allowing even
more users to connect simultaneously (Cai, Wang, Chen, & Zhang, 2010; K.-T. Chen, Huang, & Lei, 2006;
Che & Ip, 2012; Prodan & Nae, 2009).

Linderoth, an educational researcher interested in games who critically examines the way that in-game affordances serve as tools that when used by players and observed by researchers, create the illusion of learning within a game environment. While not necessarily working from an explicit STS framework, Linderoth's challenges to the dominant framework for theorizing games as learning environments also serve as an argument for the importance of opening up the black box of game software.

Set in direct opposition to the cognitive approach to learning, Linderoth (2009, 2011, 2012) argues that ecological psychology is more appropriate for understanding where and how learning might be happening within a game. According to Linderoth's view of ecological psychology, we learn by becoming attuned to the world around us and cultivating our perception in order to differentiate between tools that allow for the accomplishment of particular goals (2011, p. 5). Key to this is are "affordances", to which Linderoth refers to Gibson's original definition, "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 1986, p. 127).[29] Linderoth (2012) disagrees with the claim made by Gee, Steinkuehler, and others, that someone who is unsuccessful in a traditional school setting but successful in a game should be taken as evidence that games can facilitate learning (p. 46) and the broader claim that players successfully making their way through a complex game should be taken as evidence of their learning (p. 47). He argues that this understanding of games as a site of learning is a result of researchers, teachers, and

---

[29] This clarification must be made as the term "affordances" has since been co-opted by researchers working in Interaction Design and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), modifying its definition from Gibson's original intended meaning. Most often HCI uses affordance to describe the level of "user-friendliness" of a design, describing the ease by which a user can determine the function or use-value of a particular element of a design.

parents observing something *unfamiliar*, and that the unfamiliarity gets misunderstood

as being something *complex*:

> When realizing that these games present us with structures that we are
> unfamiliar with, it is easy to make the assumption that games are
> complex. Seeing a child progressing through a game becomes
> something truly extraordinary. We see children master what we think
> are complex systems and we ask ourselves what kind of mysterious
> features that are built into games that can make this happen.
> (Linderoth, 2012, p. 48)

After posing the question if an outside observer's unfamiliarity with a game may be

inadvertently misreading gameplay as a transformative and/or learning experience,

Linderoth asks what would happen if games were not really as complex as they first

appear to be? He argues that a successful performance in a game might actually be the

result of identifying the tools provided by the gameworld. In other words, this "learning"

is actually the refinement of one's ability to perceive the affordances of the world and

determining how best to use these affordances to one's advantage to progress through a

game. This learning would then be highly specific to a particular gameworld, and not

necessarily as easily transferrable as others such as Gee or Steinkuehler claim.

Furthermore, Linderoth warns that claims of learning within games made without

empirical evidence should be approached with wariness:

> It might be correct that games have unique properties as learning
> environments. But with no detailed analysis of either gaming practices
> or game design, this must be seen as an open question. From the
> ecological perspective, observations of someone being able to play and
> progress in a game cannot be taken for granted as constituting the
> outcome of advanced learning processes. What we see might just as well
> be progression that is built into the game system, and a practice that,
> compared to other domains, requires very little learning from its
> practitioners. (Linderoth, 2012, p. 58)

Linderoth notes that a game in which a player never progresses is not fun. Designers *want* players to enjoy and advance through their games, and will leave a trail of breadcrumbs to facilitate this success. Linderoth cautions against interpreting learning to differentiate one's (in-game) surroundings to identify affordances as anything beyond learning to identify breadcrumbs. Much like Shen and Williams' (2011) observation that research on the psychosocial impact of MMOG play needs to pay closer attention to the context in which games are played, Linderoth challenges educational researchers to pay closer attention to the construction of a game's environment and the tools it offers up to players to increase their likelihood of success.

While Linderoth's critique is focused on the techno-utopia interpretation of games being a means to reach out to students who struggle in a traditional classroom environment (which I summarized in the Introduction of this dissertation), he provides an example of how quickly assumptions about the transformative power of games begin to fall apart upon closer examination of the game's/software's affordances. Rather than assuming games are transformative, Linderoth exemplifies the importance of remaining open to alternative explanations for what can be observed when watching what has been previously been taken as evidence that games are a site of deep learning. By opening the black box and paying closer attention to a game's affordances, Linderoth serves an example of what can happen when a game is no longer treated as a device where learning happens simply by playing it. Instead, the game becomes part of the study, and its particular affordances must be taken into account rather than be left as the black box in which learning somehow takes place.

In the next section, I return to feminist theories, specifically feminist thinking surrounding technology, as a way to make the familiar strange. I also articulate how this framework has provided guidance for moving beyond the dominant narratives of EVE, and further elaborating the process by which this dissertation study design unfolded.

Using feminism to make the familiar strange

In the previous section I used Linderoth as an example to show what might be overlooked when games are viewed as a black box where learning is assumed to be taking place. The reason the device paradigm has not been more widely adopted is that Borgmann has been rightly criticized for being too rigid, romanticizing "simpler" technologies, and not necessarily concerning himself with the origins and history of devices (Hickman, 2000). Therefore, the device paradigm is not necessarily useful as a theoretical framework, but the conceptualization of things verses devices is still a helpful starting point for a thought exercise to begin the work called for by Pearce (2009), namely that more attention must be paid to how MMOGs are *manufactured* and the affordances of the gameworld cannot be divorced from the ideologies and political beliefs held by the people who designed these worlds. For a framework of critique I turn to feminist theories of technology to provide the theoretical tools to better understand the relationships of power, access, and non/progressive ideologies embedded within the software of a MMOG.

A distinguishing feature between a MMOG and other game types is that they are multiplayer games with a persistent online world. In other words, it is the players and their ability to interact, collaborate, and communicate with thousands of other players

86

in a persistent environment that differentiate MMOGs from other types of games. With the affordances of gameworlds of MMOGs designed to be a backdrop and fade into the background as we play, so too are the embedded biases, assumptions and ideologies inadvertently or purposefully obscured from view. When (or if) discussions about who plays and for what reasons do occur, they tend to remain grounded in stereotypes and folk-knowledge (e.g. a conversation described by Leray (2013) that assumes women don't play EVE because of an aversion to sci-fi)[30] rather than critical, reflective thought about how the software shapes audience perceptions or even helps to subtly dictate who should continue to play and who should quit.[31] Pearce's (2009) work serves as a reminder that a game's culture is intimately linked to both the affordances of the game's software and to the players who are attracted to playing it. Specifically in regards to EVE, the ways offline ideologies can be influential to the structure and rule systems of New Eden is clearly articulated by McKnight (2012), who draws parallels between the approach to in-game governance by CCP Games and the history of law in Iceland. As Iceland spent much of its geopolitical history developing in isolation from the rest of the world, a very different approach to government developed and the remnants of this unique rule of law still influences Icelandic society to this day. McKnight contrasts CCP Games' "Techno Anarchist" approach to game design with Linden Lab, the developer behind Second Life, an exemplar of the "California School" and argues that the lived

---

[30] Here I feel it prudent to draw attention to the way Leray's article provides a revisionist history of science fiction that ignores the contributions of women authors to the shaping of this genre.
[31] While "women don't like science fiction" is something that I've heard repeatedly throughout my investigations of EVE, this ignores the long history of women's sci-fi fandoms e.g. *The X-Files* (Bury, 2001) or *Star Trek* (Coppa, 2008).This statement is sometimes revised to "women don't like *hard* sci-fi", e.g. literature, movies, or other cultural productions that are concerned with the scientific accuracy of what is being described. This division between sci-fi and hard sci-fi echoes back to the casual/hardcore division of gameplay styles and game genres discussed in Chapter 2.

experiences of the (mostly Icelandic born) development team at CCP Reykjavík have influenced their approach to game design, possibly explaining why EVE's mechanics and rule-structures are such a departure from the norms exhibited in the rest of the MMOG marketplace.

While Borgmann identifies that certain technologies are a 'black box', obscuring these socio-cultural complexities, I return to researchers working from an explicitly feminist perspective to provide guidance on how to peel back the outer layers and unpack the "inner workings" of a MMOG. Susan Leigh Star, in a recent interview, describes one task of feminist research as "spooking", that is:

> ...finding those things that 'haunt' forms of knowledge and representation – the absence of women, for example, the deletion of female agency in talking about work done in and around the home, or sexist representations of women. (Bauchspies & la Bellacasa, 2009, p. 335)

This has been the task of feminist STS scholars, to revisit and reinsert gender, race, sexuality, etc. into the history of technology and to open up the possibility to imagine new ways of knowing.

In the introduction to the edited anthology *Feminist Technology,* Linda Layne (2010) traces the history of feminist thinking about technology, crediting Corlann Gee Bush (1983) with the first known usage of the term "feminist technology". Bush argues, much like Borgmann, that technological change is often associated with progress yet she departs from Borgmann when she includes in her argument the notion that technological change is seen by society as separate from, and far more desirable than, social change:

> Most people welcome technological change because it is *material*, believing that it makes things better, but it doesn't make them different.

> They resist social change because it is *social* and personal; it is seen as making things different ... and worse. The realization that technological change stimulates social change is not one that most people welcome. (Bush, 1983, p. 119)

Being traditionally associated with the social (rather than technological) elements of society, Bush argues that women are expected to remain stagnant while the rest of society, "is allowed, even encouraged, to move rapidly ahead" via technological advances (p. 119). New technologies will have dramatically different impacts on men and women, and Bush argues that in order for women to not be left further and further behind, it is of the utmost importance for feminism to break down the artificial divide between the social/personal and the technological/material.

Feminist theorists such as Karen Barad (1999), Donna Haraway (2000), Allucquère Rosanne Stone (1996), and Judy Wajcman (1996) highlight how technology is continually defined in a way that works to keep it separate from "society" (read: women), and their work continues to be a touchstone for those interested in breaking down this artificial division between the social and the technological. Once method for moving past this false division is the intentional creation of feminist technologies. What a feminist technology would actually look like remains undefined by Bush, but she ends her essay with the assertion that "A feminist technology should, indeed, be something else again" (p. 168). The imagination of an alternative is a theme that runs through other feminist thinking about technology, including the critical feminist literature about games reviewed in Chapter 2. For example, Fron et al. (2007) describe the 19th and early 20th century board game industry – one in which play testing was done almost entirely by women – and invite the reader to hypothesize what today's videogame industry would look like if its composition was as diverse as game players actually are (rather

than the extremely limited imagined "ideal gamer") (p. 7). Similarly, Jenson and de Castell (2008, 2010) describe how the very questions asked by many researchers interested in gender and games are frequently based on stereotypical assumptions about girls' interests and preferences and in turn, such studies are used to justify the creation of pink and purple games because 'that's what girls expressed interest in'. The work of feminist game scholars such as Jenson and de Castell (2008, 2010), Pearce (2009), Fron et al. (2007) ask how gaming cultures might change if we reimagine what research would look like if it were reframed to centre on equality rather than reaffirming difference.

A feminist technology is one that allows space for an alternative to the status quo to be discovered. It would then follow that a feminist study of technology needs to allow room for unexpected results from their research. It is therefore important to build a study design that does not simply recreate what is already known. This, arguably, is a problem that plagues the digital game research critiqued by Jenson and de Castell that is based on stereotypical notions of what constitutes female interests and desires, which in turn produces results that reaffirm the very same gender stereotypes that influenced the initial study design. In the next section I describe my involvement in another MMOG-related research project and how my experiences interviewing current EVE players troubled my previous conceptions about who plays EVE and for what reasons, as well as how best to conduct research in this community. It was by remaining open to surprise and unexpected results that allowed me to see that my initial assumptions about the reasons for lack of female players in this game was flawed, ultimately leading to the

reformulation of both the research questions and study design that led to this
dissertation

Pre-dissertation Research

From Spring 2010 to Spring 2012, I assisted with data collection and analysis for
a longitudinal, multi-site research project – Virtual Environment Real User Study
(VERUS) – a US government funded study that asked whether and how players' offline
characteristics are recognizable in their online interactions within a MMOG.
Participants were invited to take part in a study held at one of two labs (Play:CES at
York University, led by Jennifer Jenson, and Marvel at Simon Fraser University, led by
Suzanne de Castell). Visitors to either lab would complete an intake interview to gauge
their gameplay experience, answer a survey that asked for further detail about their
history of gameplay, play a commercial MMOG for 45-60 minutes, and then play a
MMOG made specifically for this study.[32] Gameplay was recorded with screen capture
software, and a forward facing camera captured the participants' faces and voices as
they played. This data was coded using an audiovisual event logging software (Noldus
The Observer XT). Multiple coding schemas were used to explore different facets of
gameplay including leadership, expertise, and interactions among co-situated
participants . One of my primary duties was running in-lab sessions where I observed
participants with a range of game play experience (from first time players to experts who
have many years of experience across multiple games) with a variety of MMOGs
including *World of Warcraft*, *Rift, MapleStory* and EVE. Most of the participants with

---

[32] Further information about the lab protocols can be found in Jenson et al. (2013) and Bergstrom et al.
(2015).

previous MMOG experience were quite familiar with *World of Warcraft*; fewer were vaguely familiar with EVE, if they had even heard of it at all. The EVE players we encountered first treated the VERUS project with suspicion and asked questions to ensure that this was a legitimate research study. This is likely due to the fact that claims of "conducting research" within the EVE gameworld have previously been used as a way to trick unsuspecting players to participate in an in-game scam.

EVE players proved to be difficult to recruit on the York University and Simon Fraser University campuses, so members of the research team attended events where EVE players were known to congregate. As a result, data was also collected on-site at LAN ("local area network") events in the UK.[33] Hosted by a small gaming events company and held every Bank Holiday, hundreds of players bring their computers and play games co-situated with their friends inside a massive convention hall booked specifically for the event. In fall 2011, I traveled to the UK to collect data at "LAN UK".[34] At this event, I interviewed members of an EVE corporation who frequently attended the LAN UK series as an opportunity to play co-situated. Most of the members of this group consented to be interviewed, complete surveys, and participate in an EVE PVP tournament we organized. Through our observations of the EVE play happening on site at the LAN party, we also observed just how little of EVE is played inside the game client, described in Taylor et al. (2015) and corroborating earlier work by Carter et al. (2012) and Woodford (2013).

---

[33] Results of the LAN study are detailed in Taylor et al. (2014). The EVE-specific data also appears in Taylor et al. (2015).

[34] LAN UK is an anonymous term given to the gaming event series used in VERUS documents.

Out of the 58 participants, there were only two women who played EVE. The data collected as part of the LAN UK recruitment was instrumental for constructing our preliminary profile of the "typical" EVE player: male, highly-educated, and slightly older than other MMOG gamers. This profile was (and remains) consistent with the typical player described on blogs and press writing about EVE. Similar demographics were confirmed at Fanfest, the annual EVE-player convention hosted by CCP Games at the company's headquarters in Reykjavík, Iceland, which I attended in spring 2012. During my time in Reykjavík, I worked with CCP's customer research department to conduct a series of focus groups with Fanfest attendees. Four focus groups were conducted jointly with a CCP employee who was my designated research partner. In addition to the focus groups, I also administered the VERUS survey, which was completed by 40 EVE players. As participants filled out the survey I would chat with them about their experiences playing MMOGs, their thoughts about VERUS, and my own preliminary dissertation research questions. Much like the gender ratio of the LAN UK surveys, of the 40 EVE players who completed a survey at Fanfest, only four were women, and much like the LAN UK interviews, these informal chats with EVE players (both men and women) confirmed that the game was perceived as attractive to a particular sort of player, a belief used by current players to explain the homogeneity of this community.

Leading up to my Fanfest trip, I had still envisioned this dissertation being about the scarcity of female players in this particular community, anticipating that it would be an investigation of why only 2-4% of EVE's players are women, a much smaller number than the 20-40% of the *World of Warcraft* female player population. By interviewing the women who *do* play EVE, I reasoned, I might be able to uncover some sort of pattern

about their schooling, work experience, or even personality type that led them to thrive in a gameworld that otherwise seemed to be so inhospitable to other female players. To facilitate formulating this research agenda, I held a "Women in EVE" focus group as a way to gather together the few women who were present at the convention. However, an interaction immediately following the "Women in EVE" focus group led to a fundamental shift in my thinking about the culture of this MMOG and how to approach a study of this gaming community. What follows is a summary of events from my Fanfest field notes and an explanation as to why this led to a complete re-envisioning of my dissertation study design.

"These women don't speak for me"

I ran two focus groups using the same questions on the same day. In the morning I hosted "What makes EVE players different?" Here the room was filled with mostly male players and the guiding questions asked the participants to describe the similarities and/or differences between EVE and other popular MMOGs, what makes a successful EVE player, and why there are so few women who play this particular game. The conversations in this focus group centred on the idea that EVE was a completely different kind of MMOG, one that requires a particular personality type that would be able to handle the challenge of learning to play it. Additionally, participants indicated that a strong social network was required to be successful in this game, whether it be through integrating oneself into a newbie-friendly corporation, enrolling in *EVE*

University,[35] or having friends who were already familiar with the game who would be willing to help you through the EVE learning cliff (recall Figure 1 from Chapter 3). Participants in this focus group stated that they would like to see more women playing this game, especially their own female partners, but offered up little explanation for why so few women play beyond the familiar refrains of women perhaps not having the right personality to play EVE and/or a disinterest in science-fiction themed games.[36]

The same set of questions was used to frame the discussion in the afternoon's focus group, "Women and EVE". The advertising copy for this focus group explicitly stated that it was an opportunity for female players to share their experiences playing EVE, and to that end, the male/female ratio was the inverse of the morning's focus group. Like the morning's focus group, participants shared the belief that EVE would only be attractive to a particular type of player, and this player was far less likely to be a woman. When I asked how to attract more women to EVE, this group's participants suggested that CCP could attempt to recruit players at science fiction and fantasy themed events such as *DragonCon,* as an interest in science fiction would be a necessary precursor to being invested enough to conquer EVE's learning curve. However, it was stressed by multiple focus group participants that recruiting women for the sake of recruiting women would be an unwelcome addition to the game. Instead, the "Women and EVE" focus group participants felt it was most important to recruit new players that exhibited the personality type best suited to a high-stake PVP environment, and that it

---

[35] *EVE University* is the name of a player-run corporation whose specific mandate is to help new players learn the basics of EVE. More information is online at: http://www.eveuniversity.org/about.
[36] Here I find it pertinent to draw attention to how this idea that the lack of women playing EVE is due to it being a science-fiction game mirrors responses made by CCP representatives, for example the opinions expressed in the Leray (2013) discussed earlier in this dissertation.

was far less likely that women would exhibit the necessary personality/skill set to be successful in EVE.

Overall, the sentiments expressed during both focus groups shared many similarities. However, the events that immediately followed the "Women in EVE" focus group caused me to radically rethink the sentiments expressed by both groups. The room used for focus groups was in high demand, booked for back-to-back sessions by a variety of groups throughout the entire day. As soon as our allotted time was over, the next group slated to use the room began to file in. We ended the focus group and as I was collecting my belongings one of the participants who had not spoken during the session asked to speak with me away from the group. Out in the hall and away from the other participants, she told me that the other women in the room made her feel like she could not speak and share her experiences regarding what she enjoyed about playing EVE. Rather than engaging in PVP combat she preferred to spend her time manufacturing in-game items or participating in joint mining endeavours with her boyfriend and their friends. In other words, she was a "carebear" a derogatory term used to describe players who do not participate in the game's PVP activities (Carter & Gibbs, 2013, p. 3). Despite the insults made about her preferred playstyle, this was the role she chose to play and how she enjoyed spending her time in EVE. The more vocal women in the room did not speak for her, but made her feel like her way of playing EVE was "wrong". She accepted my apology for not creating a space in which she felt like she could speak and left to join her boyfriend. I did not see her or her boyfriend at any of the other focus groups or at the survey booth during the remainder of Fanfest.

<u>Re-imagining the *EVE Online* community</u>

This interaction led to a turning point in my understanding of the EVE community. While brief, it helped me to articulate the inherent problem with only interviewing current players. By exclusively targeting current players for my data collection – including current female players – I could only ever uncover part of the answers to my questions about this MMOG community. Furthermore, by designing a program of research that emphasized an investigation of the small number of women who *did* play EVE, my research might detail their personal perspectives about why this game is unattractive to other women, but I would be no closer to uncovering the reasons for non-players nonparticipation. It was in my post-Fanfest reflections that I realized I had become so focused on the outliers' narrative/perspective (i.e. the 2-4% of EVE players) that I had become blinded to the norms and expectations that pervade EVE. Playing out in both focus groups was clearly a hierarchy of in-game activities, but upon further consideration, also reflected a hierarchy of gender and assumptions about what the "typical" female player wants from her game, and how this apparently differs from interests and gaming expectations of the female outliers that do play it. This, combined with the research that went into the writing of Chapter 3 of this dissertation, highlights how narrow current conversations are about this particular game, and especially in terms of academic research, help to replicate the vocal majority of players while obscuring the thoughts, experiences, and play preferences of those who do not exemplify the assumed EVE player.

By asking women about the experiences of other women, it would be far too easy to replicate the status quo, especially in a game like EVE with such rigid norms and

expectations. Instead, keeping with a feminist research philosophy, I believe the former

and non-players need to be part of the conversation, and be given the opportunity to

speak for themselves. This also highlighted to me the inadvertent invocation of a gender

binary in my research, and despite my best intentions, could have ended up replicating

the same sorts of research that Jenson and de Castell (2010) critique. Rather than

comparing "male play" and "female play", I decided to shift my attention to include the

perspectives of former and non-players, providing the opportunity for the unexpected.

In the following section I describe the revised study design that I mobilized to collect

and analyze the data that forms the basis for the remainder of this dissertation.

Designing the Dissertation

My research prior to this specific study collected the thoughts, experiences, and

theories of a large number of EVE players. On the surface, these interviews and

observations seem to provide a fairly consistent view of how EVE is viewed by members

of its community. However, as the vignette in the previous section illustrates, this

consistency of experience is likely an artefact of the public facing perceptions of EVE

described in Chapter 3 that are perpetuated by CCP, and reinforced by the gaming press

and many of the academics who have investigated it to date.

Learning from my experiences at Fanfest about just how easily one's

preconceptions about a community may lead to a sort of blindness to unexpected

thoughts, experiences, and feelings, I came to the realization that to better understand

the actions and mechanisms by which EVE has become so closed, I must widen my

search dramatically and not limit my investigations to current EVE players alone. To

learn more about the perceptions of what sort of game *EVE Online* is and who plays it

beyond the very narrow range of discussions detailed in the previous chapter, I designed a survey that was open to former, current, and non-EVE players.

In order to recruit a variety of perspectives about playing (or choosing not to play) EVE, I made the decision to use an online survey to serve as the primary tool for data collection. Using a mix of open ended and multiple-choice questions, the survey was designed to lay the groundwork for further investigations of EVE players who fall outside of the PVP-focused demographic that is most frequently discussed in the journalism and academic literature described in Chapter 3. In the next section I describe the design of the survey and the methods by which I attempted to recruit across a wide variety of experiences with EVE including those who have played the game but since quit, MMOG players who are aware of EVE but choose not to play it, and those who are not familiar with it.

Survey Design

The survey was written using the open source software LimeSurvey (www.limesurvey.com) and was hosted on a domain that I own, hosted on a server located within Canada. All participants were asked the same questions to gauge their experiences with games broadly and MMOGs specifically, before being asked to describe their level of familiarity with EVE. Based on their answers to this question about their experiences playing EVE, participants were funnelled towards one of four branches of the survey:

1. **Current EVE players:** Asked to describe their preferences in regards to in-game activities, as well as to describe the resources they consulted as they learned how to play EVE.

2. **Former EVE players:** The same questions as current EVE players, with additional questions about why they *no longer* play this game.
3. **Non-players familiar with EVE**: Asked to describe what they know about EVE and why they *do not* play this game.
4. **Non-players who had not previously encountered EVE**: After viewing a recent trailer for the game they were asked to describe what they thought the objectives and target audience for the game might be.

The original design of the survey did not include a branch for participants who had not previously encountered EVE. However, when I made the decision to frame it as a broader survey about MMOG experiences, I created a branch of the survey that was intended to be completed by respondents who were not familiar or unsure if they had encountered EVE before. This fourth branch was added for exploratory purposes to get a better sense of who might not be exposed to CCP advertising or reading about EVE in the enthusiast press.

Branches 1-3 were asked to describe what they know about EVE. All four branches concluded with the same demographic questions. A diagram of the survey logic is illustrated in Figure 5 and a complete copy of the survey text is included in Appendix B. Approval by the York University Ethics Committee was obtained before data collection began. A copy of this approval certificate is included in Appendix C.

```
                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │   Experience     │
                    │  playing games   │
                    └──────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │   Experience     │
                    │ playing MMOGs    │
                    └──────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │ Are you familiar │
                    │  with the MMOG   │
                    │   EVE Online?    │
                    └──────────────────┘
```

```
┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐
│ Yes I currently│ │ Yes I have    │  │ Yes I know it but│ │ I am not familar│
│     play      │  │   played      │  │ have not played │  │ with this game │
│               │  │  previously   │  │      it        │  │               │
└───────────────┘  └───────────────┘  └───────────────┘  └───────────────┘

  ┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐
  │ Theories re:  │  │ Theories re:  │  │ Theories re:  │
  │     EVE       │  │     EVE       │  │     EVE       │
  └───────────────┘  └───────────────┘  └───────────────┘
```

```
                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │   Demographics   │
                    └──────────────────┘
```
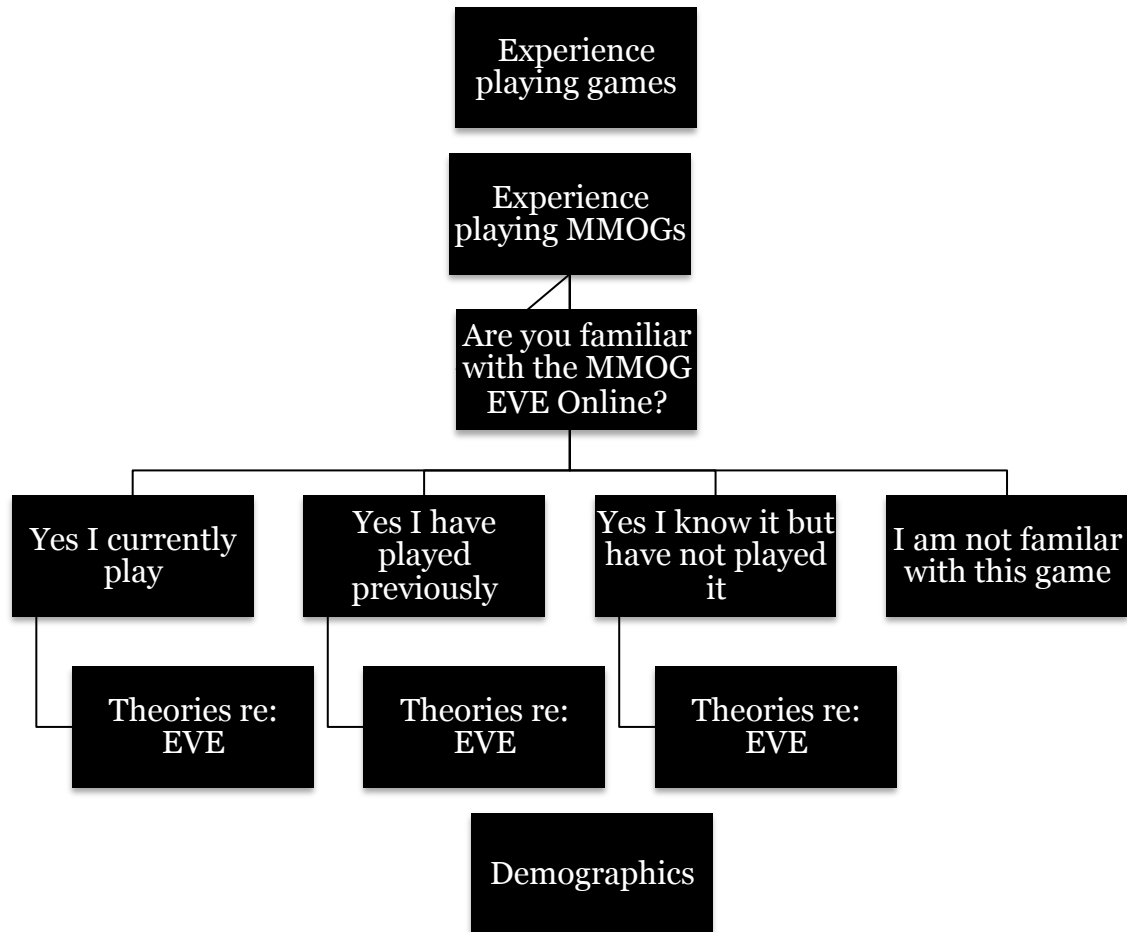
Figure 5: A visualization of the branched survey design

A pilot study was conducted in September 2013 using a closed version of the survey that required an invitation to participate. Eight volunteers participated in the pilot. The goal of this pilot was to test each of the four branches and solicit feedback about the questions and survey structure and therefore their responses are not included as part of the analysis in the remainder of this dissertation. After revising the survey based on feedback and responses to the pilot, the survey was opened to the general public in November 2013. Potential participants were directed to a webpage I created for the study, hosted on my personal website (www.kellybergstrom.ca) where I provided background information about the study in an effort to be transparent about the

research and its goals. This information was also meant to assure potential participants that this work was not focused on addiction and/or the antisocial effects of gaming, as this was an unintended consequence of some of the VERUS recruiting described in Bergstrom, Fisher & Jenson (2014).

<u>Participant Recruitment</u>

Early on, I made the decision to recruit current players *outside* of the game client. This decision was made because previous research indicates that much of what constitutes EVE play does not actually need to happen within the gameworld (Carter et al., 2012; N. Taylor et al., 2015; Woodford, 2013). Furthermore, given the amount of scams that can (and do) happen within New Eden, I reasoned that players would likely be suspicious of being asked to click on a link to complete a survey for fear of it leading to a 'keylogger' or other malware attempting to steal their account information.

In my previous research on the EVE community, I have found that when I meet players outside of the game client they are usually eager to talk to me about their experiences. I was not concerned about finding current EVE players to complete the survey, but determining how best to reach out to former and non-players required some additional thought. I ultimately decided to frame the survey as a more general study about MMOG experiences rather than being specifically about EVE for the following reasons: first, given that EVE has such a specific reputation (as evidenced in Chapter 3), I was concerned that some participants (especially those who are familiar with the game but have never actually played it) would pre-emptively self-select out of the study because they felt a survey about EVE was not capturing their experiences. Second, I

anticipated that a more general approach would likely lead to a higher response rate from former and non-players. Third, labelling the survey generally would allow for the possibility of responses from MMOG players who had not yet encountered EVE (branch 4). Nevertheless, the fact that this is a survey that is primarily focused on EVE quickly became public knowledge, as some participants would return to the online forums through which I was recruiting to provide the feedback that the survey should be renamed "The *EVE Online* Player Survey". Because the survey was hosted on my own site, I was cautious about not overwhelming the server and therefore recruited participants in phases, allowing approximately a week to pass between recruitment attempts.

Survey recruitment was modeled after the VERUS study recruitment; my goal was to solicit responses from a variety of sites and venues to ensure a wide respondent pool. This included distribution across my own networks (both direct and via social media). I advertised the survey on Twitter multiple times, sometimes using EVE-specific hashtags (e.g. #tweetfleet) to capture responses from current players. When sharing the link via Twitter I used a customized shortened address made through the URL shortening service bit.ly (bit.ly/MMOGexp), which also allowed for tracking the spread of recruitment tweets. According to analytics provided by bit.ly, the survey was shared 150 times (73 shares via Twitter, 4 shares via Facebook, 11 shares from other websites including an EVE corporation's homepage, and 62 shares that were classified as unknown).

The survey received official recognition from CCP when it was retweeted from the #tweetfleet hashtag by the current CEO of the company, but this signal boosting only

happened once. In addition to social media, I also made recruitment posts to various game related forums, including a forum explicitly described as being for "girl gamers". The response to recruitment on MMOG-specific forums was mixed: while a post made to the *World of Warcraft* forums received very little attention, a post made to r/EVE (a Reddit.com community devoted to the discussion of and sharing information about EVE) resulted in so many simultaneous attempts to complete the survey that it temporarily knocked my server offline. In a presentation made at the 2014 meeting of the Digital Games Research Association, I detailed the possible reasons for such a dramatic difference in responses from the two recruitment sites (Bergstrom, 2014). To summarize briefly, I speculate that the overwhelming response from r/EVE is likely due to the fact that unlike *World of Warcraft's* community, EVE has received comparatively little attention from the academic game studies community. I argue that *World of Warcraft* has received so many requests for participation in research in the past few years that the community is suffering from survey fatigue. Comparatively scant literature about EVE (reviewed in Chapter 3) means that this particular player community has had fewer opportunities to share their thoughts, opinions, and theories about EVE with a researcher and in turn have these experiences legitimated through peer reviewed publications.

In addition to recruitment on gaming-related forums, I also ran two advertisement campaigns on the social networking site Facebook.com. Facebook advertisements allow for a high degree of demographic customization, allowing a targeted advertising campaign to specific ages, genders, geographic locations, as well as specific interest groups. The first ad was targeted specifically to those who had indicated

on their profile that they were interested in EVE. The second was a much more general ad targeted towards men and women over the age of 18 who indicated that English was among the languages they communicated in. Both ads ran for 30 days each. I also paid for banner advertisements on Reddit.com, running ads in the subreddit for new eve players (r/evenewbies), a female-friendly gaming community (r/girlgamers) and the catch-all gaming subreddit (r/gaming).[37] Finally, posters advertising the study were placed around the York University campus at regular intervals for the duration of time that the survey was live.

Compensation for completing the survey took the form of an optional entry for a draw to win a $100 electronic gift certificate to an Amazon web portal of the winner's choosing. The survey was live for a total of 4 months November 2013 to February 2014, and was closed after the 100 responses threshold has been crossed for each of the first three survey branches (current, former, and non-players who are aware of the game). This threshold was selected to ensure a variety of responses to the open-ended survey questions inquiring about the participant's opinions about who plays EVE and for what reason. The fourth survey branch (those unfamiliar with the game) was not originally intended to be part of the survey and given it was exploratory in nature, I did not include it in the 100 minimum threshold I had set for the other three branches.

It is important to note that, due to the way participants were recruited, this survey is not intended to act as a representative sample or to be generalizable to the larger population of current, former, or non-players of this game. For example, as the

---

[37] I attempted to buy ad space on r/EVE but another party had already purchased all available space for the duration of time my survey was open to responses. While I can only speculate, the numerous times I visited r/EVE over the course of data collection, the top banner ad was an advertisement for EVE Online. Therefore, I assume that it was CCP Games that purchased this ad space on Reddit.

survey was written in English and recruitment was done entirely in English, this would

immediately exclude segments of the population who feel most comfortable

communicating in a different language – including the large segment of Russian EVE

players appearing in the research of Catherine Goodfellow (2014) conducted on

Russian-language game forums. Despite not being a representative sample, I draw

attention to the fact that this dataset is unique in that it solicited (and received)

responses from former and non-EVE players, as well as being the largest capture of

survey responses from current EVE players to date.

Preparing for Analysis

In this section I provide an overview of the steps I took to prepare the survey data

for analysis. This analysis will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6 where I

take up the quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

A total of 2061 individuals answered at least one question of the survey. Of these

2061 interactions, 1009 were marked as complete by the Limesurvey software. From the

1009 completed surveys, 28 were removed from the dataset to comply with the

informed consent protocols mandated by York University's Ethics Review Committee.

These responses were removed from the dataset for the following three reasons:

indication that they did not consent to participate in this research (N=4); responding

"no" to the statement on the ICD that read "I am over the age of 18" (N=17); and

indicating on the ICD that they were over the age of 18 but in the demographics section

of the survey provided a response that indicated they were 17 or younger (N=7). A total

of 981 survey responses were analyzed. All demographic questions were non-mandatory

and the response rate for each question is indicated as I discuss summary statistics in

Chapter 5. The 1058 incomplete surveys were not included in any of the analysis described in this dissertation.

<u>Quantitative analysis</u>

While the majority of questions on the *MMOG Experience Survey* were open ended, some of the questions lend themselves to quantitative analysis. Chapter 5 details the summary statistics of the demographic information from survey respondents. This is provided to better contextualize who completed the survey and identify gaps to be addressed in subsequent research. While some of the demographic questions were straightforward and can be easily parsed for analysis (e.g. the question about age was formatted to only accept two digit numbers), in keeping with the feminist approach to data collection, many of the demographic questions were open ended and/or allowed for multiple responses. Therefore, before summary statistics could be completed, the data had to be reformatted in a way to account for all possible answers. The goal was to avoid the artificial collapse of a variety of identities into a catchall "other" category as is often the case for participants who do not identify with the gender binary. To ensure that all possible combinations of answers were included in the analysis of such questions, each unique combination of answers had to be treated as a separate bin for analysis. The implications for this decision also impacted how the results could be visualized, and this is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions

Keeping in line with a feminist approach to conducting research, and being mindful of the limitations (discussed in Chapter 2) of using check boxes in surveys of leisure, which resulted in an over-representation of "lack of interest" in reasons for non-participation, I made the choice early on in my survey-design to use primarily open-ended questions in order to best capture the thoughts and experiences of current, former, and non-players. This posed a challenge when sitting down to analyze the survey, as 981 responses went far above the 300 responses I had initially hoped to capture in this dataset. While advances have certainly been made to natural language processing (NLP),[38] the sorts of questions and queries that can be answered using NLP are not congruent with the questions I investigate in this dissertation. Therefore, I had to design a coding schema and method of analysis that was both manageable and appropriate for hand coding with the assistance of NVivo (a qualitative software analysis suite). To better focus the discussion throughout this dissertation and to create a manageable dataset that could realistically be hand coded, I narrow my investigation to a selection of survey questions best suited to answering the research questions laid out in the Introduction of this dissertation. Further details about the coding process are described in Chapter 6.

---

[38] NLP is an area of computer science focused on machine learning with the goal training computers to be able to understand and interpret human language. For example, using algorithmic processing of text it is possible to create an automatic summary of larger written document or conduct a discourse analysis, but since this usually requires a standardized input, it was not appropriate for the open-ended answers collected via my survey.

Summary

      This chapter began with an introduction to the theoretical frameworks that help guide my approach to the research presented in this dissertation. By remaining open to unexpected results from earlier fieldwork at Fanfest, I was able to reformulate my project midstream by shifting focus away from the current female EVE players, and instead creating a study design to account for the thoughts and experiences of former and non-players of EVE not limited to a particular demographic category. By designing a survey open to current, former, and non-EVE players that relied primarily on open-ended questions, I endeavoured to create a research tool that was respectful to my participants and stress the importance of my participants' voices and their expertise of their own lived and gaming experiences. Furthermore, my coding schemas were open and flexible and even in the analysis of quantitative data I have declined to collapse categories, forgoing a "cleaner" presentation of summary statistics. In the next chapter I provide summary statistics of the demographic questions asked of *MMOG Experiences Survey* participants. Chapter 6 and 7 follow, where I discuss the results of qualitative coding of a selection of open-ended questions.

CHAPTER 5: Survey Demographics

In the previous chapter I articulated how feminist research guided my choices when creating my study design. I carry this feminist approach throughout my analysis, including this chapter's summary of demographic responses. Specifically, I illustrate what it looks like to visualize basic demographic data without collapsing certain responses into a catchall "other" category. While messy, this is a necessary step to draw attention to the diversity of identities of survey respondents that can be lost when artificially narrow questions are used to collect demographic data, e.g. relying on a male/female binary, or using male/female/other where other stands in for any answer *not* fitting into a male/female binary.

I begin this chapter with a brief discussion about conducting survey-based research via the Internet and how I chose to handle survey responses that contain inflammatory language. After providing this context, I move on to an overview of demographic information collected from participants who responded to the *MMOG Experiences Survey* that I described in Chapter 4. Alongside the summary of demographics of the 981 survey responses that constitute this dataset, I also describe the similarities and differences in profiles across the four branches of the survey (current, former, non-players of EVE, and respondents that indicated they are not familiar with this game).

This chapter addresses the second research question outlined in the introduction: Who are the current players of EVE? What demographics are/not represented within the player population? Overall, the data presented in this chapter falls in line with the sorts of demographics that have come to be expected in an investigation of EVE players,

especially given the context of EVE described in Chapter 3. However, when considered

in conjunction with the literature described in Chapter 2 (leisure studies literature about

barriers/constraints and critical feminist studies about digital game play), this

prevalence of current players self-identifying as white, male, and heterosexual requires

further examination to account for *why* this particular demographic was captured in

this survey responses and who may have been left out (and for what reasons). This

subsequent investigation is detailed in Chapters 6 and 7.

A note about not discarding data

Throughout data collection I made every effort to be up front about the goals of

my research, provide supplementary information, and make myself available answer

any questions that arose before a potential participant felt comfortable participating in

the survey, but this does not necessarily mean that all participants chose to answer the

questions in a sincere manner.[39] Therefore, before I shift focus to describing some of the

summary statistics I've calculated from survey responses, I explain my reasoning for

why I have chosen *not* to discard any data other than the answers that my ethics

approval required me to remove from this dataset.

Over the course of my doctoral studies I have been asked, mostly by other

graduate students, how I intended to "verify" data collected online, as if face-to-face

interviews would somehow lead to "better" data. I suspect this distrust stems from the

---

[39] I have been wrestling about what word would be most appropriate here. While not perfect, "sincere" seems to be the least problematic word choice. Other terms such as variations of truth or truthfulness fall into the danger of Haraway's (1988) "god trick" where it would then seem that I am somehow more aware of my participants' words then they are themselves.

assumption that people are not their real or authentic selves when communicating via

computer mediated communication (CMC). That CMC is a separate sphere allowing for

an anonymous playground – "on the internet nobody knows you are a dog" (Steiner,

1993) – is something that has permeated popular culture and is simultaneously used as

a reason to explain inappropriate, hurtful, or derogatory messages posted online.

Psychology has come to refer to this as the "online disinhibition effect", which as

described by Suler (2004) below, argues that the anonymity of the Internet has created

a culture in which users feel less bound by conventional/offline social norms and

expectations:

> When people have the opportunity to separate their actions online from
> their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about
> self-disclosing and acting out. Whatever they say or do can't be directly
> linked to the rest of their lives. In a process of dissociation, they don't
> have to own their behavior by acknowledging it within the full context
> of an integrated online/offline identity. The online self becomes a
> compartmentalized self. (Suler, 2004, p. 322)

Suler argues that the self becomes compartmentalized, and this bracketing off of offline

(real) and online (not real) selves is frequently held up as explanation as to why

someone may choose to lie (or worse, say hurtful things about others) via CMC. Sharing

similarities with Huizinga's (1955) magic circle where the suspension of disbelief is

required for gameplay, Suler characterizes online interactions as a self-contained and

separate sphere that takes place outside of one's "real" offline life. The critique of Suler

is that "online" and "offline" are rarely so easily separated, especially with the increasing

insistence of presenting an accurate and/or authentic online self by the developers

behind social media sites such as Facebook, Google+, or even the short-lived attempt by

Blizzard Entertainment to identify *World of Warcraft* players by their legal names on the games forums (Albrechtslund, 2011).

Despite not asking for participants to include identifying information, I am reluctant to divorce survey responses containing inflammatory language from a respondent's offline self. Negative reactions to my survey still had to come from somewhere and I argue that these responses still provide data worth considering. Furthermore, by viewing all survey responses as equally valid, I avoid having to create subjective criteria for determining what data is discarded, and what stays included in the dataset. As an example of the sorts of responses I kept in this dataset, one participant completed the entire survey but answered each question with variations of "yo mama" insults. These may not be ideal answers to the research questions set out in Chapter 1, but they are still survey answers and were treated accordingly and are reported with other "write in" answers provided by participants.[40]

While I was prepared for (and expected) some insincere comments to appear in survey responses, I did take steps to avoid catching the unwanted attention of particular online communities who might organize a campaign to overload my survey with noise. These concerns, which inevitably effected the design and framing of my survey instrument, are formed in relation to the toxicity associated with certain segments of gaming culture, such as the extreme hostility described by Mia Consalvo's (2012) investigation of toxic gamer cultures or Andrea Braithwaite's (2014) observation of the negative responses found on the *World of Warcraft* forums after a push towards

---

[40] In the event of a participant not finding their preferred demographic category in the list of possible responses, I included "other" as a response. When "other" was selected, this created a text box that allowed the participant to write in their preferred answer. Writing an answer in the text box was optional.

equality was requested of game developers. While I was upfront in all recruitment that this survey was interested in who does and does not participate in particular MMOG communities, in an effort to avoid a full on brigade or raid,[41] I stripped mention of feminism and/or social justice from the survey's supporting materials and elsewhere on my personal website and social media accounts during the duration of data collection. While it is impossible to know what might have happened otherwise, I believe this careful self-editing resulted in this recruitment and data collection to progress without major incident or harassment.[42]

Avoiding the catchall "other" bin

Wherever possible I have provided a visualization of the metrics being discussed throughout this chapter, as they increase the readability of statistics and quantitative information. Average age was a fairly straightforward calculation; respondents were only able to answer with a two-digit number. Therefore the visualization of participant age across the four respondent groups requires little in terms of additional explanations about how I intended the graphs to be read and interpreted by the reader.

Other questions discussed throughout this chapter required an extra step of data processing before analysis could be conducted; this was mentioned briefly in Chapter 4.

---

[41] By brigade or raid, I mean organized campaigns of harassment. Specifically, I was concerned with the possibility of attracting the attention of anti-feminist groups who would purposefully fill my survey with noise, such as the experience described by Allaway (2014) where her survey was discovered by an 8chan user. Because of this discovery, Allaway's survey received hundreds of responses in a matter of hours, most of them containing racist and misogynist language (para. 6).

[42] In the time between completing data collection and writing this dissertation draft, publically identifying as a feminist game scholar has since led to unwanted attention directed at many of my colleagues working in similar areas. Had I begun my survey research anytime after August 2014, my experiences would likely have been closer to Allaway's, as described in the previous footnote.

As per the feminist framework of this dissertation, the questions asking about gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were written to be as inclusive as possible. Responses were not artificially limited to a single answer and an option to write in one's preferred answer was included,[43] as well as the option to indicate that they formally declined to answer these questions. Additionally, a respondent could leave the question blank, as all of the demographic questions were non-mandatory. While the majority of respondents selected one response per question asking about gender, race, ethnicity, etc. there were still a non-trivial amount of respondents that indicated multiple responses. Rather than lumping all multiple responses into a single category and/or classifying these responses as "other" or "multiple responses", I have included all combined categories indicated by survey respondents in my coding and analysis. This adds an extra degree of difficulty when plotting responses and for the ease of readability discussions of these responses contain two separate plots. The first details the responses of the majority of participants. The second should be read as an "inset" of the first, magnified to better display the remaining 10% (approximate) and insure that their responses are visible and acknowledged. These visualizations will not fall in line with the axioms of Edward Tufte (2001) or other proponents of "beautiful" data visualizations, but they do provide a level of nuance not afforded by the use of a catchall "other" category or forced assimilation to a strict and/or mandatory gender binary.

---

[43] I utilized a feature of Limesurvey so that if a respondent selected "other" as their answer, an optional text box would appear prompting the respondent to fill in the answer best suited to their personal experience.

Who Completed the Survey?

In the following sections I describe summary statistics of some of the demographic questions asked as part of the *MMOG Experiences Survey* (described in Chapter 4). Beginning with a breakdown of respondents' familiarity with EVE, I move on to describe the distribution of age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity of survey participants. These four metrics are highlighted in this chapter because they are often used to identify the stereotypical game player (i.e. straight white males who are teenagers or young adults), despite this stereotype consistently being discredited (Shaw, 2010c, 2012; D. Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008).

Familiarity with *EVE Online*

As described in Chapter 4, this survey began with a series of questions to gauge a respondent's experience playing digital games including MMOGs. After these general questions about what games they play, with whom they play them, and where they play games (e.g. home, at a friend's house, LAN parties), all survey respondents were asked the same mandatory question, "Are you familiar with the MMOG *EVE Online*?" The responses to this question are summarized in

Table 3. For the remainder of this analysis "I am not familiar with this game" (N=51) and "I am unsure if I am familiar with this game" (N=5) have been collapsed into a single category as both of these responses led to the same survey branch that asked the respondent to watch a recent CCP-produced trailer and speculate about what sort of game this video might depicting.

Response	Number	(%)
Yes. I currently play *EVE Online*	647	66.0
Yes. I have played *EVE Online* previously, but do not currently have an active account.	133	13.6
Yes. I am familiar with *EVE Online* but have not played the game.	145	14.8
I am not familiar with this game or I am unsure if I am familiar with this game	56	5.6
Total	981	100

Table 3: Breakdown of responses to the question "Are you familiar with the MMOG *EVE Online*?"

Current EVE players make up the majority of respondents to this survey, comprising 66.0% of all completed responses. While I posted recruitment messages in a variety of online communities (both related and unrelated to the EVE community), posts made to EVE-related communities generated the most responses. In Chapter 4 and elsewhere I argued that this is likely due to EVE being an understudied game and to date, players have rarely had the opportunity to share their opinion about this particular MMOG (Bergstrom, 2014). The large number of current EVE players skews the results in favour of this category; therefore for the remainder of this chapter I provide demographic breakdown for each of the four categories alongside the overall dataset to allow for an ease of comparison between respondents with the same level of familiarity with EVE.

Age

Despite mounting evidence that game players are older and much more demographically mixed than the archetype of a "gamer" usually allows for (Grundberg & Hansegard, 2014), the stereotype that games are a leisure activity for children (or the

117

emotionally immature) remains persistent (Bergstrom et al., 2014; Kowert et al., 2012). In an effort to speak to (and refute) this stereotype, I began my demographic analysis with an investigation of the ages of the participants who completed the survey. Almost all respondents chose to provide an answer to the question "How old are you?" and only 7 participants left their answer to this question blank. The age of respondents analyzed in this chapter ranged from 18 to 52 years old with an average of 26.0 years old. The distribution of age across the entire survey dataset is visualized in Figure 6. The box represents the range of ages of 50% of the total respondents: this indicates that half of the responses came from participants between the ages of 20 to 30. This falls in line with the "average age" of game players frequently reported by the video game industry (Entertainment Software Association, 2014a, 2014b).

In an attempt to avoid confusion between age and the year in which one was born, the question was formatted to accept two-digit numerals only. Overall this seems to have abated misunderstanding of the question, however two outliers at the older age of the spectrum were identified: 69 (in conjunction with this participant's other answers that frequently took the form of "yo mama" jokes/insults, this is likely an insincere response) and 82 (elsewhere the respondent indicated they are currently enrolled in a PhD program and so it is possible that they misinterpreted the question and entered their birth year). These two outliers appear in Figure 6 as the two crosshairs far above the rest of the distribution. Not depicted are any responses that came from participants below the age of 18. As stated in Chapter 4, all surveys that included an answer indicating the respondent was younger than 18 were removed from the dataset.

Figure 7 illustrates the age distribution for each of the four respondent segments. The distribution for the entire data set is also included for ease of comparison (listed here as All Respondents). There are no significant departures observed for any of the four survey segments; the age distributions are roughly the same across participants who indicated they currently played EVE, previously played EVE, have never played EVE, or are unfamiliar with this game.
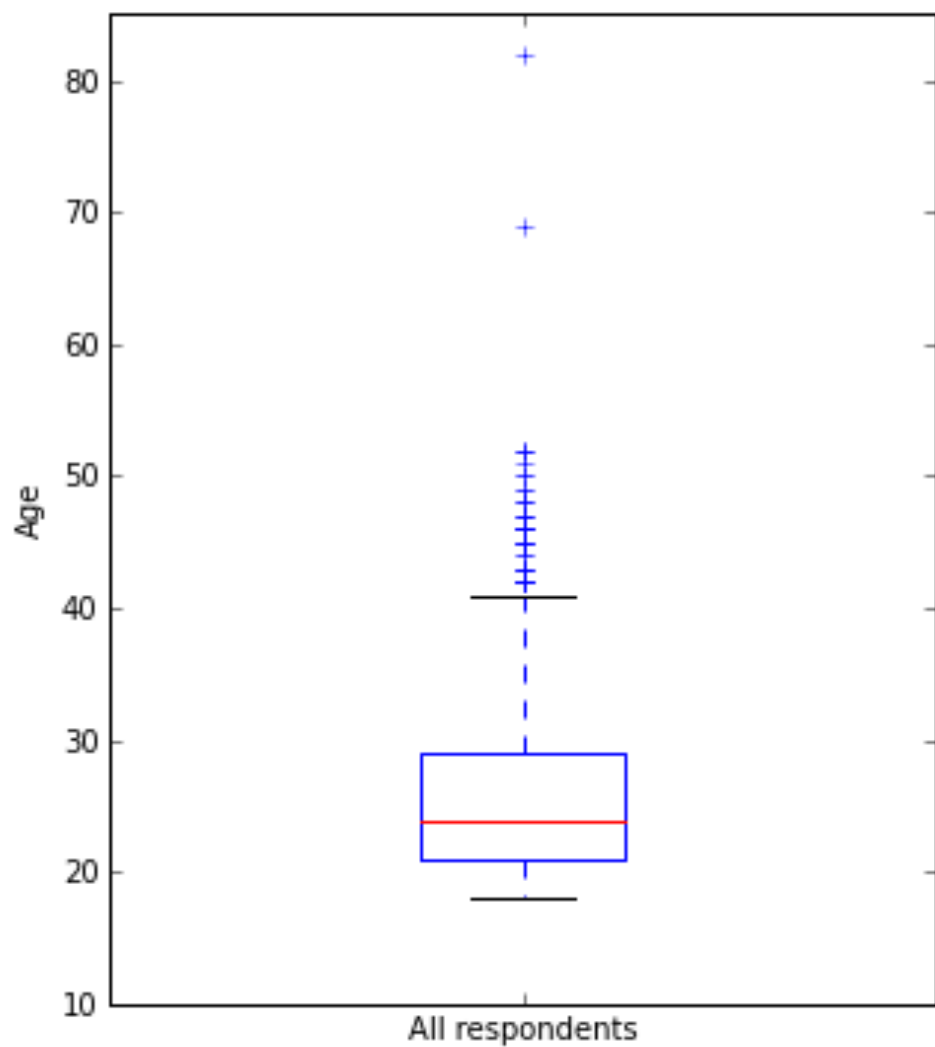
Figure 6: Distribution of age across entire dataset, including the two outliers described in the text above
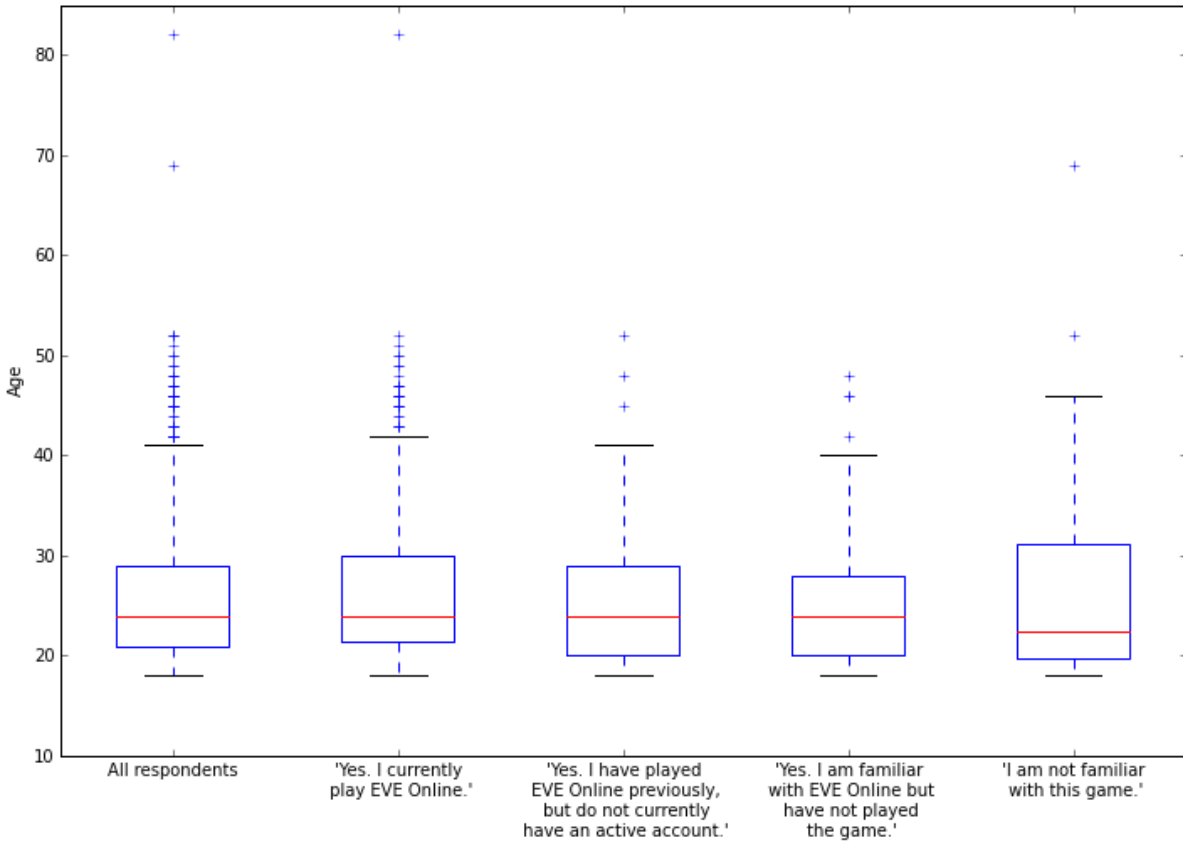
Figure 7: Age distribution across each of the four respondent segments. The distribution of age across the entire dataset is provided on the left for comparison.

Gender

A total of 973 individuals provided an answer to "With what gender(s) do you identify?" and a summary of these responses are included in

Table 4. Most respondents only selected one answer to this question (N=956) and 17 respondents selected two answers. No respondents selected three or more answers, although this option was possible as there was no limit to the number of answers that could be selected. Six specified that they preferred not to answer and eight left the question blank. Overall, the self-reported gender of respondents skews heavily towards male (82.7%). The remaining responses consisted of 13.5% female, 0.4% trans/trans*,

0.6% other (with those who opted to write-in an answer describing their gender as asexual, intersex, "ask yo mama" and "I am an alien"). The respondents who indicated more than one choice (N=17) are also indicated below in

Table 4. I made targeted attempts to recruit female participants by purchasing advertising and posting information about the survey in "girl gamer" forums/communities, but the large number of male-identified responses is not particularly surprising, given the particularly sticky idea of digital games being a masculine domain (see Chapter 2).

While the ages of respondents from each of the four survey segments are fairly consistent, the responses to "With what gender(s) do you identify?" tell a different story, both in the distribution across survey segments but also in how the data needed to be analyzed. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I provided the opportunity to select multiple answers best reflecting their personal gender identity/identities rather than asking participants to choose between a male/female binary. This leads to a dataset with far more bins than the typical question formatted to ask participants to choose between male/female (and possibly "other"). This question format is so pervasive that a male/female binary is the default gender question format in Limesurvey. Therefore, when designing the survey I had to create a custom question in order to provide the option for multiple possible responses. This has led to a "messier" dataset that required additional work before analysis could begin, but I argue, a dataset that better keeps in line with the feminist research principles outlined in Chapter 4.

Answer(s) selected	Number	(%)
Male	817	83.3
Female	124	12.6
Female + Trans	9	0.9
Female + Male	7	0.7
Write-in answer (other)	5	0.5
Trans	4	0.4
Male + write-in answer (other)	1	0.1
Prefer not to say	6	0.6
Did not answer	8	0.8
Total	981	100

Table 4: Summary of responses to the question "With what gender(s) do you identify?"

Drawing on the same data as in

Table 4 above, Figure 8 reflects the answers of participants with multiple responses. The

visualization on the left represents over 90% of the survey responses, and therefore the

vast majority of responses indicated either male or female. The visualization on the right

is the remaining 10% that has been expanded for ease of readability. The range of

responses on the right hand side of the visualization serves as a reminder of the diversity

of game players that is lost if respondents were required to select only one response

and/or were limited to answers in a male/female gender binary.
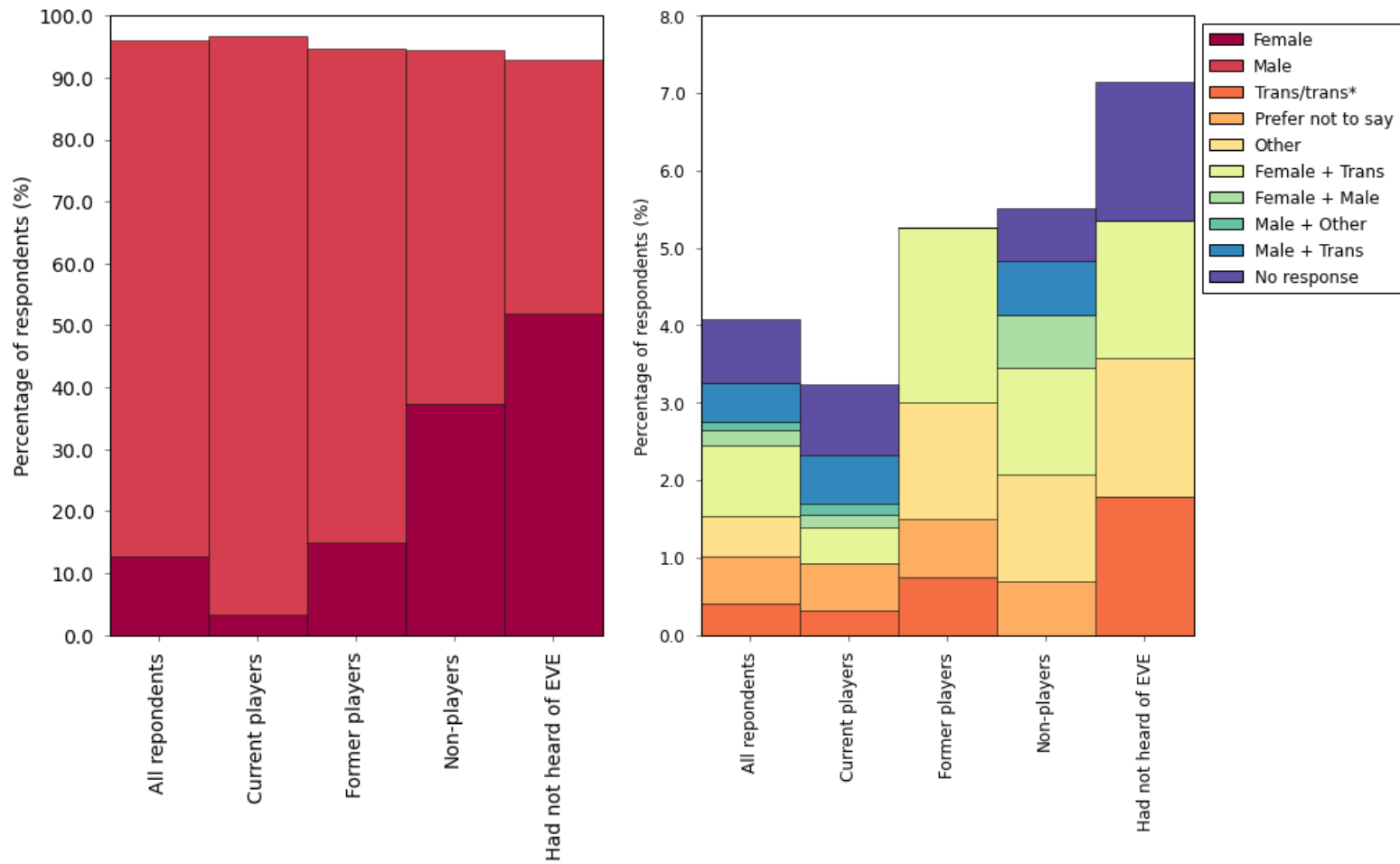
Figure 8: Gender distribution across each of the four survey segments. This has been broken into two figures to allow easier reading of the large variety of responses that make up less than 10% of the answers for each survey segment. The figure on the right has been expanded for readability.

In contrast to age being evenly distributed across the four categories (Figure 7), this visualization of gender (Figure 8) shows that current players responding to the survey are predominantly male, yet at the other end of the spectrum of familiarity, an equal number of males and females indicated they had not previously heard of EVE. Female respondents made up 12.6% of the dataset, and most of these responses come from those who are aware of EVE but have not played, or those who indicated that they were not familiar with this particular MMOG. I also draw attention to the genders represented among those who have not previously heard of EVE as it most closely reflects the latest reporting about the number of female game players being equal to males (Grundberg & Hansegard, 2014). It is perhaps not surprising that so few women are represented among the responses of current EVE players, given my research about this community to date (Chapter 4) and where EVE fits into the larger MMOG marketplace (Chapter 3). Where gender parity does/does not fit into CCP's plans for EVE and their other games will be discussed in Chapter 6.

<u>Sexuality</u>

The question used to inquire about sexuality was phrased as, "With which sexual orientation do you most closely identify?" and as with the entire demographic section of the survey, this was not a required question. The question was formatted to accept multiple answers and had the option to write in a response if the appropriate answer was not included in the list provided. A total of 974 respondents provided an answer to this question and a summary is included in

Table 5. This table is formatted in a similar manner as the table reporting gender (

Table 4) and includes those who indicated more than one answer (N=22). Seven left the question blank and 18 indicated that they preferred not to answer this question. The majority of respondents selected heterosexual/straight (85.1%) The remaining responses consisted of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and other. Write-in responses to "other" were pansexual (N=7), asexual (N=1), and "ask yo momma bout my big black dick yo".

Answer(s) selected	Number	(%)
Heterosexual/Straight	835	85.1
Lesbian	8	0.8
Gay	16	1.6
Bisexual	73	7.4
Lesbian + Bisexual	5	0.5
Heterosexual + Bisexual	5	0.5
Heterosexual + Lesbian	2	0.2
Heterosexual + Gay	2	0.2
Other	9	0.9
Prefer not to say	18	1.8
Did not respond	7	0.7
Total	981	100

Table 5: Summary of responses to "With which sexual orientation do you most closely identify?"

Responses to this question were coded in the same manner as responses to the gender question described in the previous section and visualized in Figure 9. Here the types of responses are fairly consistent across each of the segments with an overwhelming majority of responses indicating that the participant most closely identified as heterosexual. This is partly due to an oversight on my part, as while I attempted to recruit participants from forums specifically targeted towards female gamers, I did not post recruitment messages to any of the queer gaming sites that have begun to appear online (e.g. gaygamers.net or reddit.com/r/gaymers).
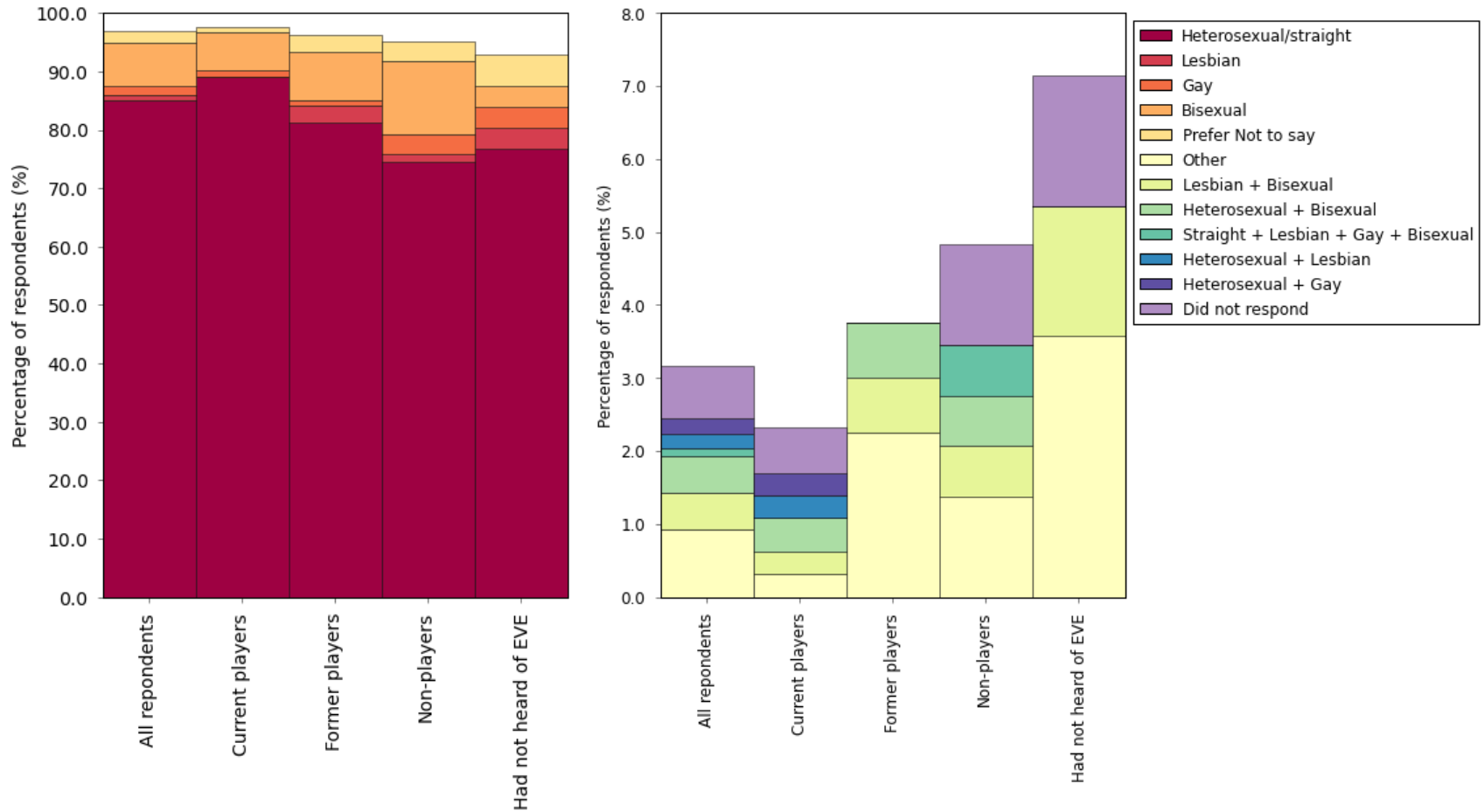
**Figure 9: Sexuality distribution across each of the four survey segments. This has been broken into two figures to allow easier reading of the large variety of responses that make up less than 10% of the answers for each survey segment. The figure on the right has been expanded for readability**

A total of 966 respondents provided an answer to "What racial/ethnic group(s) do you use to describe yourself?" This question was also formatted to accept multiple answers based on feedback collected during the survey pilot study. As Table 6 illustrates, this resulted in numerous instances of multiple responses which would not have been captured had the survey design mandated a single response to this question. While the questions inquiring about gender and sexuality resulted in some participants selecting two responses, here some participants selected three answers to best reflect the race/ethnic groups they used to describe themselves. Due to the number of bins needed to contain the variations in participant responses, the data in Table 6 is presented in ascending order. This breaks from the format of the gender and sexuality tables presented earlier in this chapter, which presented the single bins before the multiple-answer bins. Following the descriptors of racial or ethnic group is a breakdown of participants who selected other, indicated they preferred not to say, or did not respond to this question. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander was provided as an option, and while this was selected in conjunction with other options including White or Caucasian, herein shorted to White (N=1) and the combined answer of White and American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal (N=1) this was not selected as a standalone answer in any of the survey responses. The distribution of ethnicity across each of the four survey groups is depicted in Figure 10. This visualization shows a similar distribution as seen above in Figure 9 visualizing the sexuality of survey respondents; in this case the vast majority of responses coming from participants who identified as White.

Answer(s) selected	Number	(%)
White or Caucasian	814	83.0
Asian or Indian/South Asian	36	3.7
Hispanic or Latino	19	1.9
White or Caucasian + Latino	14	1.4
White or Caucasian + American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal	12	1.2
White or Caucasian + Other	10	1.0
White or Caucasian + Asian or Indian/South Asian	10	1.0
American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal	6	0.6
White or Caucasian + Middle Eastern or Arabic	6	0.6
Black or African American	5	0.5
Middle Eastern or Arabic	3	0.3
White or Caucasian + American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal + Black or African American	2	0.2
Asian or Indian/South Asian + Black or African American	1	0.1
White or Caucasian + American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal + Middle Eastern or Arabic	1	0.1
Asian or Indian/South Asian + White or Caucasian + Hispanic or Latino	1	0.1
White or Caucasian + American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal + Hispanic or Latino	1	0.1
White or Caucasian + Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.1
White or Caucasian + Hispanic or Latino + Black or African American	1	0.1
White or Caucasian + American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal + Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.1
Other	13	1.3
Prefer not to say	9	0.9
Did not respond	15	1.5
Total	981	100

Table 6: Summary of responses to "What racial/ethnic group(s) do you use to describe yourself?" Responses are organized in ascending order and Other, Prefer not to say, and Did not respond are separated at the bottom of the table. This division is provided to increase readability and allow for ease of comparison across groups.
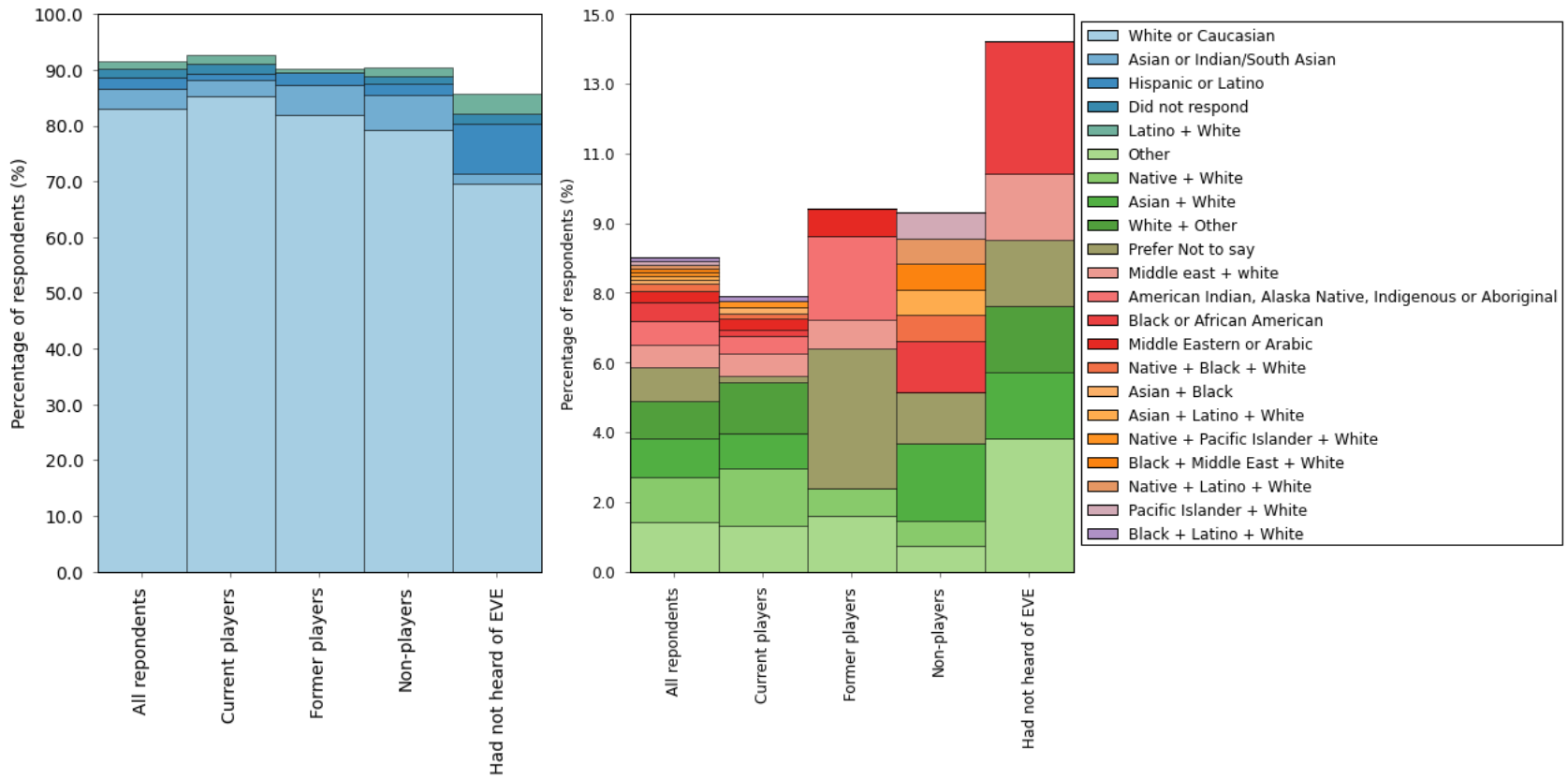
Figure 10: Ethnicity distribution across each of the four survey segments. This has been broken into two figures to allow easier reading of the large variety of responses that make up less than 10% of the answers for each survey segment. The figure on the right has been expanded for readability.

As with the other demographic questions, "Other" was provided as a means for respondents to indicate that none of the provided answers fit the race or ethnicity that best suited their personal identification. If this answer was selected, an optional text box allowed the respondent to write in an answer to better reflect the answer they wanted to share. A total of 13 respondents indicated Other as their only response, and 10 respondents selected White and Other. Two respondents utilized the text box to indicate an ethnic identity more nuanced than the options provided; in one case their identity was Maori, the other was Far East Asian.

Here I note that a subset of respondents utilized the text box to provide information about an identity typically associated with Whiteness or being Caucasian. In addition to a respondent who specified that they identified as a White African, this specification of Whiteness appeared in other answers:

- European; Irish
- Eastern European
- Viking
- Greek
- Scandinavian
- Portuguese

Additionally, two respondents wrote in Australian in the Other text box, perhaps indicating that they are Indigenous peoples of Australia but this cannot be distilled from this answer alone. Similarly, one respondent wrote American as their ethnicity, it is impossible to know if they meant Indigenous American without a follow up query. Finally, two respondents indicated their ethnicity is Human, and one responded, "Do not have a personal ethnic identity". Upon reviewing these responses I was surprised, especially when contrasted with the comparatively fewer write-in answers responding to questions about gender or sexuality.

In Chapter 2 I drew upon feminist work about gaming cultures to discuss the assumed maleness of gamers, but also relevant is the assumed Whiteness which often remains under examined in critical gaming literature, notable exceptions being the ongoing work of Kishonna Gray (2011, 2012a, 2012c), André Brock (2011), Lisa Nakamura (2009, 2012), and Tanner Higgin (2008, 2012). The imagined and expected user remains male, but also white. Here I remark that it is interesting that some respondents seemed to push back on race question but not gender or sexuality (aside from the single respondent who was committed to writing an insult about my mother in response to each demographic question). I speculate that this is at least partly a general unease in having discussions about race by those who inhabit bodies read as white (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997). These attempts to conflate nationality with ethnicity (e.g. Irish, Scandinavian) or an attempt to reject ethnicity completely (e.g. Human, Do not have a personal ethnic identity) only make up a small segment of survey responses. They do, however, still point to an underlying need to address race and ethnicity in a frank and open manner.

Comparing across demographics

Up until this point of the chapter I have discussed age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in isolation from each other. In this section I discuss how gender, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect in terms of who completed the survey and how they self-identify. These intersections are provided in pivot tables, where the columns represent ethnicity.

The rows cover two dimensions: gender, and then broken down further into sexuality.[44] In the main text of this chapter I provide a table for each of the four survey branches: current EVE players, former EVE players, those unfamiliar with EVE, and those who have not encountered this game before completing the survey.

Current *EVE Online* players

Current EVE players made up a majority of survey responses (N=647). Throughout this chapter I have highlighted that the majority of responses from current players came from participants identifying as male, straight, and white. Table 7 reinforces and emphasizes this finding – these three categories intersect in 476 responses by current players. By presenting the data in this manner, it also emphasizes how few female-identified participants responded to the survey. For example, 13 participants identified as white, female, and straight, and a further 6 participants identified as white, female, and bisexual. Even when combined (N=19), this is still fewer respondents than the total number of respondents identifying as white, male, and bisexual (N=26). I also note that even when a participant doesn't meet all three markers (straight, white, male), the highlighted columns in this table shows that for many participants two out of the three were present in their self identification.

---

[44] The tables included in this chapter only include the categories used by the particular subset of participants being discussed (current, former, non-players or those unfamiliar with EVE).

<u>Former *EVE Online* players</u>

A total of 133 former players completed the survey, 76 of which identified as straight white males. Like the current players discussed above, Table 8 below emphasizes how few female former players answered the survey. This table has also been highlighted that the frequency of straight and white responses are present among former player responses, similar to what I described above in regards to current players.

<u>Non-players</u>

A total of 145 survey respondents indicated they had heard of EVE, but had not played the game. While straight white males still represent the largest number of respondents for this category (N=61), a total of 39 white female identified participants indicated they had not previously played EVE. The majority of these white females (N=25) identified as straight, 10 as bisexual, and the remaining white/female respondents identifying their sexuality as heterosexual and bisexual (N=1), lesbian (N=1), and other (N=2). Continuing with the same pattern as the previous two sections, Table 9 illustrates that the column most frequently populated for all genders is whiteness, and straight is the most frequently populated row for both females and males.

<u>Unfamiliar with *EVE Online*</u>

The final category is the respondents who indicated they were not familiar with EVE prior to completing the survey (N=56). Of the four categories, this is the only group of respondents where female and male identified participants are close to parity, in this

case more respondents indicated as female than male. As Table 10 illustrates, 17

respondents identified as straight, white and female, and 15 identified as straight, white,

and male.

Count of Gender	American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal	Asian + Black	Asian + White	Asian or Indian/South Asian	Asian or Indian/South Asian White or Caucasian	Black + Latino + White	Black or African American	Did not answer	Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino White or Caucasian	Latino + White	Middle east + white	Middle Eastern or Arabic	Native + Black + White	Native + Pacific Islander + White	Native + White	Other	Prefer Not to say	White + Other	White or Caucasian	Grand Total
Did not answer																					
Did not answer								1													1
Heterosexual/straight				1				1												3	5
Did not answer Total				1				2												3	6
Female																					
Bisexual							1													6	7
Heterosexual/straight																1				13	14
Female Total							1									1				19	21
Female + Male																					
Heterosexual/straight																				1	1
Female + Male Total																				1	1
Female + Trans																					
Lesbian + Bisexual				1																1	2
Prefer Not to say																				1	1
Female + Trans Total				1																2	3
Male																					
Bisexual								1	1						1		2		1	26	32
Did not answer								1			1									1	3
Gay			1								1								1	5	8
Heterosexual + Bisexual																				3	3
Heterosexual + Gay												1								1	2
Heterosexual + Lesbian			1																	1	2
Heterosexual/straight	3	1	2	16	2	1		7	7	1	6	3	2	1		9	5	1	7	476	550
Other																				2	2
Prefer Not to say																		1		2	3
Male Total	3	1	4	16	2	1		9	8	1	8	4	2	1	1	9	8	1	9	517	605
Male + Other																					
Prefer Not to say																				1	1
Male + Other Total																				1	1
Male + Trans																					
Bisexual																				1	1
Heterosexual/straight								1												2	3
Male + Trans Total								1												3	4
Prefer not to say																					
Heterosexual/straight				1																2	3
Prefer Not to say																				1	1
Prefer not to say Total				1																3	4
Trans/trans*																					
Bisexual																				2	2
Trans/trans* Total																				2	2
Grand Total	3	1	4	19	2	1	1	12	8	1	8	4	2	1	1	10	8	1	9	551	647

Table 7: Cross comparison between gender, sexuality, and ethnicity for current *EVE Online* players.

Count of Gender	American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal	American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or AboriginalAsian or Indian/South Asian	Asian or Indian/South Asian	Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or LatinoWhite or Caucasian	Middle Eastern or Arabic	Middle Eastern or ArabicWhite or Caucasian	Other	Prefer Not to say	White or Caucasian	Grand Total
Female											
Bisexual										1	1
Heterosexual/straight			2							14	16
Lesbian										2	2
Lesbian + Bisexual										1	1
Female Total			2							18	20
Female + Trans											
Bisexual										1	1
Lesbian										1	1
Other										1	1
Female + Trans Total										3	3
Male											
Bisexual	1		1							6	8
Gay										1	1
Heterosexual + Bisexual										1	1
Heterosexual/straight	1	1	4	3	1	1	1		3	76	91
Other	1										1
Prefer Not to say								1	2	1	4
Male Total	3	1	5	3	1	1	1	1	5	85	106
Other											
Heterosexual/straight							1				1
Other										1	1
Other Total							1			1	2
Prefer not to say											
Bisexual										1	1
Prefer not to say Total										1	1
Trans/trans*											
Lesbian										1	1
Trans/trans* Total										1	1
Grand Total	3	1	7	3	1	1	1	2	5	109	133

Table 8: Cross comparison between gender, sexuality, and ethnicity for former *EVE Online* players.

Count of Gender	Asian + Latino + White	Asian + White	Asian or Indian/South Asian	Black + Middle East + White	Black or African American	Did not answer	Hispanic or Latino	Latino + White	Native + Black + White	Native + Latino + White	Native + White	Other	Pacific Islander + White	Prefer Not to say	White or Caucasian	Grand Total
Did not answer																
Gay															1	1
Did not answer Total															1	1
Female																
													1			1
Bisexual				1						1					10	12
Heterosexual + Bisexual															1	1
Heterosexual/straight		1	4		1		1	1	1		1	1			25	36
Lesbian															1	1
Other															2	2
Prefer Not to say		1														1
Female Total		2	4	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		39	54
Female + Male																
Straight + Lesbian + Gay + Bisexual			1													1
Female + Male Total			1													1
Female + Trans																
Bisexual															1	1
Lesbian + Bisexual															1	1
Female + Trans Total															2	2
Male																
Bisexual															3	3
Did not answer						1										1
Gay															4	4
Heterosexual/straight	1		4		1	1	2	1						1	61	72
Prefer Not to say															3	3
Male Total	1		4		1	2	2	1						1	71	83
Male + Trans																
Bisexual															1	1
Male + Trans Total															1	1
Other																
Bisexual															1	1
Lesbian		1														1
Other Total		1													1	2
Prefer not to say																
Prefer Not to say														1		1
Prefer not to say Total														1		1
Grand Total	1	3	9	1	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	115	145

Table 9: Cross comparison between gender, sexuality, and ethnicity for respondents who indicated they were familiar with *EVE Online* but have not played it.

Count of Gender	Asian + White	Asian or Indian/South Asian	Black or African American	Did not answer	Hispanic or Latino	Latino + White	Middle east + white	Other	Prefer Not to say	White + Other	White or Caucasian	Grand Total
Did not answer												
Prefer Not to say											1	1
Did not answer Total											1	1
Female												
Bisexual											1	1
Heterosexual/straight	1	1	1	1					1	1	17	23
Lesbian					1							1
Lesbian + Bisexual											1	1
Other											1	1
Prefer Not to say							1				1	2
Female Total	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	1	21	29
Female + Trans												
Lesbian											1	1
Female + Trans Total											1	1
Male												
Gay					1	1						2
Heterosexual/straight			1		3	1		1			15	21
Male Total			1		4	2		1			15	23
Other												
Other								1				1
Other Total								1				1
Trans/trans*												
Bisexual											1	1
Trans/trans* Total											1	1
Grand Total	1	1	2	1	5	2	1	2	1	1	39	56

Table 10: Cross comparison between gender, sexuality, and ethnicity for respondents who indicated they were not familiar with *EVE Online*.

What can we learn about EVE Online from these statistics?

Throughout this chapter I have provided a summary of the types of people who participated in my dissertation research, and visualized some basic comparisons across the four survey branches (current, former, non-players as well as those unfamiliar with

EVE). The majority of participant demographics across age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity seem to fall in line with expectations of the sorts of demographics usually represented in games research that falls outside the critical feminist literature discussed in Chapter 2; the majority of survey responses came from white heterosexual males. Similarly, the majority of current EVE players who completed this survey also fall into this same category. To the uncritical eye, this would seem to be evidence to once again reaffirm that these are the sorts of demographics most likely to be interested in participating in a MMOG, especially a game with such a notorious reputation as EVE. However, by drawing on the frameworks discussed earlier in this dissertation, namely constraints/barriers to leisure participation, and then viewed alongside critical feminist investigations of gaming cultures, this invites further investigation as to why gameplay continues to be the domain of this particular intersection of identity markers.

The goal this chapter has been to provide a sense of who currently plays EVE, and the similarities/differences of demographics of former and non-players. In the next chapter I turn my attention to analyzing open-ended questions, narrowing my focus to the responses by current, former, and non-players of EVE. I also return to the demographic investigations presented in this chapter where they form the basis of my investigation about *who* the imagined typical EVE player might be, and how this imagined typical player matches the demographic data presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6: Imagining *EVE Online*

> *EVE Online* is a sandbox and the real charm is that in the dark back corners of the sandbox the players are melting the sand into glass and stabbing each other in the eyes with it. (id 966, current player, M-S-W)

In Chapter 3, I explored how EVE is discussed from three different perspectives (the developer, the gaming press, academic writing) and identified gaps in current conversations about who plays EVE and for what reasons. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the survey I designed and administered to address these gaps, and Chapter 5 provided a summary of the demographics of survey participants. Building on these previous chapters, herein I present an analysis of survey open-ended responses to address the third research question I asked in the introduction: How do current, former, and non-players game describe EVE? The motivation for this analysis was to pay closer attention to how these groups describe EVE and if these descriptions share any similarities (or depart from) the dominant narratives of Chapter 3. In this chapter I argue that non/player responses, combined with recent actions on the part of the game's developers, point towards an increasing homogeneity of the EVE player population and decreasing opportunities to become members of its community.

Earlier in this dissertation I described how EVE is marketed as a sandbox-style game, yet little information about what this actually entails is provided on CCP's websites. There is equally sparse coverage in the gaming enthusiast press that showcases the diversity of play styles or in-game activities that a sandbox game would presumably contain. In contrast to discussions surrounding EVE, coverage about other games typically described as a sandbox (e.g. the *Grand Theft Auto* series) often focus on the emergent ways of playing that are not reliant on the quests/in-game activities provided

by the developer.[45] In Chapter 3 I argued that representations of EVE written with non-players as the imagined audience emphasize "giant space battles". I theorized that these representations mean that potential players reading about EVE from these sources who would gravitate towards the PVE elements of gameplay (e.g. mining, manufacturing, role-play, etc.) might pre-emptively opt out before conquering the learning "cliff", assuming they even download the trial version of the game. Previous research about the EVE new player experience indicates interactions between new and existing players are important. This includes Christopher Paul's (2011) argument that CCP purposefully leaves out information from the in-game tutorial to encourage newcomers to overcome the EVE learning cliff by seeking out connections with existing players. Similar sentiments were expressed by focus group participants (described in Chapter 4) who stressed the importance of a social network for 'surviving' in EVE.

Building on this existing work, I was interested to see what sorts of responses I would receive when I asked survey participants to describe EVE. The question posed to current and former players was phrased as: "How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played it before?" Non-players were asked: "What do you know about EVE Online?" In all cases the question was optional and formatted as open-ended with a large textbox. This chapter focuses primarily on the responses of current and non-players, but where relevant I have also included the responses of former players. The majority of the analysis of responses by former players is contained in Chapter 7.

---

[45] For example Kotaku, one of the enthusiast sites described in Chapter 3, frequently covers the *Grand Theft Auto* series. The latest articles are available online at: http://kotaku.com/tag/grand-theft-auto. This coverage is often focused on player modifications, such as making the gameworld look more like North Dakota instead of California (Fahey, 2015) or ways to explore the gameworld to uncover hidden content ("Easter eggs") (Hamilton, 2013).

In reporting these findings, I draw on the feminist research philosophy outlined in Chapter 4, and therefore quote heavily from survey respondents' own words and keep paraphrasing or summarizing to a minimum. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are the entirety of the participant's response. I have not edited participants' words aside from copyediting for spelling and/or punctuation. When quoting survey responses I indicate the survey response ID as a unique anonymous identifier (id #), as well as indicate if the quote comes from a current, former, or non-player. I also indicate basic demographic information using the shorthand described in

Table 11, which will be referred to throughout this chapter and the next in the format of Gender-Sexuality-Ethnicity. As evidenced by the summary statistics provided in Chapter 5, I note the majority of survey respondents self-identified as male, straight, and white; this is labelled in the notation system as M-S-W. In an effort to maintain the anonymity of participants who indicated a demographic category that contain less than 25 responses (e.g. only 4 participants self-identified as Trans) I have collapsed some categories. These collapsed categories are also defined in

Table 11 below.

Demographic Marker		Shorthand Code
Gender	Male	M
	Female	F
	Non-Binary • Trans • Other • Multiple answers	NB
	No Data • Prefer not to say • Did not answer	GDNR
Sexuality	Straight	S

	Bisexual	B
	Queer • Lesbian • Gay • Other • Multiple answers	Q
	No Data • Prefer not to say • Did not answer	SDNR
Ethnicity	White or Caucasian	W
	Asian or Indian/South Asian	A
	Hispanic or Latino	HL
	Black or African American	AA
	Multiple Ethnicities • Other • Multiple answers	ME
	No Data • Prefer not to say • Did not answer	EDNR

Table 11: Notation system used for demographic information. Categories that have been collapsed to maintain participant anonymity are indicated in bullet points. This information will be used throughout Chapter 6 and 7 in the following format: gender-sexuality-ethnicity.

Describing EVE Online: Current and Former Players

I began my investigation by creating a spreadsheet compiling current and former

players' answers to "How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played it

before?" I then imported this spreadsheet into Nvivo and built a coding schema based

on the major themes present in these descriptions of EVE. I also coded for specific

buzzwords including invocations on the EVE-specific memes "internet spaceships",

"serious business" or "srs bsns", and any references to spreadsheets or Excel.

Overall, most respondents answered this question, only 47 of 647 current players

and 3 of 133 former players left the response blank. The length of responses varied

widely. Some chose to answer with a single word such as:

- Complicated (id 610, current EVE player, M-S-W)
- Brutal (id 1118, current EVE player, M-S-W)
- Real (id 1223, current EVE player, M-S-W)
- Spaceships (1560, former player, M-S-W)
- Difficult (id 1559, former player, M-B-ME)
- Dense (id 1736, former player, M-S-W)

These responses are terse, but perhaps not surprising given my findings thus far indicating EVE is not a game necessarily welcoming to outsiders and therefore respondents may not feel compelled to provide a lengthy response. At the other end of the spectrum, I also received multi-paragraph responses; the longest answer came from a current player and comprised of 658 words. Overall, of the average response length for current players is 25.7 words and former players is 18.9 words (these numbers exclude the participants who left this answer blank).

The most common descriptor about EVE focuses on it being a space-themed game; 371 current and former players provided an answer that indicated EVE is about space and/or spaceships (current players N=306 or 47.2%, former players N=65 or 48.9%). This is unsurprising, as images of stars, planets, and spaceships figure prominently in CCP's advertising campaigns for the game. What *was* surprising was how few participants used the specific term "science fiction" or "sci-fi" to describe EVE (current players N=26 or 4.0%, former players N=5 or 3.8%). The articles I looked at in Chapter 3 frequently used science fiction as a descriptor for EVE, and yet this was invoked in only 31 current and former player responses. I theorize that this is because participants did not necessarily view science fiction as an important enough descriptor to mention it in their response to this question; this is particularly interesting when viewed in conjunction with Chapter 3, where I highlighted a CCP employee's statement that the reason why there are so few women playing EVE is because women don't like

science fiction. I will revisit CCP's characterization of EVE and their assumptions about who is most interested in playing it again in the conclusion of this chapter.

Rather than using science fiction, respondents were far more likely to use the term "sandbox" (current players, N=255 or 39.4%, former players N=14, 10.5%) to describe EVE. The heavily reliance of the term "sandbox" in player descriptions of EVE likely stems from CCP's own reliance on the term to advertise their game.[46] However, I found that the majority of current players who used sandbox in their answer did so with very little (or in many cases, no) qualifiers to explain what the term sandbox refers to. This is further evidence that the assumed novice EVE player has already encountered the game somewhere else, and is equally assumed to already be familiar with the slang, memes, and highly specialized jargon that pervades this community. In the next section I provide further evidence of an "insider" culture that became apparent as I narrowed my focus and analyzed the survey responses of current players. I will return to the responses of former players in Chapter 7.

Current Players: *EVE Online* is for Insiders

As I've discussed throughout this dissertation, EVE is a MMOG that requires time/effort to understand the game beyond the narratives of "large space battles" or "assholes in space" that pervade reporting directed towards the non-player. A theme running throughout this investigation is very few answers to this survey question

---

[46] This heavy reliance on "sandbox" to describe EVE is present in commercials or trailers produced by CCP Games to advertise this MMOG. An example of the heavy use of "sandbox" can be seen in "The Butterfly Effect" (CCP Games, 2009) a trailer that uses chaos theory to explain how the actions of a single EVE player can have far reaching consequences in a single shard gameworld.

provide a description that would actually offer a foothold for a player who had not previously encountered this game and its surrounding community. I begin with a discussion of EVE-specific jargon. This is important because many responses from current players may seem meaningless to someone unfamiliar with this particular MMOG, but actually contain references to very specific elements of EVE. As another example of responses speaking to an "insider" audience, I also discuss the use of memes and catchphrases in survey responses.

Recall that in Chapter 3 I argued that the design and structure of CCP's websites seemed to articulate an imagined user that was already familiar with the game – a similar theme emerges from the responses to my query for current players about how they would describe EVE to someone who has never played it before. Just as the official website provided very little in terms of a foothold for a visitor who had never heard of EVE before (e.g. no "EVE 101" or "Frequently Asked Questions" like the FAQ featured prominently on the official *World of Warcraft* website), many of the responses from current players do not make an effort to make EVE any less opaque for those not already familiar with this MMOG and its surrounding community. Above I described that some of the responses to this question consisted of a single word, likely unhelpful to explain to non-players what this game is about. In this section I emphasize the frequency of current players relying on specialist/insider knowledge, even when explicitly asked to describe it to someone who not previously familiar with this game.

Emphasizing Jargon

Responses provided by current players seem to be undergirded with an assumption that an imagined recipient of this information may not have *played* EVE before, but they have *heard* of it. Similar to the official CCP websites and much of the coverage in the enthusiast press, I take this as evidence of an imagined audience that is already familiar with EVE. This imagined audience also explains why so many responses of current players draw heavily on memes, jargon, and/or catch phrases that are extremely popular and frequently used by players. Consider how meaningless the following descriptions might seem to someone without any prior introduction to this game:

> Spreadsheets in space that let you scam (id 230, current player, F-S-W)
>
> Spreadsheets online. Death has consequence, don't die. Day traders, rejoice. (id 504, current player, M-S-ME)
>
> Space ships, lasers, pew pew, 'splosions. (id 658, current player, M-S-W)
>
> It's not about making a sandcastle, it's about destroying another's. (id 247, current player, M-S-W)
>
> Spaceship sandbox about building metaphorical castles while knocking other people's castles over and throwing sand in their face. (id 812, current player, M-S-W)

Here I stress that these are not excerpts, this is the full response provided by five different current players about how they would describe EVE to someone who has never played it before.

These are just five examples of answers that relied heavily on jargon that on the surface seem like short, pithy responses. Despite this surface reading of perhaps not taking the question seriously, these responses actually contain a large amount of

information about the game. Id 230's response, "spreadsheets in space" refers to the

nickname given to EVE ("Excel Online") due to its math and calculation heavy

gameplay. Id 230 also makes reference to the lawlessness of EVE, specifically that CCP

will not intervene when players cheat or scam each other – the laissez-faire approach to

moderation discussed in Chapter 3. Id 504 also makes reference to the math involved in

playing EVE, but this time instead of making reference to the hands off nature of the

developer, the respondent draws attention to the fact that EVE features "permanent

death" (described in Chapter 3). The most jargon-heavy example response is id 658, but

in their response this participant makes reference to the space-themed nature of the

game, combat ("lasers, pew pew"; lasers are a type of weapon in the game and pew pew

is slang supposed to represent the sound lasers make when they are fired) and the

permanence of death ("'splosions"; exploding ships).

The final two examples, id 247 and id 812, can be read as a nicer way to describe

griefing, that is, creating one's own fun at the expense of another player's experience

and/or ability to play the game (Bartle, 1996). It is also an indirect reference to the

philosophy of Goonswarm and similarly aligned groups that play EVE as a non-

consensual PVP game. Goonswarm is a group of players from the Something Awful

forums who gained notoriety for creating a new way to battle against rival players in

EVE.[47] At a panel at the 2009 Fanfest where leaders of powerful Alliances were given the

---

[47] Rather than relying on more traditional means of advancement in EVE that are directly tied to the amount of time spent playing the game (i.e. training specific high level skills that allow you to fly a powerful ship), Goonswarm's main tactic involves flooding the battle with as many low-level ships as possible. By "swarming" their enemies Goonswarm's success is not dependent on recruiting long-term players capable of flying powerful ships. Instead, their strength comes from a steady recruitment of new players from the Something Awful forums. For more information about this tactic see Bergstrom et al. (2013).

opportunity to make a presentation about their group, Darius Johnson (former CEO of Goonswarm) was asked a question from the audience about whether the Goons were attempting to break EVE. Johnson's answer explained that "breaking" EVE would be counterproductive as it would take away a game that he and his fellow Goons enjoy playing. Instead:

> At the end of the day the idea that people have is that we are out to destroy *the* game but I think that quote is taken out of context. At the end of the day our goal is to destroy *your* game. (*FanFest 2009: GoonSwarm - part 3*, 2009)

Viewing the responses of id 247 and id 812 in conjunction with Johnson's description of the Goon philosophy, these survey participants are describing the underlying goal of this game being to destroy another player's creation in the sandbox that is EVE. The emphasis on destruction (and the destruction of other players' in-game property) is something I have explored in a co-authored paper with Taylor et al. (2015). I make a similar argument in my contribution to the forthcoming *Internet Spaceships are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader* where I discuss the homogenization of EVE-play and the assumption that PVP is the "only" and/or "correct" way to play (Bergstrom, forthcoming). This also links back to my discussion in Chapter 3, and such anecdotes likely help to perpetuate the PVP-focused and/or "EVE players doing horrible things to each other" story arcs that play out in enthusiast press coverage about this game. I also note the pervasiveness of this sort of play style is the subject of Marcus Carter's (2015) dissertation, where he studied scamming and antisocial behaviour in EVE, or what he calls "treacherous play".

Internet Spaceships are Serious Business (and other memes)

The use of jargon continues throughout current player responses, sometimes taking the form of memes. Richard Dawkins (1976) originally used the term "meme" to describe the way an idea or piece of information can travel through society while mutating, changing, and shifting – much like a gene. This attempt to apply evolutionary theory to the shifting and ever changing aspects of a culture has since been taken up by scholars interested in the study of digital culture. "Internet memes" can take the form of images, videos, short pieces of text, or a website that are shared via computer-mediated communication, and like Dawkins' memes, begin to modify as they are shared (Shifman, 2013). Previous research on Internet memes has shown that they have become a key part of online political dialogue and discussions (Milner, 2012) and are a way to demonstrate one's cultural literacy and reaffirm one's belongingness to a particular online community (Phillips, 2012). In this section I discuss two EVE-specific memes: references to "Excel Online" and "Internet Spaceships" being "serious business". Unlike Shifman's finding that memes start to change as they are shared, in this case these two specific phrases have very little variation within the responses collected in this dissertation research, but they seem to be mobilized in a way that support Phillips' argument that their invocation by current players reaffirms belongingness to EVE's community.

Above I made reference to the EVE-related meme of "Excel Online" appearing in the responses of a current player describing EVE. This was not an isolated incident, 55 responses (8.5%) made specific reference to Spreadsheets and/or Excel Online. Other examples include:

Excel, in space, that makes your heart thump. (id 556, current player, M-S-W)

Awesome multiplayer sandbox space strategy trade action excel sheets. (id 1330, current player, M-S-W)

Spreadsheets with pretty pictures. (id 1377, current player, M-S-W)

EVE Online is all about space, spreadsheets and shooting things. (id 1355, current player, M-S-W)

Here I note that current players who invoked spreadsheets and/or Excel included in their descriptions elements that seem positive, e.g. that EVE is an action-filled game ("...makes your heart thump") or that the game is attractive ("pretty" or "attractive" appeared multiple times in this dataset). Id 1330 starts their description with "awesome", but as with the descriptions in the previous section, risks being read by someone not familiar with EVE as being a bunch of seemingly random words strung together. The final example, id 1355, does not necessarily have a value-judgement in their response, but their answer contains three major elements of EVE (that it is set in space, involves math/calculations, and has a PVP component).

In contrast, when former players invoke spreadsheets and/or Excel (N=13 or 9.7%), the sentiment is not necessarily as positive as the current players above. Consider for example this lengthy response from a former player:

Hardest, cruellest game you will ever play. And get those Excel spreadsheet skills sharpened; you'll need them, regardless of whatever you're doing.

Be prepared to make this game a second job or second life. You will devote crazy amounts of hours to your personal enterprises, corporation, and/or alliance. And you will most times do it willingly.

Community can be nice at times, but prepare to meet mostly dicks in space. Everyone wants to show off their "e-peen." All. The. Time.

Oh, and one account isn't enough. Anyone who's seriously about EVE will have at least two. (id 35, former player, M-B-A)

While not necessarily condemning the game or its players, I read this quote as having a more critical edge than the examples from current players provided above ("...cruellest game you will ever play"; "...prepare to meet mostly dicks in space"). In all of the examples presented thus far, spreadsheets and/or Excel are mentioned with little to no discussion about what you might be expected to do with Excel as a supplement to EVE play; id 35 comes the closest to providing an answer. In most other cases in this dataset, spreadsheets and Excel were used in isolation, without making explicit reference to *why* a player might need them. In my coding, I made note of responses that specifically described EVE as being a math-heavy and/or calculation-heavy game, but this was only mentioned in two responses. Once again, I stress that the more frequently used terms are loaded with meaning for someone with some degree of familiarity with EVE, but exactly what spreadsheets or Excel means in this context would likely be lost to outsiders.

Spreadsheets are not necessarily something unique to EVE play, for example Excel is just one tool described in T.L. Taylor's (2003b) exploration of *EverQuest* "power gamers", that is, players who are involved in a highly regimented playstyle reliant on software beyond the game client. These particular *EverQuest* players viewed their in-game activities in a very particular way, where optimizing their performance, e.g. perfecting their play down to each individual keystroke is the ultimate goal. Taylor notes that what this small group of players considers "fun" is not necessarily in line with the larger *EverQuest* community who sees play reliant on external software as cheating and/or not within the true spirit of the game (p. 301). However, unlike Taylor's

informants who were a small segment of the larger *EverQuest* community, the use of spreadsheets and math-heavy gameplay appears to be far more ubiquitous in EVE.

The clearest evidence that current players assume their audience has had a prior introduction to EVE is provided by the extensive use of the phrase "internet spaceships". This phrase appears 61 times in the responses of current players (9.4% of responses), but was only used by one former player. Internet spaceships is loaded with (sub)cultural value for someone who has prior exposure to the game, and yet the meaning of this phrase (or even that this is an EVE-specific meme) may be lost on a non-player. To someone invested in this community, "internet spaceships" is a ubiquitous phrase, part of the reason why my co-editors and I selected it for our edited volume about EVE ("*Internet Spaceships are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*"). Other recent uses of variations of the phrase include the documentary about EVE players and their relationship with the MMOG's developers, "A Tale of Internet Spaceships" (2014). This phrase has also become part of the company philosophy of CCP, for example being used in the keynote address by CCP CEO Hilmar Pétursson after announcing the cancellation of the developer's other MMOG, *World of Darkness:* "If Internet spaceships were ever serious business at CCP, that is now the case, and will continue to be so" as quoted in Kuchera (2014, para. 11).[48] The phrase is instantly recognizable to most players who have spent some time in and around this community, but would likely be lost on someone who had never encountered the game before. It is telling that so many participants decided to include it in their response to a query asking them to describe

---

[48] *World of Darkness* was cancelled after I completed data collection and began writing. I will return to the game and what its cancellation means in the conclusion of this chapter.

EVE to someone who had not previously played the game: this imagined reader may not have played EVE, but they know enough about the game that they are assumed to be aware of the importance this phrase holds for the community.

In some instances in this survey data "internet spaceships" is also coupled with another particularly notorious feature of this MMOG, that learning to play EVE is means that new players are faced with a difficult learning curve. For example:

> INTERNET. SPACESHIPS.
>
> Probably the hardest, most unforgiving game you'll ever play. The learning curve is like teaching a five-year-old nuclear physics. (id 228, current player, M-S-W)

Comments such as id 228 use hyperbole, but also seem to have an underlying element of self-congratulation for surviving the process of learning how to play EVE. Others presented learning to play EVE as some sort of higher calling or noble cause, and that by successfully defeating the learning curve, one would somehow better understand human relationships:

> I wouldn't recommend this game unless you are willing to learn and seriously commit yourself with time, money and mental state. It is a game that calls for you to be open-minded, and how to treat the world. I say that because the world is you, the players. And you have to consider everything, and I mean everything, that a human can and will do to another human. (id 147, current player, M-S-A)

Just like in id 228's response above, id 147's response has reference to the extreme amount of commitment required to learn this game and has an undertone of exceptionalism, that EVE players are somehow different than players of other MMOGs. Below I highlight further examples where EVE is presented as not intended for and/or not of interest to most "other" people:

EVE is a game of meticulous craftsmanship and is **not enjoyed by the common person** because most of EVE is very cut and dry. This game gets it value from its "meta-gaming" aspects where more than the game is considered. i.e. sifting email and account of traitors, diplomatic relations, and how to lead people into staying with you and doing things a certain way. (id 404, current player, M-B-W)

EVE is an MMO set in space. It has a very steep learning curve, and it is **not meant for most gamers** in the sense that it has a very different play style than typical video games. (id 526, current player, M-S-W)

Complex, brutal, extremely rewarding, but **not for everyone**. (id 612, current player, M-S-W)

A massive online game where you can potentially interact with anyone else currently playing. **Definitely not for everyone** though, because it takes a lot of work to get to a point where you actually understand what's going on. Ability to multitask is almost a necessity. (id 958, current player, M-S-EDNR)

In my interactions with EVE players to date, it is well understood that it is not a game that is universally accessible. For some current players, EVE's difficulty (and by extension, mastering the learning curve) is touted as a point of pride. I have also been told in my prior conversations with players that EVE is the game that you "graduate" to when you become so skilled at other games (e.g. *World of Warcraft*) that they no longer provide any challenge. These sorts of conversations add to the sense of exclusivity and accomplishment of being a long-term EVE player.

EVE Online is not for everyone

The idea that EVE is unattractive to all but a select few ties back to a larger theme running through many of the current player responses, that EVE is only attractive to a certain personality type. In previous work I have critiqued the idea of EVE hailing only a very particular type of player (Bergstrom, Carter, Woodford, et al., 2013). Instead, my

co-authors and I argued that the "ideal" EVE player is constructed through the intersections of specific developer practices (e.g. the inclusion of an incomplete tutorial), a community that rewards certain behaviours over others (e.g. the Goon philosophy discussed earlier in this chapter), and the type of events that dominate discussions about this game written with the non-player in mind (e.g. the examples provided in Chapter 3 about large space battles). The responses to this dissertation survey, the largest survey of EVE players to date, provides further evidence of just how much that sense of exceptionalism permeates this community.

The pervasiveness of exceptionalism in current player responses begins to provide an explanation for the skewed demographics discussed in the previous chapter – if EVE players assume this game is only of interest to a certain personality type, it follows that players might assume EVE is only be attractive to particular demographics: the white male who is assumed to be playing "hardcore" games such as EVE. Chapter 2 provided a summary of the critical feminist game studies literature that critiques the assumption that the audiences most interested in playing games are straight, male, and white. In an article by Joseph Leray (2013) about the lack of female players in EVE, CCP employees explain it was their belief that EVE is not attractive to women because of assumed play preferences and/or a dislike of science fiction. CCP's statements, combined with the sense of exceptionalism that runs through so many of the current player responses describing EVE as "not for everyone", opens up further questions about who current players imagine as the ideal potential recruit to this game. In future interviews with EVE players I intend to probe their recruitment efforts – who in their personal networks do they encourage to play (or even talk to about) EVE? Based on my

findings from this survey and existing research about homophily in online spaces where people with similar interests and/or demographics clump together (boyd, 2012; Yardi & boyd, 2010), my hypothesis is that if they are straight, white, and/or male, they likely focus on recruiting players who look the same as them, helping to perpetuate the homogeneity of this MMOG community.

Because EVE is so often murky to outsiders, I've tried to come up with a non-game comparison to describe EVE. Based on the survey responses I've discussed thus far, it would seem like being welcomed into the EVE community is much like joining a fraternity. The entrance procedures are often cloaked in obscurity: the methods by who does/does not get welcomed into the inner fold are based on traditions that are not necessarily publically understood, often involves a lot of tests of one's commitment (fraternity hazing vs. the EVE learning cliff), and those who become members are tasked with maintaining the exclusivity ("EVE is not for everyone"). However I note that fraternities – and EVE –remain an exclusive club only for as long as membership is restricted. Furthermore, the rewards for pushing through hazing rituals must be viewed from the outside as being worth the effort to do so. To better understand if this veneer of "exclusivity" is interpreted as such by outsiders, I now present the reasons provided by non-players as to why they do not play and have never tried to play EVE.

Non-Player Perceptions of EVE Online

After indicating they were familiar with EVE but have never played it, non-players were asked the following question: "What do you know about EVE?" Similar to the response rate of current and former players, only 6 of 145 non-players left this question blank. Using the schema created for the responses to current and former

players, I coded the descriptions of EVE by non-players to see where these descriptions do/do not overlap. Overall, most non-players were aware that EVE is a game and/or called it a MMOG. Like the current and former players, "space" was a frequent descriptor, appearing in 83 (57.2%) of the non-player responses. Sci-fi or science fiction was used in 11 responses (7.6%), and sandbox appeared 9 times (6.2%).

Non-player responses were typically short; the following are exemplary of the responses to this question by this group:

> Economic based sci-fi MMO with PVP and dominated by large guilds.
> (id 1336, non-player, NB-B-W)

> I know that EVE is a MMO about space (id 1784, non-player, M-S-HL)

> It's a space simulation type of MMOG (id 1565, non-player, M-S-W)

The majority of responses from non-players were very brief, falling in line with the three examples above. There is a marked difference in the tone of non-player responses when compared to the more jargon-heavy descriptions provided by current players. Whereas current players seemed in many cases to be addressing their answers to an imagined reader "in the know" about EVE and its associated memes, non-players wrote in a much more formal tone.

In contrast to the heavy use of memes by current players, no non-players provided a description that made reference to "internet spaceships" and/or "serious business". The only meme to appear was Excel and/or spreadsheets, appearing in five of 139 answers provided to this question. Four of the five answers make reference to Excel or spreadsheets, but do not provide much in the way of context for why they chose to describe EVE in this manner:

> It is a sucky MMO. Spreadsheet based if you want to do anything significant. (id 1492, non-player, F-S-A)

> Excel the MMORPG. (id 1706, non-player, M-S-W)

> Heard of it described as something to the effect of 'spreadsheets with graphics', seems to have an older player-base and is particularly male-dominated (and I think more hostile to women?) (id 2034, non-player, F-SDNR-ME)

> That it's a massive, complex game. Some call it Spreadsheet the Game because of how many options there are and how the UI is laid out. I know that one can earn real-life money from the game as well. (id 1712, non-player, M-S-W)

Much like the invocation in the responses of current players, the responses of id 1492, id 1706, and id 2034 do not elaborate on the purpose of spreadsheets or Excel in conjunction with EVE play, but id 1492's use of "sucky MMO" appears more disdainful in tone when contrasted with how "spreadsheet" was used by current players. In comparison to these first two examples of non-players describing EVE, id 1712 makes reference to the user interface's ("UI") layout as a possible reason why it is called "Spreadsheet the Game". I have not actually encountered "Spreadsheets the Game" as a specific phrasing in any of my prior investigations of EVE, but the rest of id 1712's summary is accurate: EVE is indeed massive and complex, and players can use real world currency to pay for game time (PLEX or "pilot license extensions").

The fifth answer mentioning spreadsheets was actually one of the more detailed descriptions of EVE among all the non-player responses, and far more descriptive than many of the responses provided by current players:

> It is a sandbox style space MMO that gives mostly full control to the players. It uses one large server and players form into corporations, each with their own goals and purposes. It is known for having a very high learning curve and has been described as "spreadsheets in space." The developers, CCP, also started a user elected council that they fly to

Iceland to have a sort of summit on improving the game. (id 2010, non-player, NB-Q-W).

When viewed in comparison to the other responses, id 2010's is an outlier; this description contains a similar level of detail on par with some of the of responses by players who have actually played EVE. Furthermore, id 2010 is an outlier in terms of the demographics present among survey respondents as they identified as both non-binary and queer. They use the proper term for in-game groups ("corporations" rather than the more commonly used "guilds" in fantasy-themed MMOGs), and are aware of the CSM and that this player-elected council goes to CCP's Iceland offices to discuss the game with the developers. Upon further investigation of their responses to other survey questions, id 2010 provided the following reasons for why they do not play EVE:

> Very high learning curve and monthly cost. It also seems like more of a time sink than I am willing to put in. I enjoy occasionally reading about things that go in on EVE, but it is not a genre I am interested enough in to spend the required time to learn it. (id 2010, non-player, NB-Q-W)

Here I note that id 2010 invokes "lack of interest" as a reason for not playing (one barrier/constraint to leisure participation described in Chapter 2). When this specific barrier is viewed in conjunction with the rest of the response, it would seem that this particular respondent does not see enough reward to be gained by actually playing EVE, and instead will limit their participation in this community to occasionally reading about it. I will return to a discussion about barriers/constrains in a subsequent section of this chapter, but first I draw attention to a subset of answers at the other end of the spectrum where participants actually know very little about EVE.

<u>Un/familiar with *EVE Online*</u>

Before I move on to discussing reasons provided by non-players for their lack of

engagement in EVE, I draw attention to a subset of respondents who indicated they

were familiar with EVE, but in their survey responses described a different game. As my

goal was to have participants share what they knew about EVE, I avoided having

descriptions of the game in my recruitment or in the survey. This was done to prevent

any accidental priming or leading the participants towards a particular type of answer.

Likely due to this lack of clarifying information about this MMOG, some participants

described a game that was actually *not* EVE. For example:

> I think the game has something to do with a medieval setting and
> castles. The ads suggest maybe there are female characters or there's an
> online dating component to the game, but I'm not sure. (id 80, non-
> player, F-S-W)

> It was one of the largest MMOs until it split its player base by coming
> out with a second version, allowing WoW to come along and thrive. (id
> 1747, non-player, F-S-W).

With the reference to a medieval setting, a female character in the ad, I suspect id 80

had confused *EVE Online* with *Evony Online*, a browser-based fantasy game advertised

frequently on Facebook. The advertisement in Figure 11 stating "save your lover now!"

might have also led the participant to believe there is an online dating component. Id

1747 is likely describing *EverQuest I* and *EverQuest II*, the fantasy-themed MMOGs that

dominated the market until *World of Warcraft* was released. Both games (*Evony Online*

and *EverQuest I/II*) have similar names to *EVE Online* and perhaps that is the reason

for this confusion. Throughout my discussion of the responses of current players, I have

illustrated that the EVE discursive community is exclusionary; I draw attention to these

two cases as they serve as extreme examples of just how far EVE is from the everyday

realm of experience for those outside the assumed target demographic of this MMOG, as both of these respondents self-identified as female.

Figure 11: Sample advertisement for *Evony Online*, a fantasy-themed browser game.

Most of the responses to this question described a game that resembled EVE and indicates at least a passing familiarity with it. To learn more about non-players perceptions of EVE, I now turn my attention to those who indicated that they have decided *not* to play this particular MMOG. Above I described the lack of details provided by most non-players in response to the question: "What do you know about EVE?" Two additional optional questions followed: "To the best of your knowledge, what are the primary goals of this game?" and "Why do you *not* play EVE?" The response rate was similar to the rest of the questions explored in this chapter, 8 non-players declined to answer the question about EVE's goals, and 6 did not provide a reason for why they do not play. In the previous section I explained that most non-player responses to the question "What do you know about EVE?" were quite short. While responses to the question inquiring about the goals of EVE were equally short, they still provide insight into how this group perceives EVE as a game, but equally important, EVE as an online

community. Following my discussion of EVE's goals as perceived by non-players, I provide an analysis of their reasons for not playing.

Non-player perceptions about goals in *EVE Online*

I asked about goals in EVE as a way to prompt a discussion about what non-players perceived to be prominent in-game activities in this MMOG. Descriptions of EVE's goals were fairly short. As mentioned above, eight respondents left this question blank. A further 11 respondents wrote-in answers containing variations of "I don't know". Of the participants that did answer, some contained variations on the theme of resource and/or wealth acquisition including answers such as:

> Acquire money (IDK [I don't know] what their currency is called). Take down other corporations. (id 15, non-player, F-S-W)
>
> Acquire wealth & power. (id 101, non-player, M-S-W)
>
> To accumulate wealth, power and influence in the game's universe. (id 105, non-player, M-S-W)
>
> Get money fuck planets. (id 1706, non-player, M-S-W)

These four non-player responses are exemplary of the answers making reference to resource/wealth acquisition. I note that they do not (nor do other responses not quoted) mention specifics about how resources or wealth can be obtained in EVE. I read these vague responses as an indication of only a cursory knowledge about EVE, and given my discussions of CCP's web presence and the gaming press thus far, not surprising. What is interesting is that non-players seemed to be much more aware – at least in passing – of the economic aspects of EVE-gameplay, than what would be understood if one was basing their understanding of EVE on the responses of the current players discussed

earlier in this chapter. While not heavily represented in the enthusiast press articles I

discussed in Chapter 3, I do note that EVE's economy is prominently featured in other

easily accessible summaries of EVE not discussed in this dissertation. For example, six

paragraphs of the *EVE Online* Wikipedia entry are specifically devoted to its economy

and markets, and a discussion of the game's economy is threaded throughout the rest of

the entry.

The other frequently occurring topic among non-player descriptions of EVE's

goals made either specific or indirect reference to the combat elements of gameplay:

> Be the best at spaceships, kill other spaceships. (id 1899, non-player,
> M-S-W)

> Win big space battles. (id 1723, non-player, M-S-W)

> Amass wealth, win battles against other players. (id 24, non-player, F-
> S-A)

> To make in-game money and to dominate over other players by
> attacking them and taking what they have. (id 2028, non-player, F-B-
> AA)

Id 1899 and id 1723 are examples of responses that make a more general reference to

combat, but do not specify if this is against other players or perhaps against Non-Player

Characters (NPCs). I also note that while id 1899 references "spaceships", this response

does not make reference to "internet" and therefore I did not code it as a reference to the

meme discussed earlier in this chapter. I do note that these two responses are far more

colloquial than the other two examples. The responses of id 24 and id 2028 were both

written in less colloquial phrasing, were written by female respondents, and mention

"other players" as opponents. In addition to those who mention the goal of EVE has

something to do with PVP elements, some respondents made oblique references to the

Goonswarm philosophy mentioned earlier in this chapter:

> Get cash and make people mad. (id 18, non-player, NB-B-W)

> Either: make money or troll people. (id 17, non-player, M-Q-W)

> Get rich, screw over other players if you have to. (id 1631, non-player,
> M-S-ME)

The responses above and others similar but not quoted here do not make direct

reference to destroying sandcastles (as described by current players), or the Goonswarm

philosophy of destroying the game of non-Goons (also described above). They do,

however, make reference to the griefing style of gameplay ("make people mad", "screw

over other players") that is frequently thought to be typical of EVE play, especially in the

"assholes in space" coverage by the enthusiast press discussed in Chapter 3.

The descriptions of non-players' understandings of the primary goals of EVE,

when viewed in conjunction with their descriptions from the previous section, in most

cases the statements about EVE are brief yet not incorrect. When considered in

conjunction with the other findings of this dissertation, it adds further weight to my

argument that EVE is opaque to those who are not actively involved (or have previously

been active) in the community and the EVE "community" is read as exclusive (and/or

exclusionary) even by non-players. This, however, does not necessarily account for the

veneer of exclusivity and having to weigh perceived effort of learning to play verses

perceived gains of joining this MMOG community that I mentioned in my synthesis of

the current player responses. For this, I turn to the final question asked of non-players:

"Why do you *not* play EVE?"

The description of EVE and its goals indicate that non-players are for the most part aware of it, but their degree of knowledge about its specifics varies. In this section I turn my attention to the reasons given for why respondents indicated they do not play EVE, which are as equally varied as their knowledge about the game. For some, time commitment and/or the expense of a monthly subscription were a structural barrier to play:

> Very large barrier of entry and it is not free to play. I would maybe try the game if it were free to play. (id 1537, non-player, M-S-W)

> Because I don't like subscription-based payment model. In other words - it's too expensive for me. (id 1558, non-player, M-S-W)

Others that describe the subscription as a barrier also made reference to currently paying for other games (e.g. *World of Warcraft*), saying it was financially unfeasible to maintain two subscription costs simultaneously. In addition to subscription costs, respondents also indicated they were generally unable to afford paying for a luxury item such as a MMOG subscription, or that they don't currently own a laptop or desktop computer powerful enough to run the game. These were the sorts of constraints that tended to be described by non-players who self-identified as male.

Financial and material barriers (e.g. a computer that can't run EVE) are the sorts of barriers that when pointed out, are easy to recognize and acknowledge. Less tangible are the barriers created by the EVE community (either real or perceived) that to the respondent has indicated that EVE is not a game they should attempt to play. Given some of the descriptions I have provided throughout this chapter, such responses are not necessarily surprising:

> Cost in real world money not just in game but also computer, Internet bill so on. Too much of an investment in time. Do not want to deal with rude, bullish, or douchebag-like players. Would rather play single player game offline. (id 2064, non-player, M-SDNR-W)

> Because everything I know about the player base suggests I should avoid them at all costs. (id 17, non-player, M-Q-W)

> I've heard it's pretty cutthroat, not kind to newbies, and generally a poor fit for casual players. I have far too little available playtime to deal with any of that. (id 107, non-player, F-S-W)

> Turned off by stories of in-game ruthlessness and cruelty. Back-stabbing and double-dealing to acquire power is not my thing. Very turned off by the publicized bullying and suicide taunting of another player by a prominent senior player in a major guild. (id 1336, non-player, NB-B-W)

Throughout these responses is an assessment of the EVE community being unwelcoming, or as id 2064 puts it, "douchebag-like players". This assessment is likely in part due to the way EVE has been reported on, where some journalists put an emphasis on the antisocial pockets of this MMOG community. The most specific example of this comes from id 1336. While not named in their answer, id 1336 is likely referencing events from Fanfest 2012 Alliance leaders panel where The Mitanni, CEO of Goonswarm and at the time chair of the CSM,[49] was publically intoxicated, mocked another EVE player and after referring to him by name, suggested that other players harass and encourage the other player to commit suicide. The Mitanni was banned from EVE for 30 days, and also forced to resign from his post on the CSM. This event and the subsequent punishment by CCP was widely covered by a variety of gaming enthusiast sites (Lefebvre, 2012; Meer, 2012; Yin-Poole, 2012) and would have no doubt been a prominent example of the "EVE players doing terrible things to each other" genre of

---

[49] As I discussed in Chapter 3, the Council of Stellar Management (CSM) is the committee of active players that serve as a liaison between CCP and the larger EVE community.

story had I extended my data collection as far back as 2012. I note this event was the sensational anecdote that began the de Zwart and Humphreys (2014) paper mentioned in the academic literature review section of Chapter 3. In contrast with the financial constraints described by non-players who otherwise fit the typical profile of an EVE player (straight white male), these assessments of the community were provided by respondents who either chose not to disclose their demographic information (id 2064), or did not identify as straight and/or white and/or male (id 17, id 107, id 1336). Recalling the literature I discussed in Chapter 2, this points towards specific barriers/constraints not being experienced equally across demographics. It is those respondents who do not exemplify the demographics of the typical EVE player who make mention of the behaviour of current players being a constraint, perhaps because they are having difficulty imagining a space for themselves in this community. On the other hand, straight white male respondents do not see to have a problem imagining themselves as part of this community, instead it is their personal financial situation that is the primary barrier they report that is preventing them from participating.

Finally, I highlight that some non-players actually knew quite a bit about EVE, and this knowledge of the game and its community guided their decision to not play. Earlier in this chapter I discussed how a frequent response from current players is to describe EVE as a "sandbox" (appearing in 269 of 647 answers). "Sandbox" appears 9 of the 145 responses of non-players and when it is mentioned, it is alongside a detailed description of what they know about EVE:

> It's a sandbox game set in space where you build a fleet of ships and can fight other players alone or in a 'guild'. Some large groups dominate large parts of the in-game world and battles can last months or longer due to the complexity of the mechanics. (id 1823, non-player, M-S-W)

> A lot: I've read a lot on why it's a successful sandbox, single-shard universe both in terms of game design and financial success and enjoyment of it's player base. As well as the online culture of its community and the paradox between slow/boring gameplay and sudden "world changing events" that make news items from time to time. (id 1554, non-player, M-SDNR-W)

In both of these examples, the term sandbox is used, and like current players there is no further explanation of what that means. In the case of id 1823, the respondent has indicated they are familiar with the PVP elements of gameplay, making reference to the long, drawn out space battles. Id 1554 indicates they have read a lot about EVE so they are aware that the game is played on a single shard server, but much like the responses of current players discussed earlier in this chapter, do not elaborate on what "sandbox" is. Here I would argue that non-players who use the term sandbox to describe EVE are familiar with the way the game is positioned by CCP and by the enthusiast press, but fall into the same 'trap' as current players by using a term that is more about marketing than the actual reality of EVE gameplay. It would seem that "sandbox" is a buzzword that circulates freely in discussions about this game, operating the same way as other memes discussed throughout this chapter (internet spaceships, Excel Online) carrying with it an assumption that the reader is familiar enough with EVE and/or sandbox style games to readily understand what is meant by this term.

By referencing "sandbox" and making reference to specific events such as the CSM controversy, the responses of some non-players seems to indicate they are quite familiar with EVE and its surrounding community. Probing further, I find evidence that knowing too much about EVE can lead to a decision not to play it, especially for respondents who do not identify as straight, white, or male. The best example of this

comes from a participant who provided a lengthy response detailing what they know

about the game:

> (I'm afraid I will not mention everything I know about EVE as that
> would be exhausting)
>
> My top of mind:
> It's a strategic multiplayer online game, built on the premises of a
> "sandbox" where the players "choose" what happens, not a route from A
> to B. Different gangs play and coordinate against each other to gain
> power, space and reputation. A game where strategic cooperation,
> politics and trust can make or break players' success. One of the most
> interesting parts of EVE is the Economy.
>
> EVE has a reputation of being a men's game, where women are only 4%
> of the player population. EVE has the reputation of being a community
> hostile towards female players. (id 177, non-player, F-SDNR-W)

In this response, the participant has articulated that EVE is a sandbox, but in contrast to

the two previous examples, goes on to define a sandbox as that "the players 'choose'

what happens, not a route from A to B". A route from A to B indicates a set path, or

more specifically in game terms, gameplay on rails. They also demonstrate their

knowledge of how players can battle over territory, and that the economy plays a

prominent role in this game – all accurate descriptions of the game and its mechanics.

Perhaps even more surprising is that this respondent makes reference to estimated 4%

of EVE players being women, which does not appear in any other survey responses

including those of current and former players. In the follow-up question "Why do you

not play EVE?" id 177's response was as follows:

> The frighteningly steep learning curve and the likely scenario of being
> excluded from the beginning simply because I'm not the best or a
> woman.
>
> Mostly, I'm afraid that it will be difficult to become a true part of the
> EVE community. (id 177, non-player, F-SDNR-W)

As helpful as leisure studies and its models of barriers/constraints summarized in Chapter 2 have been for formulating this dissertation study, responses such as id 177 do not so neatly fit into the interpersonal/intrapersonal/structural barrier model provided by Crawford and Godbey (1987). And yet, id 177's response is probably the clearest example of everything that CCP and the EVE community has done to erect a barrier around this MMOG. This respondent is clearly well-versed in EVE, and like id 2010 described on page 154, the respondent who is content to read about EVE but is not inclined to play it, seems to indicate that at least for some potential players the biggest turnoff about EVE is knowing *too much* about it.

In 2012 when I traveled to Iceland and had the opportunity to conduct focus groups at Fanfest, the CCP employee who was my assigned research partner was very interested in the responses we would be collecting from players. When we brainstormed to create a set of questions, they added their own that was on the mind of other employees at CCP: Why does EVE not have as many players as *World of Warcraft*? Growth is something that is on the mind of most MMOG developers, CCP included. As I discuss in the closing section of this chapter, CCP seems to have chosen maintaining homogeneity of its player base over the diversity of players that would required to grow EVE from 500,000 to *World of Warcraft's* peak of 12 million.

Concluding thoughts: Is CCP closing ranks?

> EVE is a game where you can do anything you want, but good luck
> finding out how. Also, spaceships. (id 740, current player, M-S-ME)

Over the course of my doctoral studies, EVE has undergone changes, such as the (limited) introduction of avatars to gameplay in the 2011 *Incarna* expansion and the

addition of micro transactions where players can spend real world cash on cosmetic items for their avatars. *Incarna's* avatars were originally intended as a way to accommodate the interests of "potential new markets" (Senior, 2011, para. 5). When this new feature failed to attract an influx of new players, CCP laid off a large number of staff. In interviews after the layoffs, CEO Hilmar Pétursson made a promise to EVE players their future endeavours would remain more tightly focused on the elements EVE was known for:

> We as a company were trying to achieve many impossible things at the same time. We were fighting on many fronts, and that has now resulted in us not really being able to get through [all] that. We need to focus more. So now CCP becomes much more focused on the more classical aspects of *EVE Online*, and getting *Dust* out there,[50] and working the connection between those two games so that they add value to one another. (Zacny, 2011, para. 4)

Pétursson made similar comments in the keynote address given at the Fanfest I attended to conduct the focus groups described in Chapter 4. I watched Pétursson apologize for the micro-transactions that resulted in widespread player revolts, and his apology was reiterated on a Dev Blog (CCP Hellmar, 2011). In the quote above he makes reference to "classical aspects of EVE", which when considered in conjunction with Paul's (2011) work on the EVE new player experience, as well as the current player quotes discussed throughout this chapter, seem to point towards a sort of closing of ranks that began in 2011 and is still playing out in the way current players choose to describe EVE in this dissertation research collected in 2014.

---

[50] Here Pétursson is referring to *Dust 514*, the console-based First Person Shooter game that integrates with the *EVE Online* universe, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Paul (2011) argues that the difficult learning curve is a purposeful feature implemented by CCP that maintains the homogeneity of the game's player community. Furthermore, he argues that this design has real and concrete impacts on who will remain an EVE player:

> The difficulty encourages player interaction, as new players must interact with older players in order to ascertain how to play the game. Player interaction in the game is designed to create identification among players, developing a tighter knit community where those experienced in EVE are placed in a position to welcome those new to the game. (Paul, 2011, p. 263)

Current players act as gatekeepers of knowledge, and it is only by fostering a relationship with existing players that new players are welcomed into the fold. Returning to Pétursson's promise of CCP refocusing their efforts to pre-*Incarna* EVE, combined with the knowledge that *Incarna* had been intended to introduce different demographics to the EVE playerbase, Pétursson's new direction for the company is a doubling down, rather than a move forward. Therefore, what is demonstrated in these current player responses – especially those stressing that EVE is "not for everyone" – is a maintaining of the old guard and/or valorization of the trial by fire of learning to play EVE. This, combined with the shuttering of CCP's other MMOG *World of Darkness*, are reasons why I believe that this particular online community will likely become even more homogenous in the future. I elaborate on this in the next section.

Cancelling *World of Darkness*

Insights into how CCP views their playerbase can be seen in the history of their other MMOG venture, *World of Darkness*. This title started as a tabletop and card game produced by White Wolf Publishing. CCP purchased White Wolf in 2006 after the

company experienced financial troubles due to an overall softening of the tabletop market. White Wolf became CCP's Atlanta GA office and shortly after the acquisition work began on a *World of Darkness* MMOG. Based on the card game's supernatural fantasy world of vampires and werewolves, *World of Darkness* the MMOG would feature humanoid avatars and be a major departure from EVE's space setting and ships as avatars. From this point on, the lines between *World of Darkness* and EVE blurred (I. G. Williams, 2014, para. 12), but EVE would remain the flagship product in the CCP roster.

World of Darkness was in production for over nine years, reached alpha stage on three separate occasions, and was permanently shuttered in mid 2014. Over these nine years, to outside observers it appeared that the game was progressing (albeit at a extremely slow pace); it was only after CCP publically announced they were abandoning the project that information came to light just how rocky the entire development process had been. As mentioned in the previous section, in the wake of the failed 2011 EVE *Incarna* expansion, CCP laid off a large number of staff. When announcing these layoffs, Pétursson also stated that work on *World of Darkness* would be scaled back to provide resources as the developer pivoted and attempted to rebuild EVE's momentum in the post-*Incarna* slump (Zacny, 2011). This, according to Ian Williams' (2014) history of *World of Darkness,* was only one instance of CCP Iceland "poaching" employees and resources from the *World of Darkness* team to work on EVE-related projects. In Williams' interview with former CCP developer Nick Blood, the ex-employee states:

> There were plenty of developers who would get redirected to create EVE content for three to six month cycles… During these times, *World of Darkness* development was significantly slowed down. I remember the upper management often exasperatedly trying to figure out what to do

with the remaining staff for a six-month period while their artists and programmers were busy elsewhere. (2014, para. 15)

From this quote, it would appear that despite the public perception that development of *World of Darkness* was progressing, it was not a priority for CCP. In his keynote at the 2014 Fanfest, Pétursson states the cancellation of *World of Darkness* should be viewed as a signal that CCP will, from this point on, focus exclusively on the EVE universe: as a MMOG (*EVE Online*), as a First Person Shooter accompaniment on the PlayStation 3 (*Dust 514*) or PC (*Project Legion*), and the spaceship dogfighting game on the Oculus Rift (*EVE Valkyrie*). Pétursson also spoke of the difficulty of trying to develop two different universes at the same time, shutting the door on any possibilities of any other White Wolf properties ever being made into a digital game (Kuchera, 2014). At the time of writing this chapter, CCP has yet to make any public statements about what will happen to the *World of Darkness* intellectual property.

World of Darkness (and is cancellation) is important, because it sheds light on how CCP and its employees view their playerbase that falls outside the demographics of the "typical" EVE player. Returning to Joseph Leray's (2013) article I first discussed in Chapter 3, multiple CCP employees were quoted in this article about the lack of female players in EVE. Thor Gunnarsson, Vice President of Business Development at CCP commented, "I think we have to be realistic about what *EVE Online* is. Science fiction-themed worlds tend to attract men" (para. 6). EVE senior producer Andie Nordgren was quoted as stating, "It's not a goal for us as a development team to specifically increase the number of female players" (para. 14). While EVE's development team may not have the goal of increasing female players, Chris McDonough, *World of Darkness* senior producer had this to say about his game:

176

The genre lends itself towards having a female population. When we were making *Vampire: the Masquerade*, you'd go to conventions and events and there was a significant number of women in that audience. Will there be more women interested in this than in *EVE*? The answer is yes. (para. 10)

Gunnarsson reiterated this belief that *World of Darkness* will likely be of interest to a wider audience than currently found playing EVE:

When White Wolf was really the rock star of the pen-and-paper games industry, what they did was they created a fiction setting that, back in the day, had an almost equal gender balance. That was unheard of in tabletop gaming, and we're certainly hoping to achieve something similar with *World of Darkness* in the future. (para. 9)

I draw attention to these quotes because they are evidence that *World of Darkness,* at least at one point in time, was seen as the answer to CCP's lack of female players that did not come to EVE after *Incarna*'s release. The inclusion of avatars in *Incarna* was intended as being a way to accommodate the interests of "potential new markets" (Senior, 2011, para. 5) which I was told by CCP employees I met at Fanfest was code for expanding the female player base of EVE. However, there was a lack of user feedback sessions, focus groups, or even beta testing;[51] potential female players (or any other potential players) were never actually asked if having avatars would change their mind about playing EVE. In my conversations with current players and those affiliated with CCP, the prevailing assumption was women preferred (or even "needed") an avatar to

---

[51] *World of Warcraft* has been a counterpoint to my discussions about EVE throughout this dissertation, and the use of beta testing is no exception. Before the release of a new expansion or the addition of new content through a mid-expansion patch, Blizzard preemptively rolls out this content on "test servers". Players can make copies of their existing avatars and play with the changes before they are implemented on the live servers. Players can also provide feedback about what does/does not work, or what they do/do not like in the proposed changes and Blizzard is often responsive to player critiques. For example, Blood Elves, the (at the time) new race was first introduced via the Blizzard test servers. Based on beta tester's complaints about the male forms being too feminine, final version of the male avatars featured a much more muscular and stereotypically masculine silhouette. See Corneliussen (2008, p. 73) for further details about this change.

better identify with their in-game character. This harkens back to the stereotypical assumptions about female players being more interested in dressing an avatar up like a doll rather than ever being "really" interested in the actual mechanics of gameplay, which is in turn critiqued by the feminist game scholars I summarized in Chapter 2.

After the release of fully rendered avatars in *Incarna* failed to suddenly increase the influx of new (read: "female") players to EVE, *World of Darkness* was assumed to be the way CCP could attract more women to play their games. Knowing now that *World of Darkness* was poorly supported, I have to wonder how serious CCP ever was about expanding their games to new players. With the abandoning of *World of Darkness*, it remains to be seen where (or even if) increasing the demographic diversity of players figure into CCP's long-term strategic plans. Given Pétursson's refocusing CCP to be an EVE-universe only company and promise to return to the "classical aspects of EVE" which I read as being the core white male demographic of players, I most certainly have my doubts.

Summary

In this chapter I have addressed the third research question I outlined in the Introduction of this dissertation: "How do current, former, and non-players describe EVE?" Drawing on the answers to an open-ended survey question ("How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played it before?") I argue that for current players, the imagined reader of their survey response was already familiar with the game. I highlighted the prevalence of jargon and memes that while carrying meaning to those familiar with this particular game, may not be helpful to someone who has not yet

played EVE. Furthermore, current players emphasized the exceptionality of EVE, presenting this game as something that would be unattractive and/or uninteresting to all but a select few players. Finally, I hypothesized that this emphasis on exceptionality links back to stereotypical assumptions about particular types of interests, namely that only a very specific demographic (i.e. the straight white males as evidenced in Chapter 5) are assumed to be interested in the competitive, space-oriented "spreadsheet" gameworld offered by EVE.

The latter half of this chapter explored EVE as described from the opposite perspective, namely how non-players understood this game. Here I articulated what non-players know about EVE, what they think the goals of the game are, and finally, their reasons for *not* playing. For a small group of respondents, EVE was so far out of their everyday realm of experience that they described a completely different game (e.g. *Evony Online* or *EverQuest I/II*), but for the majority of non-players, EVE was described in an accurate manner, in some cases more descriptive than the explanations of current or past players. While some respondents indicated their primary barrier to actually becoming an EVE player are related to financial and/or technological constraints (e.g. not owning a computer that can run the game), I hypothesized that at least for some respondents, knowing *too much* about EVE was the reason they have thus far declined to download and play the free trial.

I concluded this chapter with a summary of CCP's recent activities, specifically the cancellation of *World of Darkness* and the subsequent restructuring of the company to focus solely on an EVE-specific universe spread across multiple games. CCP has previously expressed interest in growing their subscription numbers to be closer to the

millions of *World of Warcraft* subscribers. However, the company's latest endeavors

seem to indicate that rather than opening the game to the wider audience necessary to

grow subscription numbers, CCP is shifting their focus to retaining the very narrow

demographics of current players. I argued that this is evidence of further entrenching

the idea that EVE is a game that actively discourages most people from playing it,

implying, as the title of Paul's (2011) investigation puts it, "Don't play me".

CHAPTER 7: Quitting *EVE Online* is (Sometimes) Hard to do

In this chapter I investigate of the experiences of former EVE players, as reported in responses to the *MMOG Experiences Survey*. The third research question I outlined in the Introduction was: "How do current, former, and non-players describe EVE?" Chapter 6 addressed the responses of current and non-players; in this chapter I describe the responses of former players. Following this discussion, I turn my attention to my fourth research question, "What reason(s) do former players give to describe discontinuing their participation in this game?"As I began to analyze the responses of former players to provide an answer to this final question, I quickly realized that the category of "former" player was more complicated than my original definition of it comprising of participants who once played EVE but currently do not. I found that participants clustered around three different explanations for discontinuing participation. The first two clusters I had anticipated: former players who have discontinued their EVE play *temporarily* (i.e. indicating they want to be playing EVE but cannot currently do so because of external constraints) and former players who have made a *permanent* departure from this game. What surprised me when conducting this analysis was the number of respondents who seemed unsure if they would return to EVE in the future. The literature I discussed in Chapter 2 about non/participation in leisure activities did not provide a framework to anticipate this tentativeness when describing whether or not a former player plans to return to EVE. However, these responses challenged me to rethink my previously held assumptions about playing (and quitting) EVE, informing my plans for future research to be discussed in the concluding chapter.

How do former players describe EVE Online?

A total of 133 survey respondents indicated that they had played EVE previously, but do not currently have an active account. Former players were asked to describe EVE in an open-ended question that used the same phrasing as the question asked of current players ("How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played it before?"). A total of 130 of 133 former players provided a response to this question. "Space" was used to describe EVE by both former and current players; reference to space appeared in 65 of the 130 responses provided by former players. "Science fiction" and/or "sci-fi" was only used 5 times, and in Chapter 6 I discussed how this was an interesting disconnect from the heavy use of the term science fiction to describe EVE by other sources including CCP, journalists, and some academics.

In some cases, former players provided a non-response to this question:

Not sure... I probably wouldn't. (id 1931, former player, F-Q-W)

I don't have a clear enough memory to reliably describe it. (id 1984, former player, F-B-W)

One does not simply explain *EVE Online*. (id 319, former player, M-S-W)

In these three examples of what I have called a 'non-response', there is a range of answers. Id 1931's response is the closest to a refusal to describe EVE, however this short amount of text does not provide enough context to know *why* they wouldn't describe EVE but could perhaps be because they do not identify as straight or male and were not welcomed into the fraternity. The response of id 1984, another female respondent who does not identify as straight, suggests that EVE did not figure prominently enough into her experiences for to remember anything about it. Finally, the response provided by id 319 can be interpreted as suggesting that EVE is too

complicated to be understood through an explanation alone (i.e. it must be played to be understood). However, like the responses of other straight white males discussed in Chapter 6, this one makes reference to an Internet meme depicted in Figure 12. Specifically, he is citing "One does not simply walk into Mordor" from the 2001 film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*. By invoking this meme, id 319 compares coming up with a description of EVE as being akin to Frodo's quest to return the One Ring to the fires of Mount Doom in Mordor. While not an EVE-specific meme, this suggests that the respondent is well versed in Internet culture, and knows enough about how EVE is frequently depicted to make a joke about the MMOG's steep learning curve and notorious player community.

Figure 12: An example of the "One does not simply" meme. Depicted here is a still from the 2001 film *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* where the actor playing Boromir states, "One does not simply walk into Mordor. Its black gates are guarded by more than just orcs. There is evil there that does not sleep". This particular meme usually takes the form of text being overlaid on this image with the phrase "One does not simply [x]" where x is a dangerous or impossible task.

Similar to the current players discussed in Chapter 6, spreadsheets/Excel Online appear in the responses provided by some former players (N=13 or 9.8%). One response used only the words "Internet spaceships" (id 1573). Equally brief are some of the responses invoking the spreadsheet meme:

> Excel in space. (id 1809, former player, M-S-ME)

> Spreadsheets online. (id 1513, former player, M-S-W)

> A virtual space-themed spreadsheet simulator. (id 6, former player, M-S-W)

> It's like flying a spreadsheet. (id 2037, former player, F-S-W)

In each of these responses, like those I discussed in Chapter 6, very little information is provided about what EVE is (or even that it is a MMOG). Other responses made mention of spreadsheets and provide more details, but are reliant on EVE-specific or MMOG-specific jargon:

> Space-based MMO. Different from "theme park" MMOs such as *World of Warcraft*. Half joke about it being a spreadsheet simulator. (id 1711, former player, M-S-W)

Here id 1711 makes reference to "theme park" MMOGs, which are usually the antithesis to sandbox games. Theme parks are usually understood to be games that put players "on rails", that is, force players into a linear progression. This allows developers to create a rich in-game narrative, but this comes at the expense of allowing players to make (or feel like they have the power to make) their own non-linear choices within the gameworld. While not stated explicitly in id 1711's response, there is an implicit contrast to EVE's supposed sandbox approach to gameplay, which I defined in Chapter 3 as an open world in which players are said to have free reign to choose their own in-game activities based on what they find is most interesting ("Find Your Path in the Sandbox,"

n.d.). Id 1711 makes reference to "…spreadsheet simulator" as being a half-joke, but their phrasing indicates that they at least partly think it is an appropriate way to describe this game to someone who has not played it before. Much like the responses of current players discussed in Chapter 6, id 1711's use of jargon may not have meaning to someone unfamiliar with the conventions with EVE (or MMOGs more generally), but does actually contain an accurate description of this game.

EVE as a sandbox figured prominently in Chapters 3 and 6, and therefore I investigated where and how "sandbox" was mentioned by former players. This term was mentioned in 14 former player responses (10.5%). Some were as brief as the other responses mentioned above, e.g. "Virtual Space Sandbox" (id 1503, former player, F-S-W) or "Space sim in a sandbox with few rules" (id 243, former player, M-S-W). At the other end of the spectrum are responses that provide a description of what a sandbox game entails:

> Space-based MMORPG borderline sandbox as the players cause many of the events that define the game in regards to exploration and space battles. (id 2026, former player, M-S-W)

> A giant sandbox. The game *is* the players' interaction. You are not shown how to have 'fun' or what to do to advance, you have to make your own fun, choose between dozens of ways of advancing your own character. The most involved and interesting MMO I've played, BY FAR. (id 309, former player, M-S-W)

In contrast to the descriptions provided by current players in Chapter 6, the responses of id 2026 and id 309 make mention of player-driven events ("…the players cause many of the events that define the game…"), or the lack of rails provided by CCP ("you are not shown how to have 'fun'…"). Id 2026 does not contain a value judgement about EVE, but id 309 appears to be endorsing the game by describing it as "the most involved and

185

interesting MMO I've played, BY FAR". I will return to non/endorsements by former

players in a subsequent section of this chapter.

In addition to some former players providing an explanation of what they mean

by the term sandbox, other former players made reference to non-PVP elements of EVE

gameplay:

> It's an MMO where you fly around in a spaceship. You can mine, fight,
> play the economy among other things. It's got an awesome character
> creator and an interesting economy. And spreadsheets. (id 1831, former
> player, M-S-W)

> A complex sci-fi space simulation in a persistent online universe with
> thousands of players playing at the same time on the same server.
> Players can take on different roles, from asteroid miners and traders to
> pirates, organize in corporations and take part in a massive economy.
> (id 1476, former player, M-S-W)

> You control a ship, and can make missions, mine, shoot other players.
> There are corps (like groups of players) you can join and you can have
> activities with them. It's a huge world, with different systems and you
> jump (like travelling through a portal) from one to the other. There's no
> character level, you learn skills instead. And based on what skills you
> know, you can fly different ships and have different guns and shields
> and stuffs. (id 1321, former player, F-S-W)

In each of these three examples, a variety of in-game activities are mentioned including

mining, trading, being a pirate, and participating in PVP. The respondents also

demonstrate their knowledge about EVE by describing the single-shard server

("thousands of players playing at the same time on the same server") and the skill

development system. I note that such a diversity of possible in-game activities did not

appear in any current player responses. In Chapter 6 I argued that current players

seemed to be answering this question by imagining a reader who was already familiar

with EVE. In contrast, these three detailed responses seem to be an attempt to answer

the question in a way that does not assume the reader has previously encountered EVE,

countering the theme of exclusivity running through the responses of current players discussed in Chapter 6.

In addition to the exceptionality of EVE and its players, I also noted how current player responses lead me to interpret them in a way that appears to make being an EVE player like a being member in an exclusive fraternity. I speculated that this was a reason why current players provided descriptions that relied on jargon, EVE-specific memes, or highlighted how EVE is not a game for "most other people", as maintaining the veneer of exclusivity is one method of justifying the high barriers to entry. This exceptionality was largely missing from the descriptions of EVE as provided by former players. Building on my thoughts in Chapter 6, I propose that former players were more detailed in their responses because since exiting this particular MMOG community, there is no longer a need to maintain this veneer of exclusivity and/or exceptionalism. By no longer being invested in the EVE community (as their accounts had lapsed), conquering the learning cliff of EVE is now a non-issue. This may indeed be why respondents such as id 1831, id 1476, or id 1321 provided such detailed descriptions in their responses. It is also possible that their preferred EVE activities fell outside the PVP that is most frequently discussed by the enthusiast press (Chapter 3) or current players (Chapter 6) and ultimately found that mining, industry, or other PVE activities were not supported enough to their liking. I will return to this discussion in the second half of this chapter where I explore the reasons participants gave for quitting EVE.

<u>Non/endorsements</u>

Before I move on to my investigations of why players quit EVE, I draw attention to how some former players used their survey response as a space to either warn the reader away from playing it, or to describe EVE as a game worth investigating through play. In the previous section I provided examples of non-answers in respondents' description of EVE. A similar response was provided by id 109 who's description of EVE consisted of, "Don't play it, try other MMOs". The opposite sentiment was expressed by id 1465, "Massive, interesting, should try!" I note that neither id 109 nor id 1465 provided any reasons or rationale about why the imagined readers of this response should/should not play EVE, but their responses to other questions provide slightly more context. In his response to "why are you not currently playing EVE" id 109 provided the following explanation:

> I think the game itself is a fail. It had its days long ago, but not
> anymore. My loyalty to the game is gone, even though I still play a 2d
> mmo game since 1998. So this describes how EVE failed. (id 109,
> former player, M-SDNR-ME)

From this I read id 109's disappointment in EVE, but his answers to other questions do not provide any further explanation about how or why EVE has failed. This also reaffirms that id 109's advice to not play EVE should be taken as a negative endorsement about the game. On the other hand, id 1465 describes their reason for not currently playing as:

> Because it requires a lot of time to get to a decent level and it needs a
> monthly subscription. (id 1465, former player, M-S-W)

In the case of id 1465, it seems likely that they would continue to play if their

circumstances were different (more leisure time and/or more disposable income),

reaffirming that id 1465's recommendation is a positive one.

More overt value judgements appeared in other responses. For example, negative

descriptions of EVE by former players included:

> A boring as fuck space simulator. (id 180, former player, M-S-ME)

> A boring method of proving your supposed superiority to others, thinly
> covering real-life corruption. (id 155, former player, M-S-W)

> I would describe EVE as a game that can seem fun at first, but gradually
> becomes disappointing or outright unpleasant. If you're willing to
> spend a long time training skills and essentially doing grunt work
> (repetitive missions, mining), you will eventually be able to enjoy
> feeling superior to newer players. (id 1487, former player, M-S-W)

In id 180's response there is not very much detail about what EVE is, but "... space

simulator" does provide a small degree of context for the game in that it is space-themed

and sometimes described as a simulation-style game. Both id 155 and id 1487 make

reference to a sense of superiority over other players and suggest that neither

respondent particularly enjoyed their time playing EVE. While not making explicit

reference to the events, id 155 may be alluding to the controversy about a CCP employee

who provided unfair advantages to particular players over others, as I briefly discussed

in my summary of Blodgett's (2009) research in Chapter 3. Throughout this dissertation

I've discussed how both players and Paul (2011) cite the need for newcomers to reach

out and form bonds with existing community members to ensure their success in EVE.

In the responses of id 155 and id 1487 there is an undertone that perhaps these

relationships remain hierarchical.

The three responses discussed in the previous paragraph read as a warning to stay away from EVE. More positive endorsements also appeared among survey responses, such as:

> The best and worst MMORPG ever. Amazingly fun and rewards smart, intelligent play. A great community too, once you're past the front door. (id 1577, former player, M-S-SA)

> An extremely immersive game, capable of delivering a lot of adrenaline, requiring a lot of teamplay, allowing for bonding and trust between players. Very high skillcap, extremely rewarding. (id 1848, former player, M-S-W)

Both id 1577 and id 1848's responses make reference to EVE being rewarding and also make reference to the player community. Given previous research by Paul (2011) that stresses the importance of finding an in-game player community to provide the necessary skills to conquer the learning curve, it would seem from their responses that id 1577 and id 1848 – both straight males – were able to make such bonds, perhaps leading to the positive assessments of EVE. A very different positive endorsement of EVE is contained in the response of id 1841:

> DUDE. SPACE SHIPS. PEW PEW. IT'S HARD BUT FUN. (id 1841, former player, F-S-W)

There is not enough information to assess whether "dude" is intended to invoke an assumed male reader to their response or if it is used to invoke excitement, but "pew pew" is a jargon-laden term that references the PVP of EVE. All three of these positive endorsements make reference to the difficulty of EVE "...once you're past the front door" (id 1577), "very high skillcap..." (id 1848) and "IT'S HARD..." (id 1841). In chapter 5 I provided evidence that some current players emphasized the exclusivity of playing EVE, describing it as a game "not for most people". The responses of these former players,

while not as overt as the responses of current players in Chapter 5, still indicate that

entry into EVE is not necessarily as easy as downloading the game and starting the free

trial.

I close this section with a lengthy description provided by a former player who

begins their description of EVE with a comparison to *Ultima Online*, a long-running

MMOG series that houses a PVP community as notorious as the one found in EVE:

> EVE is vanilla *Ultima Online* in space. The former is a land of insane
> naked cannibals that will steal your things and kill you with them and
> make jerky from your corpse. In EVE, groups of thousands work
> together to steal your things and make jerky from your space-corpse.
> People will spend years becoming friends with you, rise to the top of
> your corporation, meet you for drinks in real life, marry your sister,
> finally get director rights to your corp and then steal everything and
> burn it down, having been a spy the entire time.
>
> EVE likely statistically significantly reduces real life murder and theft
> by keeping sociopathic people busy with spreadsheets, metagaming,
> and sharing hardcore bestiality slash fiction in voice chat. It is also one
> of the deepest and most fascinating games in existence and I highly
> recommend it; there is absolutely nothing else like it. (id 1005, former
> player, M-S-W)

My decision to conclude this section with id 1005's response comes from my inability to

determine if this is supposed to encourage or discourage the reader from playing EVE.

This extremely negative, hyperbolic description of EVE seems to emphasize the most

horrible aspects of the community, but ends with the statement "...I highly recommend

it; there is absolutely nothing else like it". This push/pull between describing this game

and its players in a negative light, yet encouraging the reader to play is one of the

clearest examples of boundary keeping provided by a survey respondent. Much like the

journalist descriptions of large space battles or "assholes in space" discussed in Chapter

3 serve as an endorsement to potential new recruits interested in this play style, id

1005's description of EVE similarly appeals to the potential player interested in such activities. To those who do not find such description attractive, such as the non-players I discussed in Chapter 6, this response might as well be a giant sign that reads, "keep out".

<u>Summary</u>

When originally conceptualizing this research, I anticipated receiving responses from former players that highlighted the cutthroat nature of this MMOG universe and describing EVE in a negative manner. Instead, I received a variety of responses ranging from players who refused to answer the question (instead provided a non-response), to those who provided a detail summary of the various activities that a sandbox game can offer. I had expected to receive far more negative assessments of EVE than what is present in the 130 responses provided by former players. When viewed in conjunction with former players' reasons for quitting, an explanation for this diversity of responses emerges. I now turn my attention to the fourth research question outlined in the Introduction, "What reason(s) do former players give to describe discontinuing their participation in this game?" where I describe that for some players, quitting EVE is only a temporary break while for others, it has been a permanent departure.

Why do players quit EVE Online?

In conducting the analysis to address my fourth research question, I found the reasons for no longer playing EVE depended on if the respondent indicated if they were permanently quitting or taking a temporary break from the game. This is not a particularly surprising result, but what was unexpected were the responses of players

192

who did not know if they would be returning to EVE in the future or not. This ambivalence is in contrast to the strong opinions about EVE that I discussed in Chapter 6, especially the opinions of non-players who have read enough about EVE to know that this is not a community they wish to become involved in. Furthermore, these responses serve as a reminder that play is never static, and that interests, amount of time spent playing, or even their opinions about EVE are likely to shift over time in ways players themselves cannot always anticipate.

Rethinking the "former player" category

> I tell myself I've quit but I'll probably end up coming back before long.
> "People never quit EVE, they just take breaks." (id 1561, former player, M-S-W)

My intent is to highlight that even within the group of players who participated in this survey indicating they shuttered their account(s) and explicitly stated that they do or do not intend to re-subscribe in the future, there were still respondents who seemed ambivalent as to whether this departure would actually be permanent – perhaps if something about the game and/or its community changed substantially they would consider re-subscribing. Put in other words, if returning to EVE was like opening a door, I had expected it be closed, locked, and the key tossed aside by the majority of respondents in this category. Instead, I found that some ex-players had indeed locked the door and thrown away the key. Others left the door firmly closed but not actually locked. And yet for a number of former players, they have left the door ajar, quitting and re-subscribing to EVE multiple times. If quitting EVE were a door, for many of these survey respondents it would appear it is a revolving one.

193

Temporary breaks and permanent departures

After indicating that they had previously played EVE but do not currently have an active account, respondents were presented with a series of questions to probe why they quit. The first question asking about plans to return (or not) to EVE was phrased as "Why are you *not* currently playing *EVE Online*?" and it was formatted as an open-ended question with a large text box. All 133 former players provided an answer to this question.

Respondents who quit temporarily primarily indicated constraints to leisure time, sometimes citing school e.g. "I'm having a break (school related) I will come back for sure" (id 1834, former player, M-S-W) or "I have finals" (id 319, former player, M-S-W). I note that the reference to school and/or classes may be a result from recruiting via posters around the York University campus. Other responses also described financial-related reasons for temporary breaks from the game: "Can't afford it! Resubbing this Christmas" (id 417, former player, GDNR-B-W). These temporary breaks were always a result of external constraints, usually indicated a time they intended to return (e.g. the end of an exam period), and never made reference to it being something about the EVE community that was preventing/discouraging them from playing at this point in time.

At the other end of the spectrum were reasons that had more to do with a lack of interest in and/or enjoyment from playing EVE, and these responses seem to indicate a permanent departure:

> It was interesting to give it a try, but ultimately I could see why people call it 'Spreadsheets in Space'. After a month of play, it was already beginning to feel more like work. (id 1931, former player, F-Q-W)

I try to avoid spending money on video games I don't truly enjoy, and EVE requires a baseline investment in order to reach a level of consistent play that I find enjoyable. (id 1818, former player, M-S-W)

The game was just not very interesting to me, I played for the trial and even I think part of the first 30 days but the game just didn't click for me. It just was not something I enjoyed. (id 1552, former player, M-S-W)

I didn't like it. There's a HUGE learning curve and a lot to lose if you don't pick it up quickly. I felt like I was wasting time just sitting offline and waiting for my skills to level. When I was online, I just fired my space lasers at rocks to "mine" to sell stuff to buy a ship so I could get ganked as soon as I left hisec space. (id 1991, former player, F-S-ME)

These responses were longer than those above indicating a temporary departure, and also provided more detail about reason(s) for not currently playing EVE. Id 1931 invokes the "spreadsheet" meme discussed both in Chapter 6 and earlier in this chapter, this time using it as a reason why EVE was, to them, not an interesting game. This response also makes a direct link to one of the underlying messages in "spreadsheets" – *EVE Online* is work – as Microsoft Excel is typically not associated with leisure activities.[52] The next two examples, id 1818 and id 1552 explicitly reference the lack of enjoyment they found in playing EVE and so it was not worth the cost of the monthly subscription fee. The final example, id 1991 references the learning curve, and also the near-constant threat of non-consensual PVP in EVE. In Chapter 6 I described the belief held by some current players that the goal of EVE is to ruin someone else's game; it is possible that id 1991 was on the receiving end of these efforts. While for current players who enjoy griefing or "destroying other people's sandcastles" these activities are positive descriptors for the game, id 1991's response serves as an example of how this style of

---

[52] This collapse between "work" and "play" in regards to EVE is further addressed in Taylor et al. (2015) where we argue that it is not that playing EVE emulates work, EVE *is* work.

play can have an alienating effect on other players, and ultimately result in their quitting the game.

Accounting for non-continuous play

When designing the survey for this dissertation research, I knew that I had to account for players who stopped and started playing EVE on multiple occasions. Drawing on my experience interacting with MMOG players as a research assistant for the VERUS project (described in Chapter 4), I remembered that there was always a bit of difficulty faced by participants attempting to answer the VERUS survey questions about duration of time spent playing a specific game. This confusion is not always readily apparent, but I will use my own history playing *World of Warcraft* to articulate where misunderstanding(s) can occur. I first opened my account a few months after the November 2004 launch (approximately February 2005). Since then I have taken numerous breaks from the game, stopping and starting my subscription throughout the end of my undergraduate and into my graduate studies. I have also taken multiple month-long breaks from the game, while paying for my subscription, but not logging into the game client. Answering what seems to be a straightforward question, "how long have you played *World of Warcraft*", becomes difficult. Do I simply add up the time between February 2005 and today's date? Or should I subtract approximately a year from the total (the estimated amount of time I have let my account lapse and not paid a subscription fee)? And what about all the times where I have not logged into the account but I am still paying the subscription fee – do I count only the planned breaks? Or should I also subtract the time where I intended to play but "life gets in the way" and I

haven't logged in for two weeks? None of these metrics are any more correct than the other possible answers, but a problem arises when trying to compare/contrast answers of different players who calculate their total duration of play in a particular MMOG using differing criteria. Because of this possibility for multiple interpretations to the question, simply asking, "how long have you played EVE?" without further follow-up does not necessarily result in data that can be accurately compared and contrasted across an entire dataset, nor does it explicitly invite a response that would indicate if this play has been consistent or if it was interrupted by breaks.

To avoid confusion on the part of *MMOG Experience Survey* participants, especially since I would not be in the room with them as they answered the survey (as was the case with VERUS), I attempted to ask questions at an appropriate level of detail to capture the experiences of those whose EVE play was not continuous. Therefore, in addition to asking why the participant was not currently playing EVE, I also asked how many times they had cancelled and then re-subscribed to this MMOG. Former players were almost evenly split between those who had played and quit a single time (N=62 or 46.6%) and those who have quit and reactivated their accounts multiple times (N=69 or 51.9%); two respondents did not provide a response for this question. For the 69 respondents who indicated that they had quit and re-subscribed multiple times, I asked a follow-up question about how many times they had reactivated their account; 67 respondents provided a reply to this question. Answers ranged from a single reactivation, to a player who indicated they had re-subscribed on at least 10 different occasions.

For the 69 participants who indicated they had quit and subsequently returned to EVE on more than one occasion, I probed further in regards to their *current* departure from the game, and whether it was permanent. This question was phrased as, "Is this another break or have you quit for good?" and it was formatted as an open-ended question. I coded the answers as whether the respondent indicated they had permanently quit, was taking a temporary break, or if they were unsure if they would be returning to EVE at some time in the future. Participants indicating they were taking a break or quitting tended to parrot back the question text indicating they were "taking a break" or "quitting for good". These were easy to code as either breaks (N=17) or permanent departures (N=15). Rather than formatting this as a yes or no question, by making this an open-ended question where participants were asked to write in a response, it allowed for the third group to emerge: those who did not know if this was a temporary break or permanent departure.

The remaining 35 participants provided responses indicating they were unsure if they would be returning to EVE at some point in the future, such as:

> Probably for good, but never say never. (1504, former player, M-S-W)

> Maybe. I don't have concrete plans to return, but I don't feel spurned or anything either. If the bug bites again I'll probably give it another shot. (1523, former player, F-S-W)

> The last time I said I quit for good I wound up with two accounts. I don't think I'll ever quit for good until the servers are shut down. (id 1551, former player, M-S-W)

> Probably for good. It would take significant changes in the skill system for me to try again. (id 1487, former player, M-S-W)

In each of these answers, the respondent uses hedging words and seems ambivalent about whether or not they will renew their subscription at a later date. These four

responses represent the range of responses contained in the 35 responses I coded as "unsure" in regards to their plans to return to EVE or not. Id 1504 exemplifies the brief and vague responses ("never say never"). Id 1523's response indicates they did not leave because of a negative experience ("...I don't feel spurned...") and makes reference to potentially resuming their subscription if their interest in EVE returns in the future. Id 1551 provides a bit more detail to their relationship with EVE, indicating they had previously quit, only to return and create a second account. Finally, id 1487 seems to be the most certain of the four examples provided, indicating that they would likely not return unless particular in-game changes are made by CCP.

One possible explanation for this subset of former players providing responses I read as ambivalence towards further participation in EVE is that these respondents are suffering from burnout. Burnout, as defined by psychology, is a three stage phenomena:

1. **Emotional exhaustion** where a person's emotional resources are depleted with no immediate source of replenishment.

2. **Depersonalization** where the person suffering from burnout begins to have negative opinions about others and/or "expecting the worse" from them.

3. **Reduced sense of personal accomplishment** which is often linked to a feeling of hopelessness (Stanton-Rich & Iso-Ahola, 1998, pp. 1932–1933)

In Chapter 6 I discussed how some forms of MMOG play can be highly instrumentialized, such as TL Taylor's (2003b) investigations *EverQuest's* "power gamer" community. Such high-level MMOG play often requires long hours and/or a willingness to re-arrange one's personal schedule to better suit the schedule of the larger group. An example of this comes from Malone's (2009) article about raiding in *World of Warcraft*, describing how her guild used a phone tree to wake up its members in the

middle of the night to battle a rare monster before their rivals could defeat it. Here, members of her guild were expected to make themselves available 24/7 extending the in-game obligations of players, blurring "the boundary between the game and the physical world by extending the obligations of guild membership into the everyday lives of the members" (p. 301). It would likely be difficult (if not impossible) to maintain high-level play in multiple games at the same time, indeed Pearce (2009) found in her interviews with 'hardcore players' that they "typically maintain only one subscription at a time, cancelling prior subscriptions in the process" (p. 267). In future research I intend to probe the concept of burnout or fatigue more explicitly when asking players about their movement between games. My future research plans will be articulated further in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Beyond a reflection on whether or not "burnout" could be an explanation for these responses, participants with ambivalent answers also encouraged me to reflect on the affordances of MMOGs more generally. In Chapter 4 I argued that the technological backbone of a MMOG only becomes visible when it breaks down (e.g. the connectivity problems that plagued the release of the most recent *World of Warcraft* expansion), and for researchers the specific affordances of gameworlds often fade into the background in favour of paying attention to the social interaction between players. The unsure responses from former players served as a reminder that MMOGs are a sort of 'never-ending story' with no particular completion point – EVE will never be a game that can be 'finished'. Furthermore, developers such as CCP or Blizzard are frequently adding new content in expansions or patches in an attempt to keep the game fresh and interesting for long-term players. Sometimes, developers will release a major overhaul

to a component of the game, such as the addition of avatars and the captain's quarters in EVE's *Incarna* expansion in 2011, or more recently, the removal of most of the penalties associated with dying in the *Rhea* expansion in late 2014 (Drain, 2014b). Both of these are substantial alterations to EVE and the way it is played, it might be enough of a change for a former player such as id 1487 (quoted above) to consider re-subscribing once again.

Thinking further about the release of new content and its relationship to re-subscribing to a MMOG, I note that Blizzard has released five major *World of Warcraft* expansions over eleven years, all adding new content (e.g. new playable races, additional quests/dungeons/raids, a higher level cap, etc.) to encourage existing players to stay and entice former players who had previously cancelled their account to consider re-subscribing. Each expansion was announced almost a year in advance, and the release date is met with much fanfare and news coverage. The release of a new expansion leads to a sudden spike of *World of Warcraft* subscriptions, enough so that the rise (e.g. "*World of Warcraft* Reaches 12 Million Subscribers" (Reilly, 2010)) and eventual fall (e.g. "*World of Warcraft* drops 1.3 million subscribers in three months" (Warr, 2013)) are reported on in the enthusiast press. Blizzard's marketing practices encourage such spikes – players who have not let their account lapse are often gifted with free time to "try out" the new expansion (Stickney, 2014).

CCP has taken a different approach, releasing 27 smaller expansions over EVE's 12-year history, sometimes multiple times per year. In some cases the expansions add graphical upgrades, other times they dramatically re-envision an element of gameplay (e.g. the addition of avatars, reducing the consequences for player death). Perhaps

because EVE's expansions are released at a fairly steady pace without the year-long hype to build anticipation about changes to the game and encourage former players to re-subscribe on the launch date, this may explain why some former EVE players are unsure about whether or not they will return in the future. Furthermore, there is less at stake financially in regards to EVE expansions: *World of Warcraft* expansions generally require an extra $50 USD payment on top of the monthly subscription, and if a returning player has missed more than one expansion, all previous expansions must be purchased in order to access the latest content.[53] CCP releases each EVE expansion free of cost to subscribers. If a former player decides to re-subscribe in the future they will only have to download the patches to update their game client and re-activate their monthly account; the financial barrier for re-entry into EVE is not substantial. This, combined with EVE expansions being regularly released with little forward notice about whether or not they will contain substantial changes to the gameworld, may be a reason why some participants are unsure about whether they will be returning to EVE or not.

Learning from former players

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I highlighted how little research has been done in regards to former players who have quit playing MMOGs. Based on my understanding of the EVE community garnered through my pre-dissertation research, I anticipated that collecting responses from former players might be difficult, especially if they had quit because they had a negative experience playing EVE. This led to my decision to frame the survey publically as being about MMOGs more generally, rather

---

[53] The cost of this barrier to re-entry has decreased in recent years; Blizzard now substantially discounts older expansions and/or packages multiple expansions in bundles to be purchased all at once.

than an EVE-specific investigation. A total of 133 former players completed this survey, providing a range of responses to "How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played it before?" While jargon and memes appeared in some responses, other former players provided a detailed description of EVE including an explanation of what it means for EVE to be a "sandbox MMOG". These responses contained a range of assessments about EVE, including those who actively discouraged the reader from playing, to those who recommended this MMOG and/or speaking of their own enjoyment garnered from playing this game. In contrast with the responses of current players who provided descriptions of EVE that provided little foothold for someone not previously familiar with the game, former players did not necessarily assume the reader had already encountered EVE. Also largely missing from former players was a sense of exceptionalism when describing EVE players. I argue this exclusivity does not need to be maintained when the respondent is not currently playing, as they are no longer active members of the EVE fraternity.

By pulling out the thoughts and experiences of former players into their own chapter, this provided enough space to discuss the diversity of responses contained within this subset of survey participants. This chapter has shown that descriptions of EVE are related to explanations about why former players are not currently playing it. Just as there was a range of descriptions that endorsed or warned against playing EVE, there was also a range of reasons for why former players no longer have an active subscription. For some former players, they did not enjoy EVE and/or its community, and therefore have made a permanent departure. Others, typically those that matched the demographics found currently playing EVE, would like to be current players, but

external constraints (e.g. school schedule, finances) prevented them from playing at the time they completed this survey. I also argued that CCP's approach to adding expansions to EVE (multiple small expansions with no extra cost beyond the monthly subscription fee) do not create as high of a barrier to re-entry, which may in turn explain why so many former players were unsure if this current departure meant they had permanently quit, or if it was another temporary break.

In the final chapter I present my conclusions, where I reflect further on how this dissertation has been an exercise in studying a moving target, and Chapter 7 has influenced my decision to rethink how to research the experiences of former and non-players. Therefore, I conclude this dissertation with a description of plans for subsequent investigations, where I outline a proposal for longitudinal research to better account for changes to play practices and preferences over time.

CONCLUSION: Studying a Moving Target

> EVE has one of the best communities I have ever come across, and it is sad that a lot of the time gaming media portrays us as jerks/assholes because certain events get a lot more media coverage than others. (id 672, current EVE player, M-S-W)

As I have repeatedly argued, EVE is an MMOG that has a very particular reputation. This dissertation has shown that actions of CCP Games, the enthusiast press, and current players intersect to create a community that is welcoming to some (but not all) potential players. In this concluding chapter, I provide an overview of the dissertation and review the research questions I put forward to frame this work. I close with a summary of the original contributions made in this work, provide some additional final thoughts, and outline a plan for future research investigations.

In Review

Situating my investigation within the wider context of games and education, I opened by asking questions about what a game-based curriculum would make of a student who is not interested in games or has not had opportunities to access games at home or in leisure spaces. I argued that more information about former and non-players is required before informed decisions about adding digital games to curricula could be made, and this dissertation has served as a first step towards filling that knowledge gap. Furthermore, I argued that just as educational game research has made assumptions about the digital affinity of students, game studies has been overwhelmingly focused on current players at the expense of those who have opted out from or have been unable to play games.

In order to provide guidance for thinking about former and non-players, in Chapter 2 I turned to leisure studies and the study of barriers/constraints to leisure participation. Using the non/participation of women in leisure activities as a focal point, I reviewed that literature to provide a conceptual framework to better understand how non-participation can be misread as "lack of interest", when in reality there are internal and external constraints that may be preventing full participation. I concluded my review by looking at critical feminist game studies, and arguing that by drawing upon the more survey-based approach found in leisure studies, the areas for interventions highlighted by critical feminist scholars about external constraints to game play would be harder to be brushed aside as anecdotal or "cherry picked" examples.

Chapter 3 began with an introduction to EVE and the basic mechanics of the game. I then compared information available on the official website for *EVE Online* and CCP's corporate website to the official website for *World of Warcraft*. When viewed side by side, this comparison highlights how little information is provided to help new players learn what EVE is or how to play it. Turning to the gaming enthusiast press, I identified that most journalistic coverage of EVE is directed towards current players. When pitched towards a more general audience, stories about EVE remain overwhelmingly focused on "giant space battles" or other sensational in-game events that do not require extensive knowledge about the game's mechanics or goals. The third investigation in this chapter was a review of the academic literature that uses EVE as its primary object of study. Here I highlighted the similarities between academic writing and press coverage for non-players, as much of the early academic writing about EVE has used sensational in-game events to foreground certain aspects of this MMOG while

overlooking others. I concluded this chapter with an overview of the second generation of EVE literature that has recently emerged. Unlike earlier academic work that relied on second-hand accounts of events happening within the gameworld, the authors contributing to this new trajectory of research provide insights about EVE that are based on empirical work and/or actual time spent playing the game.

Taken together, these three perspectives (developer, journalist, and academic) illustrated just how little is known about EVE beyond the stereotypical player. This formed the basis for the study design detailed in Chapter 4. This chapter opened with an overview of the theoretical framework I used to guide the design and implementation of the *MMOG Experiences Survey*, the primary data collection tool I used. I also provided a summary of my work on EVE to date, and how my preconceptions about this particular MMOG community were ruptured during fieldwork at Fanfest, the annual player convention hosted by CCP. Guided by a feminist research philosophy, I emphasized the need to not over determine my study design and instead allow room for unexpected results to possibly emerge. I concluded this chapter by detailing the survey design, recruitment process, and my philosophy/approach to "cleaning" the resultant dataset.

Arguing against the artificial collapse of certain demographics into catchall "other" categories, Chapter 5 served as an example of what inclusive reporting on survey data can look like. In terms of the actual data presented, the demographics of current EVE players did not differ from the stereotypical EVE player: straight white males in their mid-20s. To better understand why such a limited demographic of player appears to be attracted to this game, Chapter 6 investigated how current and non-players

describe EVE. Here I found that current players described the game in ways that provided very little detail and relied heavily on jargon/EVE-specific memes. Indeed, these responses carried an underlying assumption that the reader of their descriptions of EVE would be already familiar with this MMOG, its player community, and its surrounding norms and conventions. Most non-players, unsurprisingly, did not describe EVE in ways referencing the jargon/memes mobilized by current players. Some did, however, express knowledge about EVE and indicated that they were aware enough about the game and its players to know it would not be an ideal leisure activity for them. Some non-players even presented more descriptive and detailed explanations of the game than current players.

Finally, I discussed the responses of former players in Chapter 7. I began with an analysis of how former players responded to a question prompting them to describe EVE to someone who has never played it before. In contrast with the responses from current players, former players did not necessarily assume the reader had already encountered EVE. Responses from former players also contained a variety of assessments about EVE, ranging from those who actively encouraged the reader to find a different MMOG to play, to those who spoke highly of EVE and encouraged the reader to play it, to those who seemed to have conflicted feelings, calling it the "worst and best" game they had ever played. The second half of the chapter discussed former players reason(s) for quitting EVE. Here I found that responses split into three categories: those who viewed their non-play as a temporary break, those who indicated they had permanently quit EVE, and a group of respondents who were unsure about whether or not they would re-activate their account again in the future. The tentativeness to

describe their EVE play as either a break or permanent departure led to my rethinking of the "former" category as being untenable for the sorts of questions I would like to investigate in the future. Building on these findings, especially how some former players were reluctant to speak of their future non/play in definitive terms, I concluded this dissertation by articulating a new trajectory of research that is longitudinal and no longer focused on the non/participation of a specific game. This new trajectory builds on the findings of Chapter 7, specifically that MMOG participation is not a fixed practice, but may oscillate over time.

In sum, while breaking new ground through the inclusion of former and non-players in the respondent pool, this dissertation has highlighted the perennial problem of dealing with the "moving target" when attempting to study MMOG players. I now return to the research questions I articulated in the introduction of this dissertation, summarizing the answers I've found, and the new questions that arose over the course of conducting this research.

Research questions, revisited

In the introduction of this dissertation I outlined four research questions to help guide my study design, data collection, and analyses. These questions were as follows:

1. How is EVE positioned in the MMOG market?

2. Who are the current players of EVE? What demographics are/not represented within the player population?

3. How do current, former, and non-players describe EVE?

4. What reason(s) do former players give to explain discontinuing their participation in EVE?

In this section I summarize my finding in terms of the answers I've formulated, but also provide a critical reflection on my missteps, articulating where my initial assumptions led me astray in the case of my investigations of former EVE players, as well as the larger implications of my results.

My first research question was discussed in Chapter 3. By paying closer attention to how EVE was positioned by CCP Games, written about in the gaming enthusiast press, and mobilized (or not) in academic writing, I found that a lot of the discussions about EVE focus on a very narrow bandwidth of play and players. The term "sandbox" is heavily invoked in marketing this game, but what a sandbox-style game actually entails is infrequently discussed. This is the first instance of many throughout this dissertation where I found that "sandbox" or "sandbox-style" game may be frequently used to describe EVE, but this descriptor has become so broadly used that it is in danger of losing all meaning. Specifically in regards to coverage about EVE, I found little evidence of the diversity of play styles offered by a sandbox-style game being covered in the enthusiast press, instead this coverage focused on highly technical/jargon-filled descriptions targeted at current players, or sensational reporting targeted at a more general readership emphasizing large space battles that do not require a deep understanding about what EVE is and/or how it is played. While some of the emerging literature on EVE from what I am calling the second generation of EVE scholarship has taken a wider approach to non-PVP elements of gameplay e.g. interviews and observations of miners/industrialists by Taylor et al. (2015) or an investigation of the Russian-language player community by Goodfellow (2014), this research still exists in the shadow of earlier work that emphasized second-hand accounts of particularly

notorious in-game events. Overall, EVE is positioned as an outlier in the MMOG market, which I argue adds to the sense of exceptionalism displayed by current players, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The second research question asked about the demographics of EVE players, and this was investigated in Chapter 5. Survey participants who indicated they are currently EVE players were overwhelmingly white, male, and straight. The further removed from EVE (former player, to non-player, to respondents who had not heard of EVE before the survey), the greater the diversity of the respondents. These findings were not necessarily surprising, as my previous work on EVE as part of the VERUS project similarly found that players of this MMOG are predominantly straight white males. Rather than assuming that potential players who fall outside these demographic categories are somehow less interested in EVE, I turned to the study of women's leisure and the critical feminist game studies literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to demonstrate how non/participation can be unfairly correlated to dis/interest. In Chapter 6 I highlighted responses of current players who emphasized that EVE would not be of interest to "most other gamers" as playing this MMOG apparently requires a very specific personality type that conveniently maps onto straight and/or white and/or male bodies. Because success in overcoming the EVE learning curve/cliff seems to require an in-game social support system, I flagged an area of potential further investigation where I intend to interview current players, asking them to articulate who they imagine as the ideal recruit to this game. By probing further about who current players talk to (or do not talk to) about EVE I intend to test my hypothesis that they likely focus on recruiting other players sharing

the same demographics, which in turn helps to perpetuate the homogeneity of this MMOG community.

The third research question asked how current, former, and non-players described EVE; this was investigated in Chapters 6 and 7. As mentioned above, the responses of current players relied heavily on jargon, which I took as indication of an "insider" culture, or as I described in Chapter 6, something akin to a fraternity. As it is frequently called a "science fiction game" (by CCP, the enthusiast press, and academics), I expected this term to feature prominently in descriptions of EVE. Instead of science fiction, "space" was a far more common descriptor; I argue this is likely due to the images of stars, planets, and spaceships used in advertisements for the game. EVE also has little in common with other cultural products typically labelled as "science fiction", as EVE is a game that contains very little backstory or narrative development.

Also featuring prominently in descriptions of EVE is that it is a sandbox game. Much like my findings in Chapter 3 where I demonstrated how EVE is marketed as a sandbox with little demonstration by the developer or journalists about what sandbox-style play entails, current players did not elaborate on what they meant by calling EVE a "sandbox game". The clearest descriptions of what a sandbox actually is came from former and non-players, in particular I draw attention to the subset of non-players who have read quite a lot about EVE and this knowledge ultimately informed their decision *not* to play. Indeed, these non-players seemed to be aware of what a sandbox game is and could describe the basic features of EVE, but also knew enough about the game and/or its surrounding community to know it was something that was not "for" them.

The fourth research question was investigated in Chapter 7. Former players cited a variety of reasons for not currently playing EVE, ranging from temporary school commitments, to not finding the game enjoyable enough to warrant paying a monthly subscription fee. I found that participants clustered around three different explanations for discontinuing participation: temporary breaks from EVE but with an intention to re-subscribe in the future, permanent departures ("quitting for good") and respondents who were unsure if this current deactivation of their EVE account(s) will be temporary or permanent. I theorized that burnout or fatigue could be one possible reason for this ambivalence, but also by paying closer attention to CCP's gameplay renewal process, that is, their release schedule for new expansions to add new content to EVE, I described how the barrier to re-entry is not particularly high for this MMOG community. Furthermore, the responses of former players serve as a reminder that play is never static, and that interests, amount of time spent playing, or even their opinions about EVE are likely to shift over time in ways players themselves cannot always anticipate. This led to a plan for future research (which I elaborate on at the end of this chapter) that is less reliant on playing (or not playing) a particular game, and instead take a more ecological approach to the study of players and a longitudinal study of preferences about game genre and play style, time available to play, and relationships to other non/players over time and in multiple contexts.

Summary of Contributions

At the time of writing, this is the largest sample of EVE survey data that has been collected for academic investigation.[54] While the results of the demographic investigation outlined in Chapter 5 did not offer up anything particularly revelatory of the demographics of current players, this empirical data adds weight to the "stereotypical" EVE player indeed being a reality. In presenting these demographic findings, I also demonstrated that it is possible to visualize survey data without relying on the artificially narrow bins that ask respondents to pick the "best" yet incomplete option to describe themselves, rather than allowing for multiple responses that are more accurate. When I was first formulating my research plans for this dissertation, I had hoped to uncover evidence to refute the stereotypical EVE player. Instead this work has ended up reaffirming this stereotype.

By turning to leisure studies, an area of research that exists alongside but rarely intersecting with game studies, I have articulated a framework and vocabulary for these nascent conversations about former and non-MMOG players. The research tools used by leisure scholars to study non/participation in leisure activities represent an exciting new frontier for critical feminist game studies and as this dissertation has exemplified, provide enough data points to make critiques about "anecdotal" evidence much more difficult to levy. Furthermore, by fusing this leisure studies literature with the findings that the stereotype about the typical EVE player actually being the reality, the implications for game studies is that "choice" and "preference" for particular games

---

[54] I note that CCP does frequent launch surveys, especially directed towards players who cancel their account(s). However, this is done for market research purposes, and this data is not made available for third-party investigations.

should no longer be used to explain why EVE has such a different demographic make up than other MMOGs currently on the market. By moving beyond choice or preference, this will allow for new hypotheses to be tested for why EVE's demographics are what they are. For example, this opens up questions about to what extent CCP's choice to have players interact via vehicular avatars that are not permanent (spaceships that are easily destroyed and meant to be easily replaced) has influenced the community of current players to see EVE play as something that is impersonal, exceptional, and not for the faint of heart.

This dissertation has also served as an investigation of barriers and constraints to digital game play. Rather than assuming that all potential players who are interested in EVE will be found playing the game, in Chapter 7 I demonstrated that some players have felt forced to take a temporary break due to external constraints (e.g. exams at school or financial limitations), or are perhaps suffering from MMOG burnout, a much more personal/internal form of constraint. Others have opted out of playing EVE before ever downloading the trial, as evidenced in Chapter 6 where non-players demonstrated their knowledge about this game, and explained that through this investigation, they determined the EVE community would be unwelcoming. This has complicated what it means to play or not play a MMOG, and opened up avenues for future research about how access and barriers to digital game play will inevitably shift over time.

In the opening pages of this dissertation I described that for some educational researchers, games are thought to provide a compelling learning tool for youth who exhibit a degree of digital affinity far beyond previous generations of students. I asked how a game-inspired curriculum would engage for students who are disinterested in

play and/or accommodate students who have had less opportunity to play games in their leisure time. Similarly, I described how researchers have argued that games can provide a venue for 'affinity spaces' to coalesce, allowing peer-supported informal learning to take place across geographic and/or demographic boundaries. EVE may indeed be an affinity space for many of the current players, but this dissertation has shown that entry into this space is not equally easy or accessible for all. I end this section with a hypothetical (yet provocative) question: If learning can and does happen within a MMOG, in what ways are non-players literally being left behind?

Final Thoughts

Whether it is the addition of new content through small patches or more substantial expansions, MMOGs are constantly evolving. EVE is not the same game today as it was when it was first released. This dissertation has been a snapshot, capturing the thoughts and experiences of current, former, and non-EVE players at a particular point in time. Any attempt to study players is a difficult task as it is an exercise in studying a moving target; preferences for game genres and play styles are constantly evolving. Also changing is the broader circumstances in which play occurs as access to leisure time fluctuates depending on income levels, work schedule, school course load, family commitments, etc. Players without a large amount of outside constraints on their leisure time may also find their desire to MMOG play shifting over time, perhaps spending too much time at once leading to burnout and requiring a break from a particular game.

As I described in the conclusion of Chapter 6, recent decisions made by CCP seem to indicate that an increased diversity among EVE players is not necessarily of interest

to this developer. Despite CCP's growing disinterest in diversity, EVE has served as an ideal case study to study barriers and constraints to MMOG play. Furthermore, by paying closer attention to former players and their reasons for quitting EVE, I have demonstrated that despite games largely being a leisure activity, the decision to play or not play is not necessarily a result of "preference". In this dissertation I have highlighted the how including former and non-players in the study of a MMOG results in a richer, yet complicated, understanding of non/participation in digital play.

Just as players are constantly evolving, the condition in which research is conducted is also consistently in flux. As I was writing the first draft of this work a series of events unfolded, laying bare the toxicity that exists just under the surface in particular pockets of the gaming community. In a 9000+ word angry screed, the ex-boyfriend of an established independent game developer levelled a number of complaints against his former partner including that she provided sexual favours in exchange for favourable reviews of her most recent game (Jason, 2015). The post would go on to be picked up by 4chan and Reddit, creating a faceless Internet mob hurling abuse at this developer and anyone who publically supported her (Heron, Belford, & Goker, 2014). Eventually this mob would rally around the label of "gamergate" who began looking for further evidence of collusion between independent game designers, journalists, and now academics. Self-identified members of gamergate claim to be asking for better accountability within the gaming press (including disclosure of friendships between developers and journalists), but continue to spend the majority of the time calling for an end to critiques of the sexism, racism, homophobia, colonialism, etc. present within games and their surrounding culture ("keep *your* politics out of *my* games"). This loud minority of

217

gamers have since set their sights on feminist game scholars as emblematic of what they see as a larger conspiracy to unilaterally push social justice ideology into games at the expense of free speech and/or artistic freedom (Chess & Shaw, 2015). An intricate web of conspiracies links this all this together where academics are thought to be pulling puppet strings in the background, driving a journalistic agenda to unfairly valorize undeserving independent game developers (who often fall outside the demographics of being straight and/or white and/or male) at the expense of 'meritocracy'. Couched in a so-called concern for "ethics in games journalism", the apparent "consumer revolt" has changed the climate dramatically for anyone who publically identifies as a feminist and studies games.

I was "lucky" that I had completed my data collection prior to the onset of gamergate. Since then, researchers have found that their online surveys are being targeted and flooded with fake responses, events described by Jennifer Allaway (2014) in her article for *Jezebel*, "#Gamergate Trolls Aren't Ethics Crusaders; They're a Hate Group". Somewhere along the line my name was added to the list of "known internet feminists" and while not subject to the harassment faced by some of my colleagues, I have still had repeated attempts to hack my personal website and email. Had I attempted to collect data post-gamergate, the resulting dissertation would have likely taken a very different form as it would be likely that my survey would have ended up attracting attention like Allaway's did.

There has been much debate about what should happen next. Prior to August 2014, game scholars seemed to toil away in obscurity, now it is rare to attend a game studies conference and still be able to converse with other participants in a public

Twitter conversation without attracting the attention of gamergate supporters. The vitriol makes conducting feminist games research difficult, but also indicates a continuing need for feminist game studies. Surveys may no longer be a viable means for collecting research as their anonymity allows for a faceless mob to repeatedly respond via responses filled with noise. Instead, I plan to return to interviews and focus groups where the research process is more of a conversation, and more of a rapport can be developed between researcher and participant. I now describe my plans for future research in this area that moves away from using surveys, but also reformulates the idea of "former players" to be less reliant on experience with a particular game.

Future Research

In my initial conceptualizations of this dissertation, I had expected that the category of former players would comprise almost entirely of respondents who had tried EVE and quit permanently, especially when considered in conjunction with my investigations of this community discussed in Chapter 3, and my reframing of this research project described in Chapter 4. When designing the *MMOG Experiences Survey*, I included a series of questions that would allow for the possibility of a different experience to emerge, that some players might quit and re-subscribe to EVE multiple times, yet remain unsure if this current deactivation is a temporary break or a permanent departure. In Chapter 7 I argued that this lack of finality is maybe due to the fact that successful MMOGs are constantly evolving; this may also be part of the explanation of why former players remain understudied in the game studies literature.

In Chapter 7 I highlighted how the category of "former" players needs further nuance than I originally anticipated in order to differentiate between the experiences of players who have quit permanently, and those who have taken a temporary break from EVE. My experience writing that chapter has made it clear to me the importance of longitudinal work where the changing preferences of game genre or play style, time spent playing, and evolving (or collapsing) social networks are examined over time and in multiple contexts.

To date, longitudinal work has often taken the form of ethnographies of player groups, such Taylor's (2010) investigation of a *Halo* team moving from a local club to competing in an international tournament, Pearce's (2009) exploration of what happens when the virtual world in which a community previously congregated was shuttered, or Chen's (2012) documentation of the breakdown in communication that ultimately led to the dissolution of a *World of Warcraft* raiding group. In all of these examples, following a group of players is helpful to illustrate how play and play preferences can shift over time. However in these cases, especially in the case of Taylor and Chen, these social networks and play preferences are directly anchored to play in specific games (*Halo* and *World of Warcraft* respectively).

Building on these ethnographies, I propose that the next step for my own research is to break away from selecting participants based on a certain game they do (or do not) play, and instead take a more ecological approach to games and gameplay. The specifics of the study design for future investigations could take on a variety of forms including visiting the homes of individual participants (Bakardjieva, 2005; Shaw, 2010a) or the use of online data collections such as the "travelogue" tool created for the

VERUS research project where study participants were encouraged to upload screenshots and pictures of their MMOG play at home, outside of the Play:CES or Marvel labs (N. Taylor, McArthur, & Jenson, 2012).

Playing games does not happen in a vacuum, and it is also short sighted to assume that participants are only ever playing a single game at any point in time. Using my own play as an example, over the course of writing this dissertation I have picked up and then set down again multiple games depending on my workload, where I was in the world, and what games captured my interest at any particular point in time. I have also played alone and with friends, across multiple devices including on a console, on my laptop, and also on my phone. The choice to play a game at any particular time was context specific, and largely dependent on my surroundings, duration of time available for leisure, and availability of other (non-game) leisure activities. This dissertation research was motivated by a desire to pay closer attention to former and non-players; this subsequent research will add much needed context about how non/play and relationships to various games evolve over time.

References

Albrechtslund, A.-M. (2011). Online identity crisis: Real ID on the World of Warcraft
forums. *First Monday*, *16*. Retrieved from
http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3624/30
06

Allaway, J. (2014, October 13). #Gamergate Trolls Aren't Ethics Crusaders; They're a
Hate Group. Retrieved February 1, 2015, from http://jezebel.com/gamergate-
trolls-arent-ethics-crusaders-theyre-a-hate-1644984010

Bakardjieva, M. (2005). *Internet society: the Internet in everyday life*. London: SAGE.

Barad, K. (1999). Agential Realism: Feminist Interventions in Understanding Scientific
Practices. In M. Biagioli (Ed.), *The science studies reader* (pp. 1–11). New York:
Routledge.

Bardzell, S., Bardzell, J., Pace, T., & Reed, K. (2008). Blissfully productive: grouping and
cooperation in World of Warcraft instance runs. In *Proceedings of the 2008 ACM
conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 357–360). New York,
NY, USA: ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/1460563.1460621

Bartle, R. (1996). Hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades: players who suit MUDs. *Journal of
MUD Research*. Retrieved from http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm

Bauchspies, W. K., & la Bellacasa, M. P. de. (2009). Feminist science and technology
studies: A patchwork of moving subjectivities. An interview with Geoffrey
Bowker, Sandra Harding, Anne Marie Mol, Susan Leigh Star and Banu
Subramaniam. *Subjectivity*, *28*(1), 334–344. http://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2009.21

Behnke, K. A. (2012). Ladies of Warcraft: changing perceptions of women and technology through productive play. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 288–289). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282403

Bellows-Riecken, K. H., & Rhodes, R. E. (2008). A birth of inactivity? A review of physical activity and parenthood. *Preventive Medicine*, *46*(2), 99–110. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2007.08.003

Bergstrom, K. (forthcoming). Imagined Capsuleers Reframing discussions about gender and EVE Online. In M. Carter, K. Bergstrom, & D. Woodford, *Internet Spaceships are Serious Business: An EVE Online Reader*. University of Minnesota Press.

Bergstrom, K. (2014). *"We aren't your personal research facility": Survey Fatigue on the World of Warcraft Forums*. Presented at the Digital Games Research Association, Snowbird, UT.

Bergstrom, K., Carter, M., & Woodford, D. (2013). Workshop: Researching EVE Online. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2013 Conference: DeFragging Game Studies*. Atlanta, GA, USA. Retrieved from http://lmc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/DiGRA13/papers/paper_228.pdf

Bergstrom, K., Carter, M., Woodford, D., & Paul, C. A. (2013). Constructing the Ideal EVE Online Player. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2013 Conference: DeFragging Game Studies*. Atlanta, GA, USA. Retrieved from http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/constructing-the-ideal-eve-online-player/

Bergstrom, K., de Castell, S., & Jenson, J. (2011, October). *Worlds beyond Warcraft: Studying multiple MMOs.* Presented at the Association of Internet Researchers, Seattle, WA.

Bergstrom, K., Fisher, S., & Jenson, J. (2014). Disavowing "That Guy": Identity construction and massively multiplayer online game players. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies.* http://doi.org/10.1177/1354856514560314

Bergstrom, K., Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2012). What's "choice" got to do with it?: avatar selection differences between novice and expert players of World of Warcraft and Rift. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 97–104). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282360

Bergstrom, K., Jenson, J., Hydomako, R., & de Castell, S. (2015). The keys to success: Supplemental measures of player expertise in Massively Multiplayer Online Games. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, *7*(1), 101–121. http://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.7.1.101_1

Bergstrom, K., McArthur, V., Jenson, J., & Peyton, T. (2011). All in a day's work. In *Proceedings of the 2011 ACM SIGGRAPH Symposium on Video Games* (pp. 31–35). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2018556.2018563

Bialeschki, M. D., & Pearce, K. D. (1997). "I Don't Want a Lifestyle--I Want a Life": The effect of role negotiations on the leisure of lesbian mothers. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *29*(1), 113–131.

Bialeschki, M. D., & Walbert, K. L. (1998). "You have to have some fun to go along with your work": The Interplay of Race, Class, Gender, and Leisure in the Industrial New South. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *30*(1), 79–100.

Blizzard Entertainment. (2010, October 7). WORLD OF WARCRAFT® SUBSCRIBER BASE REACHES 12 MILLION WORLDWIDE. Retrieved April 8, 2012, from http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/press/pressreleases.html?id=2847881

Blizzard Entertainment. (2014). What is World of Warcraft? Retrieved June 17, 2014, from http://us.battle.net/wow/en/game/guide/

Blodgett, B. M. (2009). And the ringleaders were banned. In *Proceedings of the fourth international conference on Communities and technologies* (pp. 135–144). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/1556460.1556481

Boellstroff, T. (2006). A Ludicrous Discipline? Ethnography and Game Studies. *Games and Culture*, *1*(1), 29–35. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412005281620

Borgmann, A. (1984). *Technology and the character of contemporary life : A philosophical inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

boyd, danah. (2012). White Flight in Networked Publics: How Race & Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with MySpace & Facebook. In L. Nakamura & P. Chow-White (Eds.), *Race after the Internet* (pp. 203–222). New York: Routledge.

Braithwaite, A. (2014). "Seriously, get out": Feminists on the forums and the War(craft) on women. *New Media & Society*, *16*(5), 703–718. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813489503

Brock, A. (2011). "When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong": Resident Evil 5, Racial Representation, and Gamers. *Games and Culture*, *6*(5), 429–452.

Brown, P. R., Brown, W. J., Miller, Y. D., & Hansen, V. (2001). Perceived Constraints
and Social Support for Active Leisure Among Mothers With Young Children.
Leisure Sciences, *23*(3), 131–144. http://doi.org/10.1080/014904001316896837

Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2003). Gender dynamics and the social and spatial organization
of computer gaming. *Leisure Studies*, *22*(1), 1–15.
http://doi.org/10.1080/02614360306571

Burns, N., Paterson, K., & Watson, N. (2009). An inclusive outdoors? Disabled people's
experiences of countryside leisure services. *Leisure Studies*, *28*(4), 403–417.
http://doi.org/10.1080/02614360903071704

Burrill, D. A. (2008). *Die tryin' : videogames, masculinity, culture*. Peter Lang.

Bury, R. (2001). From a Room to a Cyberspace of One's Own: Technology and the
Women-Only Heterotopia. In *Feminist (Re)visionings of the Subject:
Landscapes, Ethnoscapes, and Theory Scapes* (pp. 55–86). Lanhan, MD:
Lexington Books.

Bush, C. G. (1983). Women and the Assessment of Technology: To Think, to Be; to
Unthink, to Free. In J. Rothschild (Ed.), *Machina ex dea : feminist perspectives
on technology* (pp. 151–170). New York: Pergamon Press.

Caillois, R. (1961). *Man, play, and games*. (M. Barash, Trans.). Urbana: University of
Illinois Press.

Caillois, R. (2006). The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games. In K. Salen &
E. Zimmerman, *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology* (pp. 122–
155). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cai, W., Wang, X., Chen, M., & Zhang, Y. (2010). MMOPRG Traffic Measurement, Modeling and Generator over WiFi and WiMax. In *Global Telecommunications Conference (GLOBECOM 2010), 2010 IEEE* (pp. 1–5). IEEE. http://doi.org/10.1109/GLOCOM.2010.5684141

Carlson, R. (2009). Too Human versus the enthusiast press: Video game journalists as mediators of commodity value. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *2*. Retrieved from http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/98/93

Carter, M. (2013). Ruthless Play. In *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 465–467). Retrieved from http://www.fdg2013.org/program/doctoral/dc03_carter.pdf

Carter, M. (2014). Emitexts and Paratexts: Propaganda in EVE Online. *Games and Culture*. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014558089

Carter, M. (2015). *Treacherous play in EVE Online* (Ph.D. Dissertation). University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/11343/48398

Carter, M., Bergstrom, K., Webber, N., & Milik, O. (2015). EVE is Real. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2015 Conference: Diversity of play: Games – Cultures - Identities*. Retrieved from http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/eve-is-real/

Carter, M., & Gibbs, M. (2013). eSports in EVE Online: Skullduggery, Fairplay and Acceptability in an Unbounded Competition. In *Proceedings of Foundations of Digital Games Conference 2013*. Retrieved from http://www.fdg2013.org/program/papers/paper07_carter_gibbs.pdf

Carter, M., Gibbs, M., & Harrop, M. (2012). Metagames, paragames and orthogames. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 11–17). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282346

Carter, M., Woodford, D., & Bergstrom, K. (2013). Internet spaceships are serious business: EVE Online workshop introduction. In *Proceedings of Foundations of Digital Games Conference 2013*. Retrieved from http://www.fdg2013.org/program/workshops/papers/EVE2013/EVE%20Online%20Workshop%20Introduction.pdf

Castronova, E. (2005). *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*. University Of Chicago Press.

CCP Games. (2009). *EVE Online: The Butterfly Effect*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08hmqyejCYU

CCP Games. (2011). EVE Online. Retrieved May 16, 2014, from http://www.ccpgames.com/en/products/eve-online

CCP Hellmar. (2011, October 5). A letter to the followers of EVE. Retrieved March 8, 2015, from http://community.eveonline.com/news/dev-blogs/2672

Chalk, A. (2014, November 17). Blizzard apologizes for Warlords of Draenor launch, adds free time for subscribers. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from http://www.pcgamer.com//blizzard-apologizes-for-warlords-of-draenor-launch-adds-free-time-for-subscribers/

Chen, K.-T., Huang, P., & Lei, C.-L. (2006). Game traffic analysis: An MMORPG perspective. *Computer Networks*, *50*(16), 3002–3023. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.comnet.2005.11.005

Chen, M. (2012). *Leet Noobs: The Life and Death of an Expert Player Group in World of Warcraft*. New York: Peter Lang.

Chesney, T., Coyne, I., Logan, B., & Madden, N. (2009). Griefing in virtual worlds: causes, casualties and coping strategies. *Information Systems Journal*, *19*(6), 525–548. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2575.2009.00330.x

Chess, S. (2009). *License to Play: Women, Productivity, and Video Games* (Ph.D. Dissertation). Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, United States -- New York.

Chess, S. (2010). A 36-24-36 Cerebrum: Productivity, Gender, and Video Game Advertising. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *28*(3), 230–252. http://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2010.515234

Chess, S. (2012). Going with the Flo. *Feminist Media Studies*, *12*(1), 83–99. http://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.558350

Chess, S., & Shaw, A. (2015). A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying About #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *59*(1), 208–220. http://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2014.999917

Che, X., & Ip, B. (2012). Packet-level traffic analysis of online games from the genre characteristics perspective. *Journal of Network and Computer Applications*, *35*(1), 240–252. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnca.2011.08.005

Coalter, F. (1993). Sports participation: price or priorities? *Leisure Studies*, *12*(3), 171–182. http://doi.org/10.1080/02614369300390171

Connell, R. (2009). *Gender : in world perspective* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Polity.

Connell, R., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the

    Concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829–859.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Consalvo, M. (2007). *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. MIT Press.

    Retrieved from

    http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=11153

Consalvo, M. (2009). There is No Magic Circle. *Games and Culture*, *4*(4), 408–417.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009343575

Consalvo, M. (2012). Confronting toxic gamer culture: A challenge for feminist game

    studies scholars. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, *1*(1).

    http://doi.org/10.7264/N33X84KH

Coppa, F. (2008). Women, Star Trek, and the early development of fannish vidding.

    Transformative Works and Cultures, *1*. Retrieved from

    http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/44

Corneliussen, H. (2008). World of Warcraft as a Playground for Feminism. In H.

    Corneliussen & J. W. Rettberg (Eds.), *Digital culture, play, and identity: a*

    World of Warcraft reader (pp. 63–86). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Craft, A. J. (2007). Sin in Cyber-Eden: Understanding the Metaphysics and Morals of

    Virtual Worlds. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *9*, 205–217.

Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1987). Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure.

    Leisure Sciences, *9*(2), 119–127. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490408709512151

Crawford, D. W., Jackson, E. L., & Godbey, G. (1991). A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, *13*(4), 309–320. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490409109513147

Curry, K. (2010). Warcraft and Civic Education: MMORPGs as Participatory Cultures and How Teachers Can Use Them to Improve Civic Education. *The Social Studies*, *101*(6), 250–253. http://doi.org/10.1080/00377990903493879

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Debeauvais, T., Nardi, B., Schiano, D. J., Ducheneaut, N., & Yee, N. (2011). If you build it they might stay. In *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 180–187). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2159365.2159390

de Castell, S., & Bryson, M. (1998). Retooling Play: Dystopia, Dysphoria, and Difference. In J. Cassell & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat gender and computer games* (pp. 232–261). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

de Castell, S., Taylor, N., Jenson, J., & Weiler, M. (2012). Theoretical and methodological challenges (and opportunities) in virtual worlds research (p. 134). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282366

Deem, R. (1986). *All work and no play?: a study of women and leisure*. Milton Keynes, England ; Philadelphia, PA, USA: Open University Press.

Delwiche, A. (2006). Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) in the new media classroom. *Educational Technology & Society*, *9*(3), 160–172.

de Zwart, M. (2009). Piracy vs. Control: Models of Virtual World Governance and Their Impact on Player and User Experience. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, *2*(3), 3–16.

de Zwart, M., & Humphreys, S. (2014). The Lawless Frontier of Deep Space: Code as Law in EVE Online. *Cultural Studies Review*, *20*(1), 77–99.

Dietz, T. L. (1998). An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: Implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, *38*(5-6), 425–442.

Drain, B. (2013, August 27). The Soapbox: Actually, that really isn't an MMO. Retrieved December 27, 2014, from http://massively.joystiq.com/2013/08/27/the-soapbox-actually-that-really-isnt-an-mmo/

Drain, B. (2014a, February 2). EVE Evolved: The Bloodbath of B-R5RB. Retrieved January 18, 2015, from http://massively.joystiq.com/2014/02/02/eve-evolved-the-bloodbath-of-b-r5rb/

Drain, B. (2014b, November 9). EVE Evolved: Clone upgrades and skill loss are gone! Retrieved March 24, 2015, from http://www.engadget.com/2014/11/09/eve-evolved-clone-upgrades-and-skill-loss-are-gone/

Ducheneaut, N., Yee, N., Nickell, E., & Moore, R. J. (2006). Building an MMO With Mass Appeal: A Look at Gameplay in World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture*, *1*(4), 281–317. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412006292613

Duncan, S. C. (2010). Gamers as Designers: a framework for investigating design in gaming affinity spaces. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, *7*(1), 21. http://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2010.7.1.21

Dutton, N. (2007). *Participatory quitting: Quitting texts and World of Warcraft player culture* (Masters Thesis). Ohio University.

Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Eklund, L., & Johansson, M. (2010). Social Play? A study of social interaction in temporary group formation (PUG) in World of Warcraft. In *Proceedings of DiGRA Nordic 2010: Experiencing Games: Games, Play, and Players*. Retrieved from http://www.digra.org/dl/display_html?chid=10343.55072.pdf

Elise, A. (2014, November 14). "World Of Warcraft: Warlords Of Draenor" Hit By Serious DDoS Attack, Blizzard Scrambles To Fix Damage. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from http://www.ibtimes.com/world-warcraft-warlords-draenor-hit-serious-ddos-attack-blizzard-scrambles-fix-damage-1723918

Entertainment Software Association. (2014a). *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry*. Retrieved from http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ESA_EF_2014.pdf

Entertainment Software Association. (2014b). Industry Facts. Retrieved from http://www.theesa.com/about-esa/industry-facts/

Facer, K., & Furlong, R. (2001). Beyond the Myth of the "Cyberkid": Young People at the Margins of the Information Revolution. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *4*(4), 451–469. http://doi.org/10.1080/13676260120101905

Fahey, M. (2015, April 26). GTA V PC Mod Lets Players Explore Snowy North Yankton. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from http://kotaku.com/gta-v-pc-mod-lets-players-explore-snowy-north-yankton-1700252645

FanFest 2009: GoonSwarm - part 3. (2009). Retrieved from

      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXOHjQoqoRs&feature=youtube_gdata_p

      layer

Feng, W., Brandt, D., & Saha, D. (2007). A long-term study of a popular MMORPG. In

      Proceedings of the 6th ACM SIGCOMM workshop on Network and system

      support for games (pp. 19–24). ACM Press.

      http://doi.org/10.1145/1326257.1326261

Find Your Path in the Sandbox. (n.d.). Retrieved December 16, 2014, from

      http://www.eveonline.com/sandbox/

Fisher, S., & Harvey, A. (2013). Intervention for Inclusivity: Gender Politics and Indie

      Game Development. *Loading - The Journal of the Canadian Games Studies*

      Association, *7*(11), 25–40.

Flanagan, M. (2005). Troubling "Games for Girls": Notes from the Edge of Game

      Design. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views – Worlds*

      in Play.

Foster, M. (2013, November 12). The Soapbox: Instant leveling and the whining fringe.

      Retrieved December 27, 2014, from

      http://massively.joystiq.com/2013/11/12/the-soapbox-instant-leveling-and-the-

      whining-fringe/

Francis, T. (2008, January 29). Murder Incorporated: The story of Eve Online's most

      devastating assassins. Retrieved January 25, 2015, from

      http://www.computerandvideogames.com/180867/features/murder-

      incorporated/

Frankenberg, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Displacing whiteness: essays in social and cultural criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007). The Hegemony of Play. In *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference.*

Futrelle, D. (2015, July 23). GamerGaters attack study on video game losers lashing out at women … by lashing out at women. Retrieved from http://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2015/07/23/gamergaters-attack-study-on-video-game-losers-lashing-out-at-women-by-lashing-out-at-women/

Gee, J. P. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gee, J. P. (2005). Semiotic Social Spaces and Affinity Spaces: From The Age of Mythology to Today's Schools. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond communities of practice: language, power, and social context* (pp. 214–232). Cambridge ; N.Y: Cambridge University Press.

Gee, J. P. (2007a). *Good Video Games + Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning and Literacy*. Peter Lang Pub Inc.

Gee, J. P. (2007b). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy* (Rev. and updated ed). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The Ecological approach to visual perception*. Hillsdale (N.J.) [etc.]: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goodfellow, C. (2014). Russian Overlords, Vodka, and Logoffski: Russian- and English-Language Discourse About Anti-Russian Xenophobia in the EVE Online Community. *Games and Culture*, *x*(x), 1–22.

Gray, K. L. (2011). *Deviant Bodies Resisting Online: Examining the Intersecting Realities of Women of Color in Xbox Live* (Ph.D., Justice Studies). Arizona State University, United States -- Arizona.

Gray, K. L. (2012a). Deviant bodies, stigmatized identities, and racist acts: examining the experiences of African-American gamers in Xbox Live. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, *18*(4), 261–276. http://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2012.746740

Gray, K. L. (2012b). Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Xbox Live: Examining Minority Gamers' Responses and Rate of Adoption to Changes in Xbox Live. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *32*(6), 463–470. http://doi.org/10.1177/0270467612469076

Gray, K. L. (2012c). Intersecting Oppressions and Online Communities: Examining the experiences of women of color in Xbox Live. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(3), 411–428. http://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.642401

Greitemeyer, T., & McLatchie, N. (2011). Denying Humanness to Others: A Newly Discovered Mechanism by Which Violent Video Games Increase Aggressive Behavior. *Psychological Science*, *22*(5), 659–665. http://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611403320

Greitemeyer, T., & Mugge, D. O. (2014). Video Games Do Affect Social Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Effects of Violent and Prosocial Video Game Play. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.* http://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213520459

Grundberg, S., & Hansegard, J. (2014, August 20). Women Now Make Up Almost Half
of Gamers. Retrieved August 20, 2014, from
http://online.wsj.com/articles/gaming-no-longer-a-mans-world-1408464249

Gurto, D., Ryan, M., & Blair, A. (2011). Crafty dynamic vendor pricing in computer role-
playing games. In *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on
Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 286–288). ACM Press.
http://doi.org/10.1145/2159365.2159414

Hamilton, K. (2013, September 24). Five ways you can make Grand Theft Auto V more
immersive. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from http://kotaku.com/five-ways-you-
can-make-grand-theft-auto-v-more-immersiv-1373584582

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the
Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575–599.

Haraway, D. (2000). A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in
the late twentieth century. In D. Bell & B. M. Kennedy (Eds.), *The cybercultures
reader* (pp. 291–324). London :New York: Routledge.

Harding, S. G. (1987). Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method? In S. G. Harding
(Ed.), *Feminism and methodology: social science issues* (pp. 1–14).
Bloomington : Milton Keynes [Buckinghamshire]: Indiana University Press ;
Open University Press.

Hargittai, E. (2010). Digital Na(t)ives? Variation in Internet Skills and Uses among
Members of the "Net Generation." *Sociological Inquiry*, *80*(1), 92–113.
http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2009.00317.x

Hargittai, E. (2015). Is Bigger Always Better? Potential Biases of Big Data Derived from

    Social Network Sites. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and*

    Social Science, *659*(1), 63–76. http://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215570866

Hartmann, T., & Klimmt, C. (2006). Gender and Computer Games: Exploring Females'

    Dislikes. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(4). Retrieved from

    http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue4/hartmann.html

Harvey, A. (2015). *Gender, age, and digital games in the domestic context*. New York:

    Routledge.

Hayes, E. R., & Duncan, S. C. (2012). *Learning in Video Game Affinity Spaces. New*

    Literacies and Digital Epistemologies. Volume 51. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Hekman, S. (2007). Feminist Methodology. In W. Outhwaite & S. P. Turner (Eds.), *The*

    SAGE handbook of social science methodology (pp. 534–546). Los Angeles

    (Calif.); London: SAGE.

Hellman, M., Schoenmakers, T. M., Nordstrom, B. R., & van Holst, R. J. (2013). Is there

    such a thing as online video game addiction? A cross-disciplinary review.

    Addiction Research & Theory, *21*(2), 102–112.

    http://doi.org/10.3109/16066359.2012.693222

Henderson, K. A. (1990). The Meaning of Leisure for Women: An Integrative Review.

    Journal of Leisure Research, *22*(3), 228–243.

Henderson, K. A. (1996). One Size Doesn't Fit All: The Meanings of Women's Leisure.

    Journal of Leisure Research, *28*(3), 139–154.

Henderson, K. A., Bialeschki, M. D., Shaw, S. M., & Freysinger, V. J. (Eds.). (1989). *A leisure of one's own: a feminist perspective on women's leisure*. State College, Pa: Venture Pub.

Henderson, K. A., & Dialeschki, M. D. (1991). A sense of entitlement to leisure as constraint and empowerment for women. *Leisure Sciences*, *13*(1), 51–65. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490409109513124

Henderson, K. A., & Gibson, H. J. (2013). An Integrative Review of Women, Gender, and Leisure: Increasing Complexities. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *45*(2), 115–135.

Henderson, K. A., & Hickerson, B. (2007). Women and Leisure: Premises and Performances Uncovered in an Integrative Review. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *39*(4), 591–610.

Henderson, K. A., Hodges, S., & Kivel, B. D. (2002). Context and Dialogue in Research on Women and Leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *34*(3), 253–271.

Heron, M. J., Belford, P., & Goker, A. (2014). Sexism in the Circuitry: Female Participation in Male-Dominated Popular Computer Culture. *Computers & Society*, *44*(4), 18–29.

Hickman, L. (2000). Focaltechnics, Pragmatechnics, and the Reform of Technology. In E. Higgs, A. Light, & D. Strong (Eds.), *Technology and the good life?* (pp. 89–105). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Higgin, T. (2008). Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. *Games and Culture*, *4*(1), 3–26. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412008325477

Higgin, T. (2012). *Gamic Race: Logics of Difference in Videogame Culture* (PhD

    Thesis). University of California Riverside. Retrieved from

    http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5811b3gv#page-1

Holisky, A. (2014, November 14). Warlords of Draenor's launch failure and where

    responsibility lies. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from

    http://wow.joystiq.com/2014/11/14/warlords-of-draenors-launch-failure-and-

    where-responsibility-li/

Holmes, J. (2011). Cyberkids or divided generations? Characterising young people's

    internet use in the UK with generic, continuum or typological models. *New

    Media & Society*, *13*(7), 1104–1122. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810397649

Huizinga, J. (1955). *Homo ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Boston, MA:

    Beacon Press.

Huntemann, N. (2002). *Game Over: Gender, Race & Violence in Video Games*. Media

    Education Foundation.

Iso-Ahola, S. E. (1981). Leisure Counseling at the Crossroads. *The Counseling

    Psychologist*, *9*(3), 71–74. http://doi.org/10.1177/001100008100900307

Iso-Ahola, S. E., & Mannell, R. C. (1985). Social and psychological constraints on leisure.

    In M. G. Wade (Ed.), *Constraints on leisure* (pp. 111–151). Springfield, Ill., U.S.A:

    C.C. Thomas.

Ivory, J. D. (2006). Still a Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of

    Video Games. *Mass Communication and Society*, *9*(1), 103–114.

Jackson, E. L. (1983). Activity-specific barriers to recreation participation. *Leisure

    Sciences*, *6*(1), 47–60. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490408309513021

Jackson, E. L. (1988). Leisure constraints: A survey of past research. *Leisure Sciences*, *10*(3), 203–215. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490408809512190

Jackson, E. L., Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1993). Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, *15*(1), 1–11. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490409309513182

Jackson, E. L., & Henderson, K. A. (1995). Gender-Based Analysis of Leisure Constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, *17*(1), 31–51.

Jansz, J., & Martis, R. G. (2007). The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games. *Sex Roles*, *56*(3-4), 141–148. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9158-0

Jason, Z. (2015, May 1). Game of Fear. Retrieved April 28, 2015, from http://bostonmagazine.magnify.net/apiv2/player?id=TMTVX13LJR06Z0D6&hostname=bostonmagazine.magnify.net&permalink=BOSTON-Film-Trailer&chromeless=true

Jenkins, H. (2006). Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture. In M. G. Durham & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: keyworks* (Rev. ed, pp. 549–576). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Jenkins, H. (Ed.). (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st Century*. MA: MIT Press.

Jenson, J., Bergstrom, K., & de Castell, S. (2013). Playing "for Real": A Lab-Based Study of MMOGs. In *Selected Papers Of Internet Research*. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org/index.php/spir/article/view/790

Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2008). Theorizing gender and digital gameplay: Oversights, accidents and surprises. *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, *2*(1), 15–25.

Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2010). Gender, Simulation, and Gaming: Research Review and Redirections. *Simulation & Gaming*, *41*(1), 51–71. http://doi.org/10.1177/1046878109353473

Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2011). Girls@Play. *Feminist Media Studies*, *11*(2), 167–179. http://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2010.521625

Jenson, J., Fisher, S., & de Castell, S. (2011). Disrupting the Gender Order: Leveling Up and Claiming Space in an After-School Video Game Club. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, *3*(1), 149–169.

Jenson, J., Taylor, N., & Fisher, S. (2010). *21st Century Skills, Technology and Learning Research Report*. Ontario Ministry of Education. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/research/Jenson_ReportEng.pdf

Joerges, B. (1999). Do Politics Have Artefacts? *Social Studies of Science*, *29*(3), 411–431.

Juul, J. (2010). *A casual revolution reinventing video games and their players*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Karmali, L. (2014, February 7). World of Warcraft Subscriber Numbers Rise to 7.8 Million. Retrieved May 2, 2014, from http://ca.ign.com/articles/2014/02/07/world-of-warcraft-subscriber-numbers-rise-to-78-million

Kasumovic, M. M., & Kuznekoff, J. H. (2015). Insights into Sexism: Male Status and

    Performance Moderates Female-Directed Hostile and Amicable Behaviour. *PLOS*

    ONE, 10(7), e0131613. http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0131613

Kawale, J., Pal, A., & Srivastava, J. (2009). Churn Prediction in MMORPGs: A Social

    Influence Based Approach. In *Proceedings of the 2009 IEEE Social Computing*

    (SocialCom-09). Symposium on Social Intelligence and Networking (SIN-09).

    Vancouver, Canada. Retrieved from http://www.vwobservatory.com/wp/?p=203

Kennedy, H. W. (2002). Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of

    Textual Analysis. *Game Studies*, *2*(2). Retrieved from

    http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/

Kennedy, H. W. (2011). Female Quake Players and the Politics of Identity. In S.

    Giddings & M. Lister (Eds.), *The New Media and Technocultures Reader* (pp.

    201–214). New York, NY: Routledge.

King, D. C. (2011). *Through the Eyes of Children: Sport and its Role in a Public*

    Housing Community (Masters Thesis). University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

    Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/1993/4872

Kolo, C., & Baur, T. (2004). Living a virtual life: Social dynamics of online gaming.

    Game Studies, *4*(1). Retrieved from http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/kolo/

Kowert, R., Griffiths, M. D., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2012). Geek or Chic? Emerging

    Stereotypes of Online Gamers. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/0270467612469078

Kubrik, E. (2012). Masters of Technology: Defining and Theorizing the Hardcore/Casual

 Dichotomy in Video Game Culture. In R. Gajjala & Y. J. Oh (Eds.),

 Cyberfeminism 2.0 (pp. 135–152). New York: Peter Lang Pub.

Kuchera, B. (2012, November 21). Games with exclusively female heroes don't sell

 (because publishers don't support them). Retrieved November 21, 2012, from

 http://penny-arcade.com/report/editorial-article/games-with-female-heroes-

 dont-sell-because-publishers-dont-support-them

Kuchera, B. (2014, May 2). CCP CEO on World of Darkness cancellation: "We are now

 the Eve Universe company." Retrieved May 8, 2014, from

 http://www.polygon.com/2014/5/2/5674352/World-of-darkness-cancellation-

 CCP-Fanfest

Layne, L. L. (2010). Introduction. In S. L. Vostral, K. Boyer, & L. L. Layne (Eds.),

 Feminist technology (pp. 1–35). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Lefebvre, E. (2012, March 28). The Mittani gets hit with ban and resigns in wake of EVE

 Online controversy. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from

 http://www.engadget.com/2012/03/28/the-mittani-gets-hit-with-ban-and-

 resigns-in-wake-of-eve-online/

Lefebvre, E. (2014, May 28). EVE Online warns supercarrier pilots of impending

 changes. Retrieved January 18, 2015, from

 http://massively.joystiq.com/2014/05/28/eve-online-warns-supercarrier-pilots-

 of-impending-changes/

Leray, J. (2013, June 3). Better design will attract more diverse players, says CCP.

    Retrieved July 6, 2013, from http://www.destructoid.com/boy-s-club-why-don-t-

    more-women-play-eve-online--254710.phtml

Linderoth, J. (2009). "Its not hard, just requires that you have no life". Computer games

    and the illusion of learning. *Digital Kompetanse : Nordic Journal of Digital*

    Literacy, *4*, 4–19.

Linderoth, J. (2011). Beyond the digital divide: An ecological approach to gameplay. In

    Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play. Retrieved from

    http://www.digra.org/dl/db/11307.03263.pdf

Linderoth, J. (2012). Why gamers don't learn more: An ecological approach to games as

    learning environments. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, *4*(1), 45–62.

    http://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.4.1.45_1

Lin, H., & Sun, C.-T. (2005). The "White-eyed" Player Culture: Grief Play and

    Construction of Deviance in MMORPGs. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005*

    Conference: Changing Views – Worlds in Play. Retrieved from

    http://summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/238/5922543c8cba0a282491dbfdfb1

    7.doc

Lucas, K., & Sherry, J. L. (2004). Sex Differences in Video Game Play:: A

    Communication-Based Explanation. *Communication Research*, *31*(5), 499–523.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/0093650204267930

MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2015). "Take That, Bitches!" Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist

    Game Narratives. *Game Studies*, *14*(2).

MacDonald, K. (2014, May 7). I Watched Ten Game Developers Get Demolished by an

    MMA Champ. Retrieved January 24, 2015, from http://kotaku.com/i-watched-

    ten-game-developers-get-demolished-by-an-mma-1572834805

Malone, K.-L. (2009). Dragon Kill Points: The Economics of Power Gamers. *Games and*

    Culture, *4*(3), 296–316. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009339731

Malone, K. R., & Barabino, G. (2009). Narrations of race in STEM research settings:

    Identity formation and its discontents. *Science Education*, *93*(3), 485–510.

    http://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20307

Mårtensson, P., Raivander, P., & Thedin, E. (2014, July 12). A Tale of Internet

    Spaceships. Retrieved March 13, 2015, from

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB1M9ZVuWtM&feature=youtube_gdata_p

    layer

Martuk. (2013a, July 1). CCP Announces EVE Vegas 2013. Retrieved January 18, 2015,

    from http://www.tentonhammer.com/eve/news/ccp-announces-eve-vegas-2013

Martuk. (2013b, September 26). CCP Announces EVE: Rubicon Expansion Coming

    November 19th. Retrieved January 18, 2015, from

    http://www.tentonhammer.com/eve/news/ccp-announces-eve-rubicon-

    expansion-coming-november-19

Martuk. (2014, February 28). CCP Announces Plans for Epic Celebration at EVE

    Fanfest. Retrieved January 18, 2014, from

    http://www.tentonhammer.com/eve/news/ccp-announces-plans-for-epic-

    celebration-at-eve-fanfest

McKnight, J. C. (2012). *The Libertarians' Saga: Tracing the cultural roots of EVE Online*. Presented at the Association of Internet Researchers - ir13, Salford, UK.

Meer, A. (2012, March 29). The Mittani's Crime & Punishment In Eve Online. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2012/03/29/the-mittanis-crime-punishment-in-eve-online/

Meyers, D. (2007). Self and selfishness in online social play. In *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference*.

Mikula, M. (2003). Gender and Videogames: The political valency of Lara Croft. *Continuum*, *17*(1), 79–87. http://doi.org/10.1080/1030431022000049038

Miller, M. K., & Summers, A. (2007). Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines. *Sex Roles*, *57*(9-10), 733–742. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9307-0

Milner, R. (2012). *The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media* (Ph.D dissertation). University of Kansas.

Nakamura, L. (2009). Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *26*(2), 128–144. http://doi.org/10.1080/15295030902860252

Nakamura, L. (2012). Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, *1*(1). http://doi.org/10.7264/N37P8W9V

Naples, N. A. (2007). Feminist Methodology and Its Discontents. In W. Outhwaite & S. P. Turner (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social science methodology* (pp. 547–564). Los Angeles (Calif.); London: SAGE.

Narcisse, E. (2014, February 19). A Comic That Perfectly Captures The Evil Genius Of

    Eve Online Players. Retrieved December 21, 2014, from http://kotaku.com/a-

    comic-that-perfectly-captures-the-evil-genius-of-eve-1526232829

Nardi, B., & Harris, J. (2006). Strangers and friends: collaborative play in World of

    Warcraft. In *Proceedings of the 2006 20th anniversary conference on Computer*

    supported cooperative work (pp. 149–158). ACM Press.

    http://doi.org/10.1145/1180875.1180898

Olivetti, J. (2013, September 26). EVE Online: Rubicon coming November 19th.

    Retrieved January 18, 2015, from http://massively.joystiq.com/2013/09/26/eve-

    online-rubicon-coming-november-19th/

O'Mullan Wayne, D., & Krishnagiri, S. (2005). Parents' leisure: the impact of raising a

    child with down syndrome. *Occupational Therapy International*, *12*(3), 180–

    194. http://doi.org/10.1002/oti.4

Palfrey, J. G., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: understanding the first generation of*

    digital natives. New York: Basic Books.

Paul, C. A. (2011). Don't play me. In *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on*

    Foundations of Digital Games (pp. 262–264). ACM Press.

    http://doi.org/10.1145/2159365.2159406

Pearce, C. (2006). Productive Play: Game Culture From the Bottom Up. *Games and*

    Culture, *1*(1), 17–24. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412005281418

Pearce, C. (2009). *Communities of play: emergent cultures in multiplayer games and*

    virtual worlds. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Philipp, S. F. (1995). Race and leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, *17*(2), 109–120. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490409509513247

Phillips, W. (2012). In Defense of Memes. Retrieved February 28, 2015, from http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/phillips/

Pinchefsky, C. (2013, March 27). Really? IGDA Party At GDC Brings On The Female Dancers. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolpinchefsky/2013/03/27/really-igda-party-at-gdc-brings-on-the-female-dancers/

Pitcher, J. (2014, November 13). Warlords of Draenor Recovering From Launch Day DDoS Attack. Retrieved from http://ca.ign.com/articles/2014/11/14/warlords-of-draenor-recovering-from-launch-day-ddos-attack

Prensky, M. (2001a). *Digital Game-Based Learning*. McGraw-Hill.

Prensky, M. (2001b). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *On the Horizon*, *9*(5). Retrieved from http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf.

Prensky, M. (2001c). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part II: Do They Really Think Differently? *On the Horizon*, *9*(6).

Prensky, M. (2006). *Don't Bother Me Mom - I'm Learning!* Paragon House Publishers.

Prescott, S. (2014, November 13). World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor expansion experiencing launch problems. Retrieved from http://www.pcgamer.com/world-of-warcraft-warlords-of-draenor-expansion-experiences-launch-problems/#!

Prodan, R., & Nae, V. (2009). Prediction-based real-time resource provisioning for

massively multiplayer online games. *Future Generation Computer Systems*, *25*,

785–793.

Reilly, J. (2010, October 7). World of Warcraft Reaches 12 Million Subscribers.

Retrieved May 2, 2014, from http://ca.ign.com/articles/2010/10/07/world-of-

warcraft-reaches-12-million-subscribers

Reis, A. C., Thompson-Carr, A., & Lovelock, B. (2012). Parks and families: addressing

management facilitators and constraints to outdoor recreation participation.

Annals of Leisure Research, *15*(4), 315–334.

http://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2012.737299

Richmond, J., & Wilson, J. C. (2008). Are Graphic Media Violence, Aggression and

Moral Disengagement Related? *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, *15*(2), 350–

357. http://doi.org/10.1080/13218710802199716

Risser, R., Haindl, G., & Ståhl, A. (2010). Barriers to senior citizens' outdoor mobility in

Europe. *European Journal of Ageing*, *7*(2), 69–80.

http://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-010-0146-4

Romano, A. (2014, August 25). Adult women are now the largest demographic in

gaming. Retrieved August 30, 2014, from http://www.dailydot.com/geek/adult-

women-largest-gaming-demographic/

Russell, R. V., & Stage, F. K. (1996). Leisure as Burden: Sudanese Refugee Women.

Journal of Leisure Research, *28*(2), 108–121.

Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2012). Hypermasculinity & Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(3), 401–416. http://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2012.705199

Schreier, J. (2014, April 24). A Look At The Insane History Of Eve Online. Retrieved December 21, 2014, from http://kotaku.com/one-writer-is-chronicling-the-insane-history-of-eve-onl-1567084192

Searle, M. S., & Jackson, E. L. (1985). Socioeconomic variations in perceived barriers to recreation participation among would–be participants. *Leisure Sciences*, *7*(2), 227–249. http://doi.org/10.1080/01490408509512120

Senior, T. (2011, December 1). Eve Online senior producer on why "we ultimately failed" with Incarna. Retrieved March 6, 2015, from http://www.pcgamer.com//eve-online-senior-producer-on-why-we-ultimately-failed-with-incarna/

Seymour, E., & Hewitt, N. M. (1997). *Talking About Leaving: Why Undergraduates Leave the Sciences*. Boulder, CO, USA: Westview Press.

Shank, J. W. (1986). An Exploration of Leisure in the Lives of Dual-Career Women. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *18*(1), 300–319.

Shaw, A. (2010a). *Identity, Identification, and Media Representation in Video Game Play: An audience reception study* (Ph.D. Dissertation). University of Pennsylvania.

Shaw, A. (2010b). What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies. *Games and Culture*, *5*, 403–424.

Shaw, A. (2010c). What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies. *Games and Culture*, *5*(4), 403–424. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009360414

Shaw, A. (2012). Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer

   identity. *New Media & Society*, *14*(1), 28–44.

   http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811410394

Shaw, A. (2013). On Not Becoming Gamers: Moving Beyond the Constructed Audience.

   Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, *1*(2).

   http://doi.org/10.7264/N33N21B3

Shen, C., & Williams, D. (2011). Unpacking Time Online: Connecting Internet and

   Massively Multiplayer Online Game Use With Psychosocial Well-Being.

   Communication Research, *38*(1), 123–149.

   http://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210377196

Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual

   Troublemaker. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *18*(3), 362–377.

   http://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12013

Shultz Colby, R., & Colby, R. (2008). A Pedagogy of Play: Integrating Computer Games

   into the Writing Classroom. *Computers and Composition*, *25*(3), 300–312.

   http://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2008.04.005

Smith, R. W. (1987). Leisure of disable tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *14*(3),

   376–389. http://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(87)90109-5

Sóleyjarson, O. G. (2009). *EVE Online: Leikir, sköpun og samfélög [EVE Online:

   Games, Creativity and Communities]* (Mini Thesis - Mhil to PhD Upgrade).

   University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland. Retrieved from

   http://hdl.handle.net/1946/2963

Squire, K. (2011). *Video games and learning : teaching and participatory culture in the digital age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Stanton-Rich, H. M., & Iso-Ahola, S. E. (1998). Burnout and Leisure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *28*(1), 1931–1950.

Stebbins, R. A. (1979). *Amateurs: on the margin between work and leisure*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Steiner, P. (1993, July 5). On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog. *The New Yorker*.

Steinkuehler, C., Alagoz, E., King, E., & Martin, C. (2012). A Cross Case Analysis of Two Out-of-School Programs Based on Virtual Worlds. *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations*, *4*(1), 25–54. http://doi.org/10.4018/jgcms.2012010102

Steinkuehler, C., & King, E. (2009). Digital literacies for the disengaged: creating after school contexts to support boys' game-based literacy skills. *On the Horizon*, *17*(1), 47–59. http://doi.org/10.1108/10748120910936144

Steinkuehler, C., King, E., Alagoz, E., Anton, G., Chu, S., Elmergreen, J., … Zhang, B. (2011). Let Me Know When She Stops Talking: Using Games for Learning Without Colonizing Play. In *Proceedings of the 7th international conference on Games + Learning + Society Conference* (pp. 210–220). ETC Press.

Stetina, B. U., Kothgassner, O. D., Lehenbauer, M., & Kryspin-Exner, I. (2011). Beyond the fascination of online-games: Probing addictive behavior and depression in the world of online-gaming. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*(1), 473–479. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.09.015

Stickney, A. (2014, October 25). Blizzard offering 7 days of game time to select accounts. Retrieved March 25, 2015, from http://www.engadget.com/2014/10/25/blizzard-offering-7-days-of-game-time-to-select-accounts/

Stone, A. R. (1996). *The war of desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Stout, J. G., Dasgupta, N., Hunsinger, M., & McManus, M. A. (2011). STEMing the tide: Using ingroup experts to inoculate women's self-concept in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*(2), 255–270. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0021385

Suh, S., Kim, S. W., & Kim, N. J. (2010). Effectiveness of MMORPG-based instruction in elementary English education in Korea. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *26*(5), 370–378. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00353.x

Suler, J. (2004). The Online Disinhibition Effect. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *7*(3), 321–326.

Summers, A., & Miller, M. K. (2014). From Damsels in Distress to Sexy Superheroes: How the Portrayal of Sexism in Video Game Magazines has Changed in the Last 20 Years. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1–13. http://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2014.882371

Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). *The ambiguity of play* (2. printing, 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

Suzor, N., & Woodford, D. (2013). Evaluating Consent and Legitimacy amongst Shifting

    Community Norms: an EVE Online Case Study. *Journal of Virtual Worlds*

    Research, *6*(3), 1–14.

Tach, D. (2015, January 27). Report: AOL shuttering Joystiq in the coming weeks.

    Retrieved January 27, 2015, from

    http://www.polygon.com/2015/1/27/7920725/joystiq-closing-aol

Tapscott, D. (1998). *Growing up digital: the rise of the net generation*. New York:

    McGraw-Hill.

Tapscott, D. (2009). *Grown up digital: how the net generation is changing your world*.

    New York: McGraw-Hill.

Taylor, N., Bergstrom, K., Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2015). Alienated Playbour:

    Relations of Production in EVE Online. *Games and Culture*, *10*(4), 365–388.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014565507

Taylor, N., Jenson, J., de Castell, S., & Dilouya, B. (2014). Public Displays of Play:

    Studying Online Games in Physical Settings. *Journal of Computer-Mediated*

    Communication, *19*(4), 763–779. http://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12054

Taylor, N., McArthur, V., & Jenson, J. (2012). Virtual postcards. ACM Press.

    http://doi.org/10.1145/2212776.2212791

Taylor, N. T. (2010). *Power Play: Digital Gaming Goes Pro* (Ph.D. Dissertation). York

    University (Canada), Canada.

Taylor, T. L. (2003a). Intentional bodies: Virtual environments and the designers who

    shape them. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, *19*(1), 23–34.

Taylor, T. L. (2003b). Power gamers just want to have fun?: Instrumental play in a

    MMOG. In *Level Up Conference Proceedings* (pp. 300–311). Utrecht University,

    Netherlands. Retrieved from http://www.digra.org/dl/db/05163.32071

Taylor, T. L. (2009). The Assemblage of Play. *Games and Culture*, *4*(4), 331–339.

    http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009343576

Terlecki, M., Brown, J., Harner-Steciw, L., Irvin-Hannum, J., Marchetto-Ryan, N., Ruhl,

    L., & Wiggins, J. (2010). Sex Differences and Similarities in Video Game

    Experience, Preferences, and Self-Efficacy: Implications for the Gaming Industry.

    Current Psychology, *30*(1), 22–33. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-010-9095-5

Thorne, S. L., Black, R. W., & Sykes, J. M. (2009). Second Language Use, Socialization,

    and Learning in Internet Interest Communities and Online Gaming. *The Modern*

    Language Journal, *93*, 802–821. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-

    4781.2009.00974.x

Tirone, S. (2003). "Evening the Playing Field": Recreation in a Low-Income Canadian

    Community. *Leisure/Loisir*, *28*(1-2), 155–174.

    http://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2003.9649944

Tufte, E. R. (2001). *The visual display of quantitative information* (2nd ed). Cheshire,

    Conn: Graphics Press.

Turner, N. E. (2008). A Comment on "Problems with the Concept of Video Game

    'Addiction': Some Case Study Examples." *International Journal of Mental*

    Health and Addiction, *6*(2), 186–190. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-007-9125-1

Vanderhoef, J. (2013). Casual Threats: The Feminization of Casual Video Games. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, *1*(2). Retrieved from http://adanewmedia.org/2013/06/issue2-vanderhoef/

Van Rooij, A. J., Meerkerk, G.-J., Schoenmakers, T. M., Griffiths, M., & van de Mheen, D. (2010). Video game addiction and social responsibility. *Addiction Research & Theory*, *18*(5), 489–493. http://doi.org/10.3109/16066350903168579

Waddell, T. F., Ivory, J. D., Conde, R., Long, C., & McDonnell, R. (2014). White Man's Virtual World: A Systematic Content Analysis of Gender and Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Games. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, *7*(2), 1–14.

Wajcman, J. (1996). *Feminism confronts technology*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Warmelink, H., & Siitonen, M. (2011). Player Communities in Multiplayer Online Games: A Systematic Review of Empirical Research. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play*. Utrecht, NL.

Warr, P. (2013, May 9). World of Warcraft drops 1.3 million subscribers in three months (Wired UK). Retrieved July 6, 2013, from http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-05/9/wow-subscribers-fall

Wawro, A. (2015, January 30). Joystiq and Massively shut down amid AOL downsizing. Retrieved June 27, 2015, from http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/235439/Joystiq_and_Massively_shut_down_amid_AOL_downsizing.php

Webber, J. E. (2013, March 28). GDC Party Alienates Female Attendees with Scantily Clad Female Dancers. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from

http://www.gameranx.com/updates/id/13709/article/gdc-party-alienates-female-attendees-with-scantily-clad-female-dancers/

Wells, H. G. (1913). *Little Wars; a game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys' games and books*. Retrieved from http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3691

White, E. E. (2008). Massively Multiplayer Online Fraud: Why the Introduction of Real World Law in a Virtual Context Is Good for Everyone. *Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property*, *6*(2), 228–243.

Williams, D. (forthcoming). The perils and promise of large-scale data extraction. MacArthur Foundation. Retrieved from http://dmitriwilliams.com/MacChapter.doc

Williams, D. (2010). The Mapping Principle, and a Research Framework for Virtual Worlds. *Communication Theory*, *20*(4), 451–470. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01371.x

Williams, D., Consalvo, M., Caplan, S., & Yee, N. (2009). Looking for Gender: Gender Roles and Behaviors Among Online Gamers. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(4), 700–725. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01453.x

Williams, D., Ducheneaut, N., Xiong, L., Zhang, Y., Yee, N., & Nickell, E. (2006). From Tree House to Barracks: The Social Life of Guilds in World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture*, *1*(4), 338–361. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412006292616

Williams, D., Kennedy, T. L. M., & Moore, R. J. (2010). Behind the avatar: The patterns, practices, and functions of role playing in MMOs. *Games and Culture*, *6*(2), 171–200. http://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010364983

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games. *New Media & Society*, *11*(5), 815–834. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105354

Williams, D., Yee, N., & Caplan, S. E. (2008). Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(4), 993–1018. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.00428.x

Williams, I. G. (2014, June 5). World of Darkness - the inside story on the death of a game. Retrieved March 6, 2015, from http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/05/world-of-darkness-the-inside-story-mmo-ccp-white-wolf

Winner, L. (1980). Do Artifacts Have Politics? *Daedalus*, *109*(1), 121–136.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. New York: Basic Books.

Witkowski, E. (2013). Eventful masculinities: Negotiations of hegemonic sporting masculinities at LANs. In M. Consalvo, K. Mitgutsch, & A. Stein, *Sports Videogames* (pp. 217–235). New York: Routledge.

Wong, N., Tang, A., Livingston, I., Gutwin, C., & Mandryk, R. (2009). Character Sharing in World of Warcraft. In I. Wagner, H. Tellioğlu, E. Balka, C. Simone, & L. Ciolfi (Eds.), *ECSCW 2009* (pp. 343–362). London: Springer London. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-84882-854-4_20

Woodford, D. (2013). Hanging out is hard to do: Methodology in non-avatar environments. *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, *4*(3), 275–288.

Yardi, S., & boyd, danah. (2010). Dynamic Debates: An Analysis of Group Polarization Over Time on Twitter. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(5), 316–327. http://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610380011

Yee, N. (2008). Befriending Ogres and Wood-Elves: Relationship Formation and The Social Architecture of Norrath. *Game Studies*, *8*(2), [Online].

Yee, N., Ducheneaut, N., Yao, M., & Nelson, L. (2011). Do men heal more when in drag? (p. 773). ACM Press. http://doi.org/10.1145/1978942.1979054

Yin-Poole, W. (2012, March 26). CCP launches investigation after Eve Online FanFest panel accused of mocking suicidal player. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-03-26-ccp-launches-investigation-after-eve-online-fanfest-panel-accused-of-mocking-suicidal-player

Zacny, O. (2011, October 23). CCP chief on layoffs, mistakes: "We had the mindset that we could achieve anything." Retrieved March 6, 2015, from http://www.pcgamer.com//ccp-chief-on-layoffs-mistakes-we-had-the-mindset-that-we-could-achieve-anything/

Appendices

Vocabulary and List of Abbreviations

Throughout this dissertation I use the terms "play", "player", and "game", all of which require clarification. A dictionary definition of play typically will describe the act of playing a game, a recreational pursuit, and/or the activity of children. Similarly, "game" is frequently defined as an activity done for amusement and/or entertainment involving some degree of competition and has a set of rules that all participants are expected to follow. However, scholars who have written about play and games such as Huizinga (1955), Caillois (1961), Winnicott (1971), or Sutton-Smith (2001) have frequently debated what words such as "play" means, so definitional work is not as straightforward. For example, Caillois defines play has having the following six characteristics:

> **Free:** in which playing is not obligatory;
> **Separate:** circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
> **Uncertain:** the course of which cannot be determined, nor the results obtained beforehand;
> **Unproductive:** creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;
> **Governed by rules:** under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
> **Make-believe**: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life. (2006, p. 128)

To Caillois, play is an occasion of "pure waste: a waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often a waste of money" (2006, p. 125). This characterization of play as being unproductive has since been critiqued. Pearce (2009) reminds us that play frequently

inspires creative activities that often result in something new being produced, such as the tradition of creating costumes to wear at conventions or renaissance fairs (p. 26). "Productive play" also happens via digital games as well, through creating new artifacts by leveraging (and sometimes subverting) the game's affordances (Pearce, 2006) or using third-party software or creating new tools to better optimize play as found in Taylor's (2003b) investigation of "power gamers". Similarly, education scholars who research play-based learning would also find the definition of play premised on its unproductiveness or wastefulness to be problematic.

Play being unproductive largely rest on the assumption that it occurs within "the magic circle", or in other words that it is separated or different from the rest of one's life. This term in relationship to the theorization of play is commonly attributed to Huizinga (1955) where he wrote the shared suspension of belief where play requires participants to mutually agree to abide by a new set of rules unrelated to those that govern everyday life. Just as the unproductivity of play has been critiqued, so has the idea that the magic circle of play is impenetrable has been problematized. Instead, more recent theorizing about play, especially the act of playing a game, recognizes that this magic circle is highly porous and that what happens inside a game can never be fully separated from one's "offline" or "real" life, see for example Castronova (2005), Consalvo (2007, 2009), and Pearce (2009). In this dissertation my use of the term "play" can be defined according to Caillois' description provided above, with two caveats: play can indeed be productive and that play does not necessarily happen in a bounded circle that remains separate from reality or the rest of one's life.

Defining "game" also requires stipulations, especially if the definition rests on the need for clearly delineated goals or objectives. *EVE Online* (EVE), the Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) at the centre of this dissertation, is proudly described by its developer as a "sandbox" style game: an open world in which players are said to have free reign to choose their own activities based on what they find most interesting ("Find Your Path in the Sandbox," n.d.). The distinction between "game" and "not a game" is tricky, and as Chapter 2 will illustrate, often ideologically loaded and constructed in a way to qualify some forms of participation as more legitimate than others. Rather than detail the extensive and ongoing dispute about what does/does not constitute a game, I draw attention to the summary of this debate provided by Pearce (2009, pp. 26–30), specifically her work describing a variety of theoretical approaches to defining what a game is, summarizing that a game "is a formal system for structuring play constrained by a set of rules that prescribe the means of achieving a specified goal" (p. 26). In the case of EVE and other sandbox-style games the specified goal or objective of the game is often set by the players (rather than the game's developers), but despite its lack of top-down imposition of objectives, EVE-play is still very goal oriented. I will return to the specific affordances of EVE and where they depart from MMOG conventions in Chapter 3.

Finally, I note that I have made the conscious decision to use the term "player" in place of "gamer", when talking about those who participate in the act of playing a game. While gamer is often used to denote someone who plays games (both analogue and digital), this specific term carries with it baggage both in terms of stereotypical assumptions about demographics and/or personalities (Bergstrom et al., 2014; Kowert

et al., 2012) and a reluctance for some players to feel entitled to take on the term to describe their own relationship to games (Shaw, 2010a, 2012). The term player, when used throughout this dissertation, should simply be taken to refer to the person who is taking part in a game but not an indication of their level of expertise, skill or time commitment to any particular game or game genre.

List of Abbreviations

Throughout this dissertation I rely on abbreviations to assist in streamlining the text. The first time each abbreviation is used, I include both the full and shorted version. For reference, I have also included frequently used abbreviations and their definitions in the table below:

CCP/CCP Games	Crowd Control Productions	The game development company that created *EVE Online*
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication	Human communication that is facilitated through the use of electronic devices. As MMOGs provide opportunities for players to talk to each other via the game client, in this dissertation I consider in-game communication to be a form of Computer Mediated Communication.
CSM	Council of Stellar Management	Elected by current *EVE Online* players, the CSM is tasked with representing the players' views and opinions to CCP. For more information about how CCP conceptualizes the CSM and their relationship to it, see: http://community.eveonline.com/community/csm/
ISK	InterStellar Kredit	The in-game currency used in the *EVE Online* gameworld
MMOG	Massively Multiplayer Online Game	A genre of digital games where thousands of players interact in a shared, persistent online environment
NPC	Non-player character	A character controlled by the game, not another player
PLEX	Pilot License	An in-game item that can be exchanged for 30 days of account

	Extension	time in *EVE Online*. Players can purchase this item from CCP (for US dollars or Euros) and then can sell it in-game to another player for ISK
PVE	Player verses environment	A term commonly used in MMOGs to describe combat against game controlled enemies (NPCs)
PVP	Player verses player	A term commonly used in MMOGs to describe combat against other players

Appendix B: ***Survey Questions***

As described in Chapter 4, the *MMOG Experiences Survey* utilized a branched survey

structure, presenting a different set of questions based on how the participant answered

the question "Are you familiar with the MMOG EVE Online?" The survey was structured

as follows:

1. Introduction to assess gaming experience
    a. Video Games experience
    b. MMOGs experience
2. Are you familiar with EVE Online?
    a. Yes I currently play
        i. Current player survey
        ii. Player theory survey
    b. I previously played
        i. Former player survey
        ii. Player theory survey
    c. I know about the game but haven't played
        i. Non-player survey
        ii. Player theory survey
    d. I don't know / Unsure
        i. Watch this trailer & answer some questions
3. Demographics
4. Final thoughts

The full survey is presented below.

Video Game Experience

When answering questions in this section, think about digital and/or video game (including games played on a computer, console, and/or handheld device).

1. Which of the following do you own? Which of the following do you use to play games?

	I own this	I use this to play games
Console (e.g. Wii)		
Handheld device (e.g. Gameboy)		
Cellphone		
Tablet (e.g. iPad)		
Laptop computer		
Desktop computer		

2. Do you consider yourself a gamer?
- Yes

- No
- *(if no)* Why do <u>not</u> consider yourself a gamer?

3. What genre of games do you play? Please provide an example of a game from that genre that you particularly enjoy (check all that apply)

Type of Game	Example of from that you particularly enjoy
- Role Playing Game (RPG) - Social Games - Puzzles - Multiplayer - Sports - Indie - Strategy - Racing - Adventure - Simulation - Action - Other: _____	

4. Did we miss anything? Please describe any other video game genres that you enjoy. If possible, please provide an example of a game title for each genre that we skipped.

- Do you play massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs)?
- Yes
- No
    - *(if no)* Why do you <u>not</u> play Massively Multiplayer Online Games?
    - *(if no)* skip to "Are you familiar with the MMOG EVE Online?"

MMOG Experience

For the questions in this section, please think about Massively Multiplayer Online Games (e.g. World of Warcraft, EverQuest, EVE Online).

Have you played any of the following MMOGs?
- Age of Conan
- Aion
- Allods Online
- Club Penguin
- DC Universe Online
- Earth and Beyond
- EverQuest I and II
- EVE Online
- Final Fantasy XI or XIV
- Guild Wars or Guild Wars 2
- Lord of the Rings Online

- Maple Story
- RIFT
- Runescape
- Star Wars Galaxies or The Old Republic
- Ultima Online
- Warhammer Online
- World of Warcraft
- Other: _____

Game	Please indicate your level of expertise for each of the MMOGs you listed above	How long have you played these games? If they are games you do not currently play, how long did you play before quitting?	When was the last time you logged in to these games?	How would you describe your play history?
Game names are automatically populated based on answers to previous question				

If you would like to describe your play experiences for a MMOG not listed above, please do so here: _____

Where do you usually play MMOGs?
- Home
- Friend's house
- Family member's house
- Romantic partner's house
- Work
- School
- Public gamin events (e.g. LAN party)
- Gaming tournaments
- Internet café
- Coffee shop
- Library
- Other: _____

Who do you usually play MMOGs with?
- Brother or male sibling
- Sister or female sibling
- Father or male guardian
- Mother or female guardian

- Other male relative (cousin, uncle, grandfather, etc.)
- Other female relative (cousin, aunt, grandmother, etc.)
- Male friend
- Female friend
- Male romantic partner
- Female romantic partner
- Someone I met while playing a MMOG
- Someone I met while playing another type of game (not a MMOG)
- Someone I met on a forum or website (e.g. Reddit.com)
- Other: _____

Why do you play MMOGs?
- Spend time with friends
- Spend time with family
- Spend time with romantic partner
- Experience a virtual world
- Meet new people
- Do things I can't do in real life
- Hang out with people like me
- Be someone different
- Relax, kill time, or hang out
- Make real world money
- Make virtual world money
- Do online research
- Other: _____

Do you use a language other than English when playing MMOGs?
- No, I only use English
- Yes, I use a language other than English
   - What language(s) do you speak and/or type when playing MMOGs? _____

Indicating familiarity with EVE Online

Are you familiar with the MMOG EVE Online?
- Yes. I currently play EVE Online.
- Yes. I have played EVE Online previously, but do not currently have an active account.
- Yes. I am familiar with EVE Online but have not played the game.
- I am not familiar with this game.
- I am unsure if I am familiar with this game

Current players

Your answer to the previous question indicates that you currently play EVE Online. The questions in this section are about your thoughts and experiences playing EVE. If you wish to add further comments about other MMOGs, there is an open-ended comment section at the end of this survey.

How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played the game before? _____
When did you create your first EVE account?
How many active EVE accounts do you currently have?
How many EVE accounts do you have in total (active and inactive)
What convinced you to try playing EVE?
- A current EVE player
- A former EVE player
- Romantic partner
- Friend
- Coworker/Classmate
- A review of EVE Online
- An article or blog that mentioned EVE Online
- A banner ad
- A targeted email from CCP/EVE Online
- Watching EVE-related videos
- Social media
- Discussion on a website
    - Which website(s): _____
- Other: _____

Was it difficult to learn how to play this game? Why or why not?
How long did it take you to feel comfortable with the basic mechanics of the game?
How long did it take you to stop feeling like a newbie/novice player?

What resources did you consult when learning to play EVE?
- Asking questions using in-game chat
- Corporation websites
- Eveonline.com
- EVE University
- Help from my corporation
- In-game tutorial
- Newbie guides written by other EVE players
- Official EVE forums
- Forums on other websites
- Reddit.com
- Wikis
- Friends that play
- Other: _____

What in your opinion is the best way to learn how to play EVE?

Do you now or have you ever participated in any of the following activities? If yes, please rate how much you enjoyed each activity

Activity	Level of enjoyment (likert scale)
PVP	
Mining	
Running missions	

Pirate hunting/ratting	
Trading	
Playing the economic market	
Wormhole exploration	
Manufacturing	
Scamming other players	
Roaming	
Roleplaying	
Leading fleets	
Talking to other players using text chat	
Talking to other palyers using voice chat (e.g. mumble, ventrillo)	
Helping new players	
Spending time with my corporation	
Spying/espionage	
Griefing	

Did we miss anything? Please describe any other activities you really enjoy or really dislike in EVE that were not mentioned above: _____

Have you done any of the following?
- Attended Fanfest
- Attended a gaming convention other than Fanfest (e.g. Blizzcon)
- Attended a fandom related convention (e.g. ComicCon, Dragon Con, etc.)
- Read an EVE related web forum/website
- Posted to an EVE related web forum/website
- Used social media to talk about EVE (e.g. #tweetfleet on twitter)
- Watched videos about EVE (e.g. on YouTube)
- Taken screenshots/screen captures of your EVE play
- Recorded video of your EVE play
- Posted videos about EVE (e.g. uploading a video to YouTube or Vimeo)
- Created EVE-related artwork
- Created EVE-related propaganda
- Met people offline that you met in EVE
- Cosplayed as an EVE-related character
- Suggested to someone else that they should try playing EVE

When I play EVE, I primarily played:

How long did you played EVE?

Have you stopped playing EVE more than once? (e.g. have you deactivated and reactivated an EVE account multiple times or taken more than one break from the game)
How many times have you stopped playing EVE?

Is this another break, or have you quit for good?

Do you talk to people that you have met in EVE outside of the game client?

How do you stay in contact with them?
- Email
- Instant messaging
- Jabber
- LANs/public gaming events
- Skype or other Internet voice protocols
- Social media (e.g. twitter, facebook, etc)
- Spending time together offline
- Text messages
- Web forums
- Other: _____

Have you ever been part of a corporation?

What sort of advantages/disadvantages did you experience while being part of a corporation?

What is your most memorable moment playing EVE?

How do you pay for your EVE subscription(s)?
- Credit Card
- Pre-purchased game time
- PLEX
- I do not pay for my own game time

Other: _____

Former Players

Your answer to a previous question indicates that while you are not currently a player, you have previously played EVE Online.

The questions in this section are about your thoughts and experiences playing EVE.

If you wish to add further comments about other MMOGs, there is an open-ended comment section at the end of this survey.

Why are you not currently playing EVE? _____

How would you describe EVE to someone who has never played the game before?

When did you create your first EVE account?
- Other

In total, how many EVE accounts did you have?

Who or what convinced you to try playing EVE Online?
- A current EVE player
- A former EVE player
- Romantic partner

- Friend
- Coworker/Classmate
- A review of EVE Online
- An article or blog that mentioned EVE Online
- A banner ad
- A targeted email from CCP/EVE Online
- Watching EVE-related videos
- Social media
- Discussion on a website
    - Which website(s): _____
- Other: _____

Was it difficult to learn how to play this game? Why or why not?
How long did it take you to feel comfortable with the basic mechanics of the game?
How long did it take you to stop feeling like a newbie/novice player?

What resources did you consult when learning to play EVE?
- Asking questions using in-game chat
- Corporation websites
- Eveonline.com
- EVE University
- Help from my corporation
- In-game tutorial
- Newbie guides written by other EVE players
- Official EVE forums
- Forums on other websites
- Reddit.com
- Wikis
- Friends that play
- Other: _____

What in your opinion is the best way to learn how to play EVE?

Do you now or have you ever participated in any of the following activities? If yes, please rate how much you enjoyed each activity

Activity	Level of enjoyment (likert scale)
PVP	
Mining	
Running missions	
Pirate hunting/ratting	
Trading	
Playing the economic market	
Wormhole exploration	
Manufacturing	
Scamming other players	
Roaming	
Roleplaying	
Leading fleets	

Talking to other players using text chat	
Talking to other palyers using voice chat (e.g. mumble, ventrillo)	
Helping new players	
Spending time with my corporation	
Spying/espionage	
Griefing	

Did we miss anything? Please describe any other activities you really enjoy or really dislike in EVE that were not mentioned above: _____

Have you done any of the following?
- Attended Fanfest
- Attended a gaming convention other than Fanfest (e.g. Blizzcon)
- Attended a fandom related convention (e.g. ComicCon, Dragon Con, etc.)
- Read an EVE related web forum/website
- Posted to an EVE related web forum/website
- Used social media to talk about EVE (e.g. #tweetfleet on twitter)
- Watched videos about EVE (e.g. on YouTube)
- Taken screenshots/screen captures of your EVE play
- Recorded video of your EVE play
- Posted videos about EVE (e.g. uploading a video to YouTube or Vimeo)
- Created EVE-related artwork
- Created EVE-related propaganda
- Met people offline that you met in EVE
- Cosplayed as an EVE-related character
- Suggested to someone else that they should try playing EVE

When I play EVE, I primarily play:

How long have you played EVE?

Have you ever taken a break from playing EVE?

Why did you take a break from EVE? Why did you come back?

How many breaks have you taken from EVE?

Do you talk to people that you have met in EVE outside of the game client?

How do you stay in contact with them?
- Email
- Instant messaging
- Jabber
- LANs/public gaming events
- Skype or other Internet voice protocols
- Social media (e.g. twitter, facebook, etc)
- Spending time together offline

- Text messages
- Web forums
- Other: _____

Have you ever been part of a corporation?

What sort of advantages/disadvantages did you experience while being part of a corporation?

What is your most memorable moment playing EVE?

How do you pay for your EVE subscription(s)?
- Credit Card
- Pre-purchased game time
- PLEX
- I do not pay for my own game time

Other: _____

Non-Players

Your answer to a previous question indicates that while you have not played the game, you have heard about EVE Online. The questions in this section are about your thoughts about EVE Online only.

If you wish to add further comments about other MMOGs, there is an open-ended comment section at the end of this survey.

What do you know about EVE? _____

Have you heard about EVE from any of the following sources?
- A current EVE player
- A former EVE player
- Romantic partner
- Friend
- Co-worker/Classmate
- A review of EVE Online
- An article or blog that mentioned EVE Online
- A banner ad
- A targeted email from CCP/EVE Online
- Watching EVE-related videos
- Social media
- Discussion on a website
  - Which website(s)? _____
- Other: _____

Do you know anyone who currently plays EVE?
- Yes
  - Have they ever tried to convince you to paly EVE?
  - How did they describe EVE to you?

      o How would you characterize this person?
  • No

Opinions about EVE Online players
This section asks you about what you know about other people who play EVE Online.

If you are not sure about any of the answers, it is fine to use your gut feelings or your own personal theories.

There are no wrong answers!

How many people do you think are currently playing EVE? _____

In your opinion who do you think plays EVE?

Do you think that the EVE community is different from other popular MMOGs (e.g. World of Warcraft)?

In what ways is EVE different?

What is your best guess of the percentage of male players in this game community? Please enter a value between 0 and 100

Where do you think EVE players live? Please rank the following geographic areas from most to fewest players

What is your best guess of the average age of EVE players?

Do you have any further comments about the gender, race, and/or age of EVE players?

Do you have any additional thoughts about EVE or the game's players that you would like to share?

Not familiar with EVE Online
In a previous question you have indicated you are not familiar with the MMOG EVE Online. Below is a recent trailer for the game. Please watch the trailer and answer the questions based on the video.

Notes: This trailer has sound. These questions are optional. If you do not wish to answer them, click "next" below to skip ahead to the final section of this survey.

Would you consider playing this game? Why or why not?

Based on the trailer you just watched, what do you think the objectives and/or goals of this game might be?

Who do you think the target demographic(s) of this game might be?

Is there anything else you would like to add about this trailer or MMOGs in general?

Demographics
Please answer the following questions about who you are offline. This data will only be used in aggregate form.

How old are you?

With what gender(s) do you identify?
- Female
- Male
- Trans/trans*
- Prefer not to say
- Other

With which sexual orientation do you most closely identify?
- Heterosexual/straight
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Prefer not to say
- Other

What was the first language you learned?

What language(s) do you use to speak to:
- Your friends: _____
- Your parents: _____
- Your classmates/coworkers: _____
- The people you play games with: _____

What racial/ethnic group(s) do you use to describe yourself?
- American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous or Aboriginal
- Asian or Indian/South Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern or Arabic
- White or Caucasian
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

What country were you born in?

What country do you currently live in?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Primary or elementary school
- Secondary or high school
- Trade school or technical college

- Community or junior college
- Undergraduate or bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree (Master's)
- Graduate degree (PhD/doctorate)
- Professional Degree
- Other: _____

What was your primary area of study?

Are you currently a student?

What level of education are you currently enrolled in?
- Primary or elementary school
- Secondary or high school
- Trade school or technical college
- Community or junior college
- Undergraduate or bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree (Master's)
- Graduate degree (PhD/doctorate)
- Professional Degree

What is your current area of study?

What is your current area of employment?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. You are now eligible to enter a draw for a $100 amazon gift certificate.

The next stage of this research involves interviews about EVE Online. These interviews are completely optional, will last 30 to 60 minutes, and you will have the choice between a skype call or instant messages. If you are selected to participate in the second phase of research and complete an interview, you will be given a 1 month game card for your MMOG of choice OR an electronic amazon gift certificate.

Please note that not everyone will be chosen to participate.

If you know someone else who might be interested in participating, you can use this url to share the survey with others: http://bit.ly/17xJ7l8"

Appendix C: *Ethics Certificate*

YORK U
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

**OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)**

5th Floor,
Kaneff Tower,
4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON

Memo

To: Kelly Bergstrom, Faculty of Education

From: Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics
          (on behalf of   *Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)*

Date: **Friday, July 05, 2013**

Re: **Ethics Approval**

        Virtual Inequality: A Woman's Place in Cyberspace

_____

I am writing to inform you that the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee has reviewed and approved the above project.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: or via email at:

        Yours sincerely,

        Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
        Office of Research Ethics