How Do You Catch a Cloud and Pin it Down?
The struggle to define and identify the GamerGate "movement"

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Abstract

In 2014, a hashtag on Twitter became a crystalizing point for a proto-social movement. This movement, organized around #GamerGate, has been both extremely active and extremely difficult to explain and identify. This paper seeks to examine the struggle of those inside and outside of the movement to identify what it meant and what it meant for the identities of those who supported as well as those who opposed it by analyzing the conversations carried on in the comments sections of various web sites where the topic was raised.

Introduction

One of the great promises of the internet age, in particular the era in which group interactions moved from being based largely on in-person or voice-based communication to on-line, text-based interaction, was that personal identity could become more fluid. Sex, gender, age, ethnicity, etc. would become less important than the ways in which a person communicated and the content of their communication. It was believed that the internet would mean that identities could be more fluid—the other people in the group conversation could be anyone from anywhere: A 16 year-old boy from India could argue with a 75 year-old woman from Brazil and both would be on equal standing—neither prejudged by their appearance and the identities those appearances suggested to others.

Unfortunately, making identity more fluid or more unknown can have the unfortunate side effect of making identity more assumed and more homogenous. In simple terms, if a person cannot see or hear cues as to the identity of another person, that person may assume that the other person has a certain set of traits based solely on presumption. A person communicating on a gaming board, for example might be assumed to be a young, white male because that is the presumed identity of a "gamer." In an era where communication is taking place increasingly on-line, the question of how identities are formed, maintained and either confirmed or disconfirmed is vitally important.

The sites of the conflict are, in one sense, almost too available for study. The establishment and contestation of identity occurs on weblogs, in on-line discussion forums, in the comments sections of video sharing sites, etc. In part because identity is a communicative act (one must present an identity to others and those others may, though communication, either confirm or disconfirm the

asserted identity), it makes sense for this conversation to take place in public or semi-public forums. In another sense, the conflict is too public, because there are countless locations where the conversation can and will occur. Conversations, in particular about group identity may occur on niche sites for those who share the identity (gamer sites) or in broader interest sites which those who share the identity and those who share related, but not identical identities mix (technology sites, etc.) or in general interest sites (news sites, etc.) where a wide variety of people gather not based on a particular identity. Thus intra-group identity and inter-group identity communication and even extra-group identity communication may be captured depending on the site of the conversation.

In this paper, a specific engagement over the identity of the "gamers" is considered. The specific incident is known as the #GamerGate controversy. This controversy provides a good example to study because it is, at a central level, a question of identity. For example, user xilefian (2014) asked about the controversy:

> What are the two sides of the argument? And what is the argument? I can't find anywhere that actually explains it, it's all "gaters versus non-gaters" and that means zero to me, what the hell is a Gamergater and why are they sending death threats to families?

So, at an initial level, there is a question of the identity of those engaged in the conflict: the "gamergaters" and the non or anti-"gamergaters."

In a broader sense, in fact, the controversy itself was about identity. One central point in the controversy was about who might properly be called a "gamer." An article in *The Washington Post*, for example, summarized part of the conflict as a struggle over whether "gamer" means those who play (video) games or if it required greater involvement in the gaming community:

> But both #GamerGate users and its opponents say the hashtag is also about what can be called a game and who is considered a gamer. Video games have broader appeal than ever — women now outnumber teenage boys among the game-playing population — raising the hackles of some longtime "traditional gamers." (Kaplan 2014)

Finally, the repercussions of the conflict also had the potential to damage or change the broader societal meaning of the term "gamer." As the controversy spread from the broader interest technology sites to general news sites, like *The Washington Post*. It exposed the identity of those who saw themselves as "gamers" to more people outside the community and thus had a greater risk of

widespread disconfirmation. Patrick O'Roarke (2014), for example, noted that the news events connected to the #GamerGate controversy had already damaged the identity in the public eye:

> The word Gamer now holds a more negative connotation than ever before, especially after the recent shooting threat related to popular feminist gaming critic Anita Sarkeesian speaking at Utah State University, and the harassment of game developer Brianna Wu. There was also the harassment and doxxing of indie game developer Zoe Quinn back in August, the apparent catalyst of the GamerGate movement.

In these three ways, the initial question as to who was participating both in support and in opposition in the #GamerGate controversy, the secondary question of the meaning of who may properly be identified as a "gamer" and the final society ramifications of the controversy and the other events connected to it, the #GamerGate controversy presents a great deal of information to consider the negotiation of and debate over group or movement identity.

Background

As O'Roarke noted, the "gamer" identity was already somewhat problematic or negative in the larger society. The stereotype of "gamers" as predominantly young, white men who were not athletic or socially outgoing was well established. As background for the #GamerGate controversy, two years prior to its appearance, another controversy moved outside of the gamer community and into the lager society. That controversy was centered around a reality program sponsored by Capcom. In particular the actions of one of the team coaches, Aris Bakhtanians, toward a female player on his team (and some of the subsequent commentary on the reaction to Bakhtanians) drew the larger society into the discussion.

Jason Schrier (2012) writing on *Kotaku.com* described the general event:

> This footage, shot on February 23 and brought to our attention today by an anonymous tipster, shows Bakhtanians shooting some lewd remarks at fellow gamer Miranda "Super_Yan" Pakozdi. He takes control of the camera and spends a whole lot of time focusing it on Pakozdi, who appears to be the only woman in the room. He focuses on her butt and breasts, shooing people away when they block his view. He also makes some comments about her feet and thighs that may seem out of line to, well, anybody.

Initially, this event was isolated within the gamer community, as discussions began to occur about the behavior and how acceptable or unacceptable it was, the concept of "gamer" identity became

central to the discussion. In particular, Bakhtanians defended his actions as acceptable for the community of gamers. Tristan Donovan (2012) writing on Eurogamer.net, described the statements Bakhtanians made in an interview after the event and the reactions both to the interview and to those reactions:

> When Bakhtanians was challenged about his behaviour he showed no remorse. "This is a community that's, you know, 15 or 20 years old, and the sexual harassment is part of a culture, and if you remove that from the fighting game community, it's not the fighting game community," he explained as if it was Pakozdi's fault he was a jerk.
>
> Quite rightly his comments sparked a firestorm. Capcom distanced itself from Bakhtanians and "addressed" the issue by reminding those taking part to behave better. The games media coverage outraged many. Some because they felt his behaviour was unacceptable, others because they believed that daring to challenge Bakhtanians' lack of decency was some politically correct conspiracy to censor them.

As the event became more widely discussed inside the community two distinct threads appeared—whether this behavior was truly part of gamer culture and if the attempts to censure those behaviors was spurred by people outside the community trying to impose their views or morals on those inside the community.

Kotaku.com continued its discussion of the fallout from the event by noting that *Shoryuken*, a website which sponsored fighting game contests, was calling for a more serious and thoughtful, more respectful response to dealing with accusations of sexual harassment. In particular, they ended up banning two guest commentators from a running program that the sponsored (and removing points earned at the event) due to the way they mocked the seriousness of the issue:

> The writer was addressing the fallout from a recent episode of "Wednesday Night Fights," which Shoryuken sponsors. Commentators Christian "ETR" Cain and Martin "Marn" Phan both disparaged the coverage of remarks and conduct by competitive gamer Aris Bakhtanians, in which he proclaimed that sexual harassment was a part of the fighting game culture, and took control of a camera at competitive event as if to prove the point, zooming it in on a female competitor's bust and buttocks. (Good 2012)

In response to this event, there were two main arguments about the gamer identity that were presented within the community and toward the broader society: that gamer culture was not sexist (although there were jokes which seen from the outside which might be seen as sexist and there are always a few people on the fringe of the culture who were sexist—but they did not represent the whole

of gaming culture) and that gaming culture did not really exist because it was merely a shared activity in which no one person's actions could ever be considered as representative of the whole.

As an example of the first sort of response, Keza MacDonald (2012), writing in *The Guardian*, talked about her personal experiences and defined what she saw as the "real" gaming community:

> I've had abuse directed at me plenty of times by strangers online, a lot of it to do with my gender, but the idiots are always vastly outnumbered by intelligent and respectful people who are interested in actual discussion rather than insults and pointless cruelty. This is the gaming community, for me – the great people I've chatted, argued and played with online, the guys and girls I grew up playing split-screen multiplayer with, the readers who start thought-provoking discussions, the creative and interesting folks I work with every day in this industry. Not the twerps who call me names in comments threads.
>
> Are things like the [Jennifer] Hepler [the lead writer on the video game Dragon Age II who quit because of death threats] and Cross Assault [the reality show that Pakozdi and Bakhtinians were on] situations acceptable? No. Should we quietly ignore incidences of sexism in the gaming community in the hope that it might go away on its own? No. But is this a part of gaming culture? Absolutely not. We are not like that. It's important that we make our voices heard, too.

MacDonald, then, represents the first kind of response: The "real" gamer community is intelligent and respectful, although it does have a few "idiots." She ends with an appeal to fellow "gamers" to not let the societal conversation be dominated by the "idiots" and to share their, presumptively more positive experiences.

As an example at the other end of the spectrum, web user Mind Yours claimed that no one could represent the gaming community because there was no such thing as a gaming community—it was merely a collection of relatively atomized individuals who happened to engage in the same activity:

> The thing is YOU DON'T SPEAK FOR EVERYONE. Neither does the author. There is no "WE". There is no "US" You can't define all Fighting game players anymore than I can define all First person shooter players. This "community" talk is just bullshit. Just because the fighting game demographic is smaller doesn't mean we are unified. Heck, First person shooter players are probably more unified because they play in clans and all matches are team based. Fighting games are one on one and stress the

> "ME" emphasis more than any other game. We are all individuals, not lemmings. All
> you can really speak for is yourself, and maybe 5 of your friends. Anything else is
> self delusional. (2012)

Mind Yours, then, is arguing that there is no real meaning to the identity of "gamer" beyond playing games and that there is no such thing as a gaming community. In particular, Mind Yours connects the idea of being in a community negatively with being a "lemming"—meaning in this case that the members of a "real" community would not think for themselves and would unreflectively follow the norms of the group.

Against this backdrop, the latest controversy to bring gamers and the gamer identity to the larger social attention is #GamerGate. The origin of the hashtag, #GamerGate, is relatively clear, at least on Twitter, but the broader origins of the controversy are less so. In a very real sense, the controversy and identity conflict at its core predates even the Pakozdi and Halpern events mentioned above. The specific trigger, however, was a weblog posted by the ex-boyfriend of a female developer—accusing the developer of a variety of indiscretions. As a consequence of the weblog, the developer, Zoe Quinn, began receiving death threats and was doxxed (had her personal information publicized on the internet). Sarah Kaplan (2014) in *The Washington Post*, described the origins of the Quinnspiracy/The Five Guys Controversy/#GamerGate:

> Rape threats. A hacking attempt on her Web site. The online publication of personal
> information, including her phone number and home address. Countless comments on
> her Tumblr calling her a "slut" and worse, including one that read: "Are you reading
> this? Of course you are. I will kill you."
>
>   This is what indie video game developer Zoe Quinn has been dealing with for
> the past month, ever since an ex-boyfriend wrote a blog post implying that she had
> traded sex for positive reviews. The post sparked a virulent campaign against Quinn
> and an all-out online war about the future of the video-game industry.

Indeed, although there is conflict over the importance of the Quinnspiracy to the #GamerGate controversy, O'Roarke (2014) noted that it is still frequently mentioned by those who support the "gamer" side of #GamerGate. He wrote that, "GamerGate faithfuls still cite Zoe Quinn and Kotaku Journalist Nathan Grayson as the motivation behind their movement, despite the allegations of collusion associated with Quinn and Grayson's relationship being (repeatedly) proven false."

In essence, the episode with Quinn and the earlier episodes involving Halpern and Pakozdi frame the identity conflict over the nature of "gamers" as one centered around both gender and, for

lack of a better word "maturity." In this paper, the way that conflict is borne out, the ways in which those inside and outside the community attempt to frame and create this identity will be considered.

Research Method

There are a number of ways to consider the formation, maintenance, and conflict surrounding identities, ranging from interviews and ethnography/auto-ethnography to the kinds of number crunching attempted by *Newsweek* in analyzing tweets with the hashtag #GamerGate. In this case, however, as a specific attempt to understand how the debate over the identity of GamerGaters and their opponents is being attempted, the specific approach taken in this paper is to analyze statements asserting identity and arguing for (or against) a specific identity, be it "gamer" or "gamergater." As mentioned previously, there are simply too many sites of the conflict to meaningfully examine, so in order to select the sites of conflict, a Google search was done with the search term "what is gamergate?" It is felt that this search would produce the most likely sites of conflict as those inside, outside, and against the GamerGate community would be able to participate in the discussion.

Having selected a variety of sites, they were further limited to those who had open commenting systems, so as to make it easy for those inside and outside of the controversy to participate. Those comments were then read (in their entirety) and the comments which made assertions of identity were collected. From those comments, a representative selection are presented below in the analysis and discussion sections as examples.

Analysis

At its core, the struggle over #GamerGate can really be seen as a struggle over identity. The particulars of that identity or those identities will emerge over the course of this analysis, but the initial point here is that the controversy is really about identity itself. Web user Jaydo (2014), for example, defined the issue as one over the definition of the GamerGate:

> The media covering one side of Gamergate and not the other IS something wrong. The media insulting and name-calling Gamergate while defining it themselves IS wrong. On top of this, the media (and social media platforms) censoring discussion that doesn't fit their narrative IS wrong. The Anti-GG crowd is attempting to control the narrative because it's much easier to defeat a strawman than an actual person.

There are several points here, but they boil down to a question of identity: insulting (giving a bad identity), name-calling (giving a bad label/identity), defining (giving an identity), narrative (a story

featuring characters—which would be identified), straw man (a false, imposed identity) and actual person (a real person with a real identity) all point to that conflict over identity.

An unidentified identity

Despite the protests of users like Jaydo, one of the central difficulties in the controversy was that there was no clear meaning of the term to begin with. As noted above, #GamerGate began as a hashtag on Twitter that anyone could use. It was not clearly defined, as a result, and that led to a variety of difficulties. Web user cml123 (2014), for example, pointed out that the ambiguity surrounding the label meant that it was not only impossible to know who was described by the label, but also impossible to know who was outside of it:

> You are never going to prove that that person isn't part of GamerGate, because there has never been and never will be a clear definition of what GamerGate is. This is the problem with leaderless movements that just channel grassroots rage into one place. The cyberterrorist sickos are no less a part of GamerGate than the most innocent ethics advocates.

In this case, cml123 explains a problem with the formless nature of the label. As any person could lay claim to the label, it is impossible for others who also claim the label to make clear to those on the outside what constituted a "true" GamerGater and what was a "fake" one.

On the webpage gamergate.me, in an article titled "What is #GamerGate?" web user Moltar agreed that the diverse nature of GamerGate as a label made it difficult to grasp:

> Many journalists who have attempted to cover the GamerGate controversy have expressed dismay at the challenge of accurately encapsulating the true motives of the revolt. It is true that #GamerGate is difficult to investigate thoroughly, as it is an extremely fragmented leaderless mishmash of individuals and groups spanning multiple communities across the web. #GamerGate's diversity also means that sampling the opinions of a few can never guarantee an accurate representation of the whole. (2014)

Here, Moltar is both acknowledging the ambiguity of the label GamerGate, but also pointing out the specific challenges it presents to those outside of the community. The fact that the GamerGate movement was leaderless meant that no "representative" could be pointed to. The fact that it was fragmented meant that any specific statement of identity might be seen as central to one member, as

peripheral to another, and as incorrect to a third. Expand that fragmentation across the "multiple communities" involved and even a large sample of statements would not guarantee a valid sample from which reliable conclusions could be drawn (in fact, it could be argued, that nothing would).

An identity in opposition to an "other"

In the face of that ambiguity, one common strategy is to define by opposition—to define a group by their resistance or antipathy toward another (more well-defined) group. That strategy was certain in evidence in these discussions. Web user arrow2010 (2014), for example, declared, "I support #GamerGate because of who is opposing it." Sadly, arrow2010 was not clear about who the opposition was. In a reply, however, web user 0xCAFEBABE (2014) agreed and identified Social Justice Warriors[1] (SJW) as the opposition: "To be honest, I didn't care so much about the gaming journalism, but seeing SJWs attempting to insert themselves into gamer culture and manufacture outrage was enough to make me anti-anti-GamerGate."

Web user Dreamer (2014) argued that this form of negative definition (GamerGaters as anti-SJW) may have been a consequence of the media portrayal of a diverse group as homogenous:

> It can be argued that Gamergate has become more about battling media image because that's what the media has decided to shine their focus; they're apparently invested in portraying Gamergate as homogenous unit, marching lock-step into misogyny. But we know that's not the case, and I'd again ask for proof of these threats coming from identified GG'ers (the article you link to does not make any such claim).

In this example, you can see, however, the specific usefulness of ambiguity and the oppositional definition to the "movement." As the label only applied to those who avowedly claimed the label, any negative actions (death threats, etc.) which did not come from those who specifically claimed to be GamerGaters could not be laid at the feet of the movement.

An obvious identity

A third technique in defining the movement is to suggest that the meaning is clear if the interrogator were simply to do more research. This attempt was typically characterized by suggesting that rather than providing an answer (sometimes because the interrogator was seen as too lazy or

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[1] It should be noted that Social Justice Warrior or SJW is a pejorative term for people who advocate for "social justice" issues on the internet. It is not a label that people generally accept for themselves so much as a label that others put on them.

uniformed to engage in real conversation), the respondent would suggest that the interrogator need only do more research and the answer would become clear. One particularly clear example was provided by Moltar (2014) on the webpage gamergate.me:

> However, if you want to do some real investigative journalism, I would ask you to please look past the culture war narrative that the media is spinning. If wrapping your head around the fragmentation of #GamerGate seems like too much of a challenging endeavor, then you need not worry. Most journalists are looking at these events with this kind of bottom-up approach, and most of them are either deliberately working against #GamerGate, or failing spectacularly to understand it. Instead, I would ask you to consider a top-down approach. Very few journalists are thoroughly investigating the corruption and ethical malpractice that has been brought to light by GamerGate. If you take a good look for yourself, and you find out what all of us have known to be true for a long time, then we'll be happy to welcome you on board.

This example encapsulates both the definition by opposition approach and the research approach. If the researcher were simply to look at the opposition more clearly, they would understand why GamerGate opposed game journalists (for creating a social justice narrative, thus bringing in the SJW). A similar answer was provided by web user Nick Guilford (2014):

> Why not do your own background research? Because you obviously take this article as fact, without doing and checking yourself. You are the reason why GamerGate exists. To educate people that biased journalism is spreading lies and false information; biased blogging that you suck up as absolute "fact" in your own words.

This approach is particularly interesting because it does several things at the same time. The meaning of GamerGate is defined in opposition to the press, it is also asserted to have an educational function. However, the user does not attempt any actual education. Instead, the user suggests that the other people educate themselves by doing their own research and fact checking. It is unclear exactly how one would "fact check" and on what basis things might be accepted as true or rejected as false.

The atomized identity

A fourth approach to define the identity of the GamerGate movement was to reject the idea of any sort of communal identity (as seen in the earlier conflict about the nature of the Fighting Games

Community in light of Bakhtinians statements). One web user, the ironically named The Leader of GamerGate (2014), claimed:

> How can you state something "officially" in a consumer revolt with no leader? Demands to "officially" announce anything are just false demands that they make to waste time. Even if figureheads like TotalBiscuit, Milo, KingOfPol, Internet Aristocrat, and others all denounced doxxing and harassment (which they all have, very clearly), they'd say "well you have no power over other people in your hate mob so you can't speak for them, so you're a hate mob that continues to support harassment and doxxing!"

In this example, then, the GamerGate movement (or consumer revolt) cannot make any "official" or coordinated action because there is no leadership. The movement is atomized and so nothing can be said by it (or, presumptively about it) as a coherent whole.

Moltar (2014b), similarly, added a disclaimer to his post, "What is #GamerGate?" to indicate that although the website is named gamergate.me, it does not make any claims to representativeness or representation of GamerGate:

> The site itself does not claim to be representative. I personally claim the article is representative, as that is my opinion. The site hosts the article, and is happy to host any other well written articles that may disagree with me about issues such as 'What is GamerGate?', but ultimately the site recuses itself from official statements, policies, or demands relating to GamerGate.

So Moltar is, while claiming the opinions in the article to be representative of GamerGate, careful to note that it is only Moltar's opinion that these ideas are representative (which is a bit of an odd disclaimer, as that would always be true). Specifically, however, disclaiming the website as representative means that citing the information on gamergate.me as authoritative would be wrong and specifically disavowed by the site.

Discussion

At this point, it may seem clear that there is no real definition of the identity of the GamerGate movement or its supporters. Some of the reasons are discussed above (the diversity of locations and potential members, etc.) Consider the opening statement of gamergate.me's article by Moltar (2014):

> GamerGate is a power struggle over the issues of corruption and ethics reforms in an
> $80+ billion industry. On one side is the leaderless consumer revolt of #GamerGate,
> comprised of those who identify themselves as gamers and those who are sympathetic
> to the concerns of gamers. On the other side is a collusive and corrupt network of
> journalists, PR reps, and media socialites who have explicitly disclosed their hatred
> of the gamer identity and their complete lack of respect for gamers.

This statement seems almost entirely unhelpful. What are the concerns of gamers? What sympathies do those who are not gamers have with them? What are the goals of this "revolt?" What is the power in question? What sorts of reforms are being suggested? What forms of corruption are being targeted? Those ambiguities are all enhanced by the idea that this revolt is leaderless and (hence) formless.

This formlessness has specific advantages and disadvantages to the "movement" or "revolt," however. One real advantage is that the movement becomes, rather than a social movement, a sort of idio-movement. Each member is, in a sense, a movement unto themselves. Each member is severable from every other member. And, once severed, that person ceases to be (or never was) a member of the movement. This allows statements like the one by web user LonoSG (2014) which disavowed any connection between harassment and GamerGate:

> No one who actually advocates within Gamergate believes harassment or threats are
> ok… Believe it or not, trolls exited online well before Gamergate began… This point
> is lost on sites like Gawker et al, and other sites who have been under fire from
> Gamergate.

Note that there is a specific kind of certainty here. "No one" is a very strong claim. Yet, there can be no doubt of it, because those who advocate for harassment can not be a part of the movement and so were never really members or ceased to be members upon making such threats.

Web user James McKenzie (2014) extended that sort of ambiguity to the anti-GamerGate side as well. Noting that there were some people outside of either group who were only interested in causing harassment or "trolling" people regardless of which side they supported:

> I honestly think most of the harassment directed at both sides is coming from
> anonymous internet trolls rather then gamergate or media supporters. What bothers
> me though, is how the media reports endlessly on harassment of the media
> personalities and completely ignores the threats directed at gamergate supporters...

In reaction to Brianna Wu's dog dying, a number of harassing messages were sent to the female developer, including the creation of an account purporting to be her dead dog (now supporting GamerGate from beyond the grave). In this case, web user Steve Haigh (2014) expressed not only sympathy for Wu in reaction to her loss, but also urged other pro-GamerGate supporters to do the same:

> I am pro-Gamergate and am sympathetic to Brianna's loss. The vast majority of us are decent enough people to feel sympathy when someone's pet dies. It feels like losing a family member. Obviously some people out there want to just cause other people pain, but those people are not the majority of Gamergate. I tweeted Brianna my condolences and hope other Gamergaters also show sincere compassion and empathy.

In that message, while acknowledging that some minority of GamerGate supporters might be capable of feeling sympathy, the "vast majority" were. Again, given the inability to identify any members of such an atomized group, it is not clear how such a statement could be made with any degree of certainty.

The idea that some people inside the movement might not be capable of sympathy (or even actively attempting to harass Wu over her dog's death, web user Zac Gordon (2014) raised the possibility of "false flag"—people pretending to be members of or supporters of GamerGate but actually opposing it—attacks:

> I'm not sure if you've been following the subject, but it's been shown that often times that people against gamergate create new accounts to harass themselves then play the victim. And if it was someone from Gamergate, that doesn't mean the whole damn movement is about harassment and dog hating.

Here, web user Zac Gordon first introduces the idea that opponents of GamerGate will create fake accounts to harass themselves and then complain about said harassment. Further, however, even accepting that some people who actually support GamerGate might harass someone doesn't mean that the movement is about harassment—that is to say that the harassment might or might not be from a GamerGater, but it is not because of GamerGate. Again, there is really only a sort of negative definition going on here. GamerGate is not about harassment.

This really allows for the commenters to create their own defense and shield their own reactions. The entire movement endorses the actions that the individual endorses. The movement, however, rejects or does not support the actions that the individual member finds problematic or

unacceptable. A good example of this sort of reaction is in the interviews of members of *The Escapist* chat rooms reported on by Greg Tito in *The Escapist*:

> "We don't speak for GamerGate or notyourshield as a whole," said Albel, who organized The Escapist's chat and identified himself as the "PR" of the #burgersandfries chat room. "It is impossible for us to do that. Each and every one of us speak only for ourselves. I've said some things in this chat I'm not proud of. I've said 'fag' and 'retard' a few times and now that I think of it, I let anonymity get the better of myself and I have to bring it back around. None of us want people like Zoe, Anita, Leigh, Jenn, Burch, Grayson et al to disappear from the industry. We don't want to put them out of jobs or take their livelihoods from them. This is and always has been about transparency in journalism. Holding people responsible and accountable for their actions. Asking for recusal where necessary and being completely honest with the ties you have with the people and things you write about." (2014)

Notice the language used by Albel here. The initial "we" and "us" are clearly referring to the people running the chat rooms on The Escapist. "We don't speak for Gamergate," for example, clearly shows that the "we" is not GamerGate. At this point, Albel switches to the first person singular: "I." The use of "I" is connected to unsavory actions—using slurs, saying things he is not proud of, etc. When he returns to the plural "we," however, again he is now speaking about GamerGate.

In essence, looking at the strategic use of ambiguity and leaderlessness of the movement allows each individual in the idio-movement to disavow any negative actions while owning for themselves and the larger social movement or consumer revolt only those positive actions they identify with.

Conclusion

The conversations surrounding the GamerGate hashtag continue and only grow more and more difficult to categorize and evaluate. Avowed members leave or are cast aside and new users claim the tag as their own. This constantly shifting field makes gathering information both more difficult and, potentially, more rewarding. GamerGate raises questions about the possibility of entirely on-line movements and how such movements struggle to create, much less maintain an identity.

As with any sort of research, there are shortcomings and concerns. More than many other topics, GamerGate presents the problem of filtering messages (almost intentionally so). It certainly makes determinations of representativeness almost impossible to answer.

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