

# Collective Organizing, Individual Resistance, or Asshole Griefer? An Ethnographic Analysis of Women of Color In Xbox Live

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We are steadily witnessing the appropriation of new communication technologies to facilitate collective organizing and mobilization. As Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) explain, the development of social media creates opportunities for digital and web based social movements to change the reality of collective action. Cyberactivists have incorporated a host of tools to facilitate their organizational activities from staging boycotts, staging public protests to planning demonstrations (Langman 2005). The types of new communication technologies that have been used include short messaging services (SMS), social networking sites, and as the current research will examine, virtual gaming communities. Typically, one would not assume that collective organizing and resistance would take place in a virtual gaming community. But this is exactly where a cohort of female gamers experience and resist hegemonic inequality every day. This paper explores their community within Xbox Live [1] and documents their struggles with racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other intersecting oppressions experienced at the hand (voice) of other gamers. They have responded with various in-game tactics to counter the perceived source of their (linguistic) oppression, the default gamer.

By employing virtual ethnography, I examine if these tactics are reminiscent of actual collective organizing, merely reflect individual acts of resistance, or are simply grieving activities used to disrupt gameplay and harass other players. Regardless of their intended purpose, this project will privilege the voices and experiences of these marginalized gamers, a luxury not afforded them inside this gaming community. Before delving into a discussion of the oppressed status of marginalized populations in Xbox Live, it is important to situate video games within a context of dominance – privileging whiteness and masculinity. This often creates a negative environment for women and people of color within the larger gaming culture.

**Linguistic Profiling: The origins of inequality in Xbox Live**

Although literature on Xbox Live is beginning to emerge, there are very few studies that examine inequalities within this virtual gaming community. One such study did find that linguistic profiling was the origin of inequality within this space (Gray, 2011). Given that Xbox is largely a voiced based community, it is important to critically examine social interactions within this space.

Baugh (2003) reveals that linguistic profiling is similar to racial profiling. Racial profiling uses visual cues “that result in the confirmation or speculation of the racial background of an individual, or individuals (p. 158),” and linguistic profiling “is based upon auditory cues that may include racial identification, but which can also be used to identify other linguistic subgroups within a given speech community” (p. 158). Scholars have long studied linguistic stereotypes finding discrimination based on accents and dialects against speakers of various ethnic backgrounds. What is seen in the corporate context is that voice discrimination and linguistic profiling are used as effective means to filter out individuals whom one may not want to do business with. For instance, the executive director of the National Fair Housing Alliance noted that insurance companies, mortgage companies, and other financial institutions may refuse to extend services to you if they think you sound Black or Mexican. Now this discrimination is more subtle since they won’t come out and say it to you directly, but rather they will not return your phone call or respond to written correspondence (Baugh, 2003).

Linguistic profiling frequently occurs within virtual communities that utilize voice to communicate. Joinson (2001) suggests that the anonymous spaces of the internet compel users to disclose personal information about themselves knowing that the party on the other end will never find out the true identity. However, in virtual communities where voice can be heard, much of our personal information automatically is emitted into virtuality. Voice based communities are unique from their text counterparts. Text based communities rely on users to type information or upload textual information. In voice based communities, information is revealed automatically when someone speaks.

Xbox Live, being mostly an audio-visual community, requires users to employ the voice option to communicate. Although some users may have the ability to alter the voice, the console does not automatically come with this feature. So your real world voice can be heard by others within

the community. As many women and people of color explain, this mere technological advance creates the most havoc in their virtual lives – racial and gendered inequality based on how they sound (Gray, 2011). As a result, women of color have organized themselves to resist the intersecting oppressions experienced at the hands of the default gamer whom they describe as the white male. Furthermore, the current research will examine the virtual methods these women employ to resist as well as the virtual resources at their disposal to employ.

## **Resource Mobilization Theory**

Resource mobilization theory emerged during the 1970's as a reaction to collective behavior models that attempted to explain how people with little power were able to organize, resist, and/or challenge those in power (Oberschall, 1973, p. 102). Resource mobilization theories suggest that participants within a movement are rational actors and decision-makers (Calhoun, 1992), and collective behavior should be understood in terms of the logic and costs and benefits as well as opportunities for action (Larana, Johnston, & Gusfiel, 1994, p. 5).

An important assumption within resource mobilization theory is that groups engaged in social movements should have the opportunity to challenge those in power (Jenkins, 1981). Extending this premise further, McCarthy and Zald (1977) recognize that the resource mobilization approach emphasizes both support and constraint of societal forces (what can hurt can also help). It also examines the multitude of resources that could be utilized to support the movement as well as other groups that can aid and assist. Resource mobilization theory also recognizes that movements are dependent upon external support for success. With these factors in mind, resource mobilization theory can aid in the understanding of how social movements emerge and develop and become successful (Melucci, 1989; Tarrow, 1998).

It is important to gauge the literature on virtual organizing and understand the dynamics for a virtual community to be successful in their social change. To do this, there are two main perspectives within resource mobilization: 1) the organizational-entrepreneurial perspective (McCarthy and Zald, 1973, 1977); and 2) the political process perspective (Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982). As Gamson (1975) argues, organization is required in order for a group to launch a social protest or movement. Early resource mobilization theory considers that strong,

bureaucratically structured social organizing is crucial for a successful movement (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). On the other hand, the current research does not have that type of organization structured as described by McCarthy and Zald (1977). The current research reflects a virtual organization and as Ahuja and Carley (1998) describe, a virtual organization is an organization that's geographically dispersed and bound by a long-term common interest or goal. Most importantly, a virtual organization communicates and coordinates through information technology.

An organization may consist of virtual teams, a group of people who interact through interdependent tasks guided by a common purpose and work across space, time, and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technologies. (Lipnack and Stamps, 1997, p. 7)

By employing ICT's, members of virtual teams are able to communicate electronically from different geographic locations and are able to virtually organize. Several key characteristics of a virtual organization have been identified by scholars. First, a virtual organization is not bound by borders (Kristof, Brown, Sims, and Smith, 1995; Mowshowitz, 1997; Travica, 2005) and exists for a specific goal (Ahuja and Carley, 1998; Foster, Kesselman and Tuecke, 2001). Within this borderless, virtual system, membership and organizational structure change over time (Travica, 2005). In addition, a virtual organization relies on an electronic network (Grenier and Metes, 1995; Lipnack and Stamps, 1997; Travica, 2005) and uses advanced information technology to facilitate the movement. Given that, a virtual organization is assumed to be able to quickly unify a group, even though the resources, services, and people that comprise a virtual organization can be single or multi-institutional, homogenous or heterogeneous (Travica, 2005).

Resource mobilization theorists posit that after a group or a movement has organized to some extent, there are certain factors which will influence its success. Cohen (1985) argues that success is enhanced by the ability to mobilize resources, gain recognition from those in power, and have flexible organization, among other things. Linking to groups in power has a direct impact on a group's ability to launch a successful movement. The more supportive connections the social movement has with groups in power, the greater the likelihood of the group's success (Aveni, 1978; McCarthy and Zald, 1977). However, being linked to a powerful group is not

always possible among groups organized for change. Another factor which may influence the success of a social movement is the choice of strategies and tactics. Jenkins (1981) reviews resource mobilization theory and classifies three types of tactics used with elites: 1) persuasion, 2) bargaining, and 3) coercion. Another factor which needs to be taken into consideration in evaluating a social movement is the structure of the group itself. Jenkins (1983) argues that groups which are organized bureaucratically are effective in fighting technical battles but not effective in mobilizing grassroots support. Given the virtual nature of the current research, tactics and strategies have to be adapted to fit the space. Also, measuring success must be modified to fit the overall goal of those organizing. As will be explored in this article, marginalized virtual groups have to modify their strategies and tactics to elicit change within hegemonic structures. To explore these strategies, virtual ethnography was utilized.

## **Methodology**

To uncover the extent that women of color collectively organize and resist hegemonic practices deployed within Xbox Live, virtual ethnography was employed as a means to privilege their actions and to critically evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies within Xbox Live. Specifically, I employed participant observation, in-game observations, and narrative interviewing. While gaming, I instructed each participant to narrate her actions or provide commentary on her in-game strategies. During gameplay, I would make note of specific actions that were employed during the game to discuss when the gaming session was complete. This process was referred to as debriefing. This process allowed gamers to reflect on their actions and reiterate their purpose and intended goals.

### Procedure

The unit of analysis within this study was Xbox Live game play specifically utilizing the following Xbox Live multiplayer games: *Gears of War I and II*; and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. Although more games were played, these three allowed the research participants the most freedom in carrying out their tactics and resistive actions hence the focus on them. I examined types of game play and identified three major types of game play the participants engaged in: 1) normal game play (no disruptions); 2) individual resistance/griefing (a single player interrupting game play with griefing strategies); 3) collective resistance/griefing (more

than one player interrupting game play with griefing strategies). The latter two options were directly used to challenge the authoritative and hegemonic establishment of Xbox Live as well as to disrupt the game play of the source of their virtual oppression. Other real world strategies and methods were examined as well, such as boycotting stereotypical games, but for the purposes of the current research, these will not be examined in this article. For a period of seven months, averaging four hours of gameplay each day, I collected data (approximately 850 hours). IRB approval was granted prior to conducting any interviews or observations.

### Participants

Random sampling was not feasible in this community. Snowball sampling was utilized to generate the population of gamers as soliciting violated the terms of service within Xbox Live. The participants within this study were members of two clans [2] which are similar to guilds seen in *World of Warcraft*. Many game researchers have studied the motivation behind joining guilds and clans within online gaming and found that most players join guilds to strategize within the game and complete difficult objectives (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore, 2007); guilds are also very popular given that 78% of online gamers were members of guilds (Seay, Jerome, Lee, and Kraut, 2004). Guilds/clans are not organized in this manner within Xbox live and clan membership is not imperative to completing objectives. Clan membership within Xbox live appears to have more social value than anything although no studies have yet emerged on clan membership in Xbox live (Gray, 2011). Members of Puerto Reekan Killaz and Conscious Daughters agreed to participate in this study (see table below for demographic information):

**Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information**

<b>Gamertag</b>	<b>Age/ Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sexual Orient</b>	<b>Clan Name</b>
MissUnique	28/F	Black/AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
ThugMisses	31/F	Black/AfrAmer	Hetero	Conscious Daughters
cdXFemmeFataleXcd	29/F	Black/AfrAmer	Bisexual	Conscious Daughters
ShedaBoss	26/F	Black/AfrAmer	Lesbian	Conscious Daughters
MizzBoss917	23/F	Black/Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
XpkX RicanMami	23/F	Black/Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
XpkX MammaMia	20/F	Black/Latina	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
YeahSheBlaze	19/F	Black/AfrAmer	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz
Patroa917	22/F	Black/Latina	Bisexual	PuertoReekanKillaz
BossMama	22/F	Black/AfrAmer	Lesbian	PuertoReekanKillaz

To explain the contrasts between the two clans within the current study, I will begin with descriptive information to shed light on each one.

**Conscious Daughters:** Conscious Daughters (CD's) have existed since July 2006 and formed their clan while playing the first installment of *Gears of War*. CD's are dedicated to social justice and are a very politically conscious group. At the time of the interviews, all nine members were attending college or had received college degrees. CD's formed as a means to reach out to women of all colors to create a safe haven for gaming; however, all members of the clan were African-American and at the time of the interviews, had not yet successfully recruited women from different ethnic backgrounds. Although CD's would organize matches with opposing teams, their priority was not serious gaming but rather the focus was on the social interactions within Xbox live. In response to intersecting oppressions in Xbox Live, Conscious Daughters merely avoided the default gamer. They simply segregated themselves and would only game with people they knew. Early in their inception, they would collectively resist and grief. For this reason, the abundance of the data within this project stems from observation and interviews with

members of Puerto Reekan Killaz. Conscious Daughters utilized different methods to resist oppressive structures in Xbox Live as will be outlined.

**Puerto Reekan Killaz:** I found the most difficulty gaining entrée into the Blatina [3] clan. I was previously familiar with one member of this clan and she introduced me to other members. Upon recognizing that I would not be welcome with open arms, I began merely observing and gaming and rarely participated in conversations. These observations helped me recognize the inner workings of this particular clan. The observations helped me navigate their interactions with one another, with other female gamers, and with outsiders in general.

I realized that the Puerto Reekan Killaz had created their clan as an all-lesbian space, and I had made it known previously that I had a male partner (not realizing that I was ostracizing myself). Fortunately, since I was described as a femme (feminine woman) and the members of Puerto Reekan Killaz described themselves as studs (masculine/transgressive females – similar to butch in traditional feminist literature), they did not force me to leave their space. I also discovered that the clan rarely welcomed members who were unable to speak Spanish. My Black, female body was not enough for me to pass within this space initially. Because I was so impressed with the tactics this clan employed towards males, I did not want to give up. Although I was not able to learn Spanish fluently, I did incorporate phrases and words that I knew and earned the nickname ‘Spanglish’ among members of Puerto Rican Killaz.

## Results and Analysis

Ethnographic interviewing and observations uncovered the oppressive nature of social interactions within Xbox Live which led marginalized players to resist this oppression. This section will outline the different types of resistance employed by the women within the clans focusing on individual and collective forms of resistance and/or grieving.

**Individual Resistance/Griefing:** Puerto Reekan Killaz spent the bulk of their time in normal gameplay. But Puerto Reekan Killaz were innovative in their strategies of grieving and resisting. To gain a better sense of tactics employed, ponder the following excerpt when I observed an individual member’s resistance:

*Mzmygrane: Ok so I know why you do it, I want some examples of what you do. Are there certain types of games where you do certain things? Walk me through some examples.*

Patroa917: *Oh yeah. You see the most in Modern Warfare since Gears doesn't have friendly fire on. Let's just play a round so you can see firsthand.*

(Several minutes pass while we both prepare to play a match)

Patroa917: *Ok everything depends on the map. So if we get Wetwork, or Bog, or Ambush (names of maps from Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare), we just hang out in the back and spawn kill.*

(Waiting for game to load)

Patroa917: *Aight [alright] bet. We got Bog. Now you go to the otha side and hang out behind that crate. Or just hang wherever our teammates are and kill em.*

(We are in a game mode called Hardcore where friendly fire is enabled meaning we can kill our teammates)

Mzmygrane: *Umm. Kill our teammates? What about the other team?*

Patroa917: *Kill em all. Shit! Spawn kill them and friendly kill us! Well not me (laughing).*

Mzmygrane: *Ok. Umm. What purpose does this serve?*

Patroa917: *No purpose. Just making everybody mad. We can make our team mad of course by killin em. And we make the opposing team mad by spawn killing. Everybody pissed off and it makes me happy.*

The first half of our griefing exercise was spent killing members of our own team comprised of all males who spoke Standard American English. This type of griefing behavior, although annoying, seriously disrupted the enjoyment of the males within the game. I could hear them through speakers in the television as they were lashing out against me and *Patroa917*. As we continued gaming, I asked questions about these methods employed and wondered how often these types of tactics were employed by the women within this clan:

Mzmygrane: *How often do you do this? Everyday? Every time you play?*

Patroa917: *Nah. Most of the time it's not just random like we doin now. We mostly do it after somebody piss us off. Oh shit. You see that shit (she sniped someone's head off).*

She explains that this type of behavior is usually in response to an oppressive act that occurs against them within Xbox live. They react in this manner only when someone forces them to this type of action by calling them *bitch*, *spic*, or by commenting on their citizenship based on how they sound. The excerpt continues below which outlines other griefing tactics employed by this clan:

(We complete several games and engage in the same behavior. By this time, I have several messages of gamers complaining about my actions. Several gamers also submitted complaints on my actions within the game. I continue resistance griefing with *Patroa917* and ignore the messages. Our game plan changes when we play a map called Ambush).

Patroa917: *Oh shit let's have suhmo' fun. Follow me.* (I follow her towards the middle of map near the fence)

Patroa917: *Ok pull out the pistol and jump up and down on my head.*

Mzmygrane: *Ok what's supposed to happen?*

Patroa917: *Just wait for it. See what I'm doing is looking down...*

Mzmygrane: *Oh shit hell naw. Now what do I do?*

(I have glitched outside of the map which is another griefing tactic – stretching the limits of the architecture of the map to your advantage.)

Patroa917: *Kill anybody you see. Well except me. They won't know where the hell it's coming from. Not unless they see you. Oh kill yourself when you run outta bullets.*

Mzmygrane: (Laughing). *Hell naw. Ok.*

(I successfully kill my teammates and the opposing team. When I run out of bullets, I kill myself and begin the process over again. By this point, I have about a dozen messages of players complaining about my behavior within the space.)

This griefing tactic further annoyed gamers within the space. Since I was invisible, the opposing team, as well as my team, was unable to locate and kill me. This infuriated the gamers within this session and I could continue hearing them within the space as well as see the messages pouring into my inbox. They were complaining. The excerpt continues below and we switch to another game to continue griefing.

(We change games and invite two other members of Puerto Reekan Killaz to the game lobby. Blaze is one of the members not welcoming of me and she immediately begins speaking Spanish. The other members respond in Spanish and I am unable to make out what they're saying so I wait for instructions. Several minutes pass. I am sent an invitation to another gaming lobby).

Patroa917: *Aight mygrane, first off, my bad. You know how she is. But for the first round we lag switchin then we gotta boot ur ass – my bad mama. We got a clan match comin up. But let's close out dis chat and get into the lobby. Don't be mad at me aight? Hit me up next time you on.*

Mzmygrane: *Nah you good. It's ok. I completely understand.*

I did not speak for the remainder of this match and the members of the clan were speaking Spanish although *Patroa917* would speak English and provide me with griefing instructions. The particular resistance tactic employed here was called lag switching. It refers to a disruption in the communication between the console and server. Many internet modems have switches that can be turned on and off which is what *Patroa917* did during this match. It slowed the game play and the players seemed like they were teleporting. But it allowed her to kill the members of the opposing team. Once again, the opposing gamers did not appreciate this kind of griefing activity

and they began filing complaints. This organized grieving only continued for another round and then the members of Puerto Reekan Killaz left and started a clan match.

These women of color respond in this 'griefing' manner because they have mobilized resources available to them inside the virtual structure of Xbox Live. To reiterate, resource mobilization theory depicts activists as rational actors who use sources available to them for their advantage (Marx & McAdam, 1994). They have re-appropriated resources in an attempt to recreate resistance tactics employed by women and people of color in previous social movements.

**Collective resistance/griefing:** Conscious Daughters were generally more organized around their resistance activities outside of the gaming community. Their activities included: 1) blogging about issues facing women and people of color in the gaming world; 2) posting stories of discrimination in Xbox Live forums and other gaming forums; 3) sitting in on games and not playing (not disruptive but not productive. The focus of the current discussion will be on the sit-in activity, considering this was all I could observe within the game.

As was stated, Conscious Daughters were created to actively engage in griefing activities in Xbox Live. But they quickly discontinued these efforts when they didn't appear to be effective. The excerpt below explains this.

*Mzmygrane: So why did the clan stop using things like spawn killing, glitching, and other griefing kinds of activities?*

*MissUnique: Shit we got tired of getting suspended. We pay all this money for our memberships and a few people complain and we were the ones getting suspended. Mzmygrane: Did y'all ever file complaints against the people who would call you bitch or nigger?*

*ShedaBoss: Man all the time. But Xbox didn't care. Nothing would ever happen to them. But we ain't stop filing complaints. Some people don't no more. But we do.*

The frustrations of this particular clan were situated around the authoritative figure, Xbox Live, who did not heed their complaints or the negative situations they faced as women and as people of color in the community. Puerto Reekan Killaz had long given up filing complaints and had just taken matters into their own hands, at the risk of getting their membership suspended.

Members of the Conscious Daughters opted for more organized activities to disrupt the authority as well as publicly shed light on social interactions in Xbox Live.

Mzmygrane: *So when y'all stop grieving, what things did you do to continue organizing and resisting oppressions in Xbox Live?*

ThugMisses: *The next best thing. We took to da streets (laughing). Nah, we started a blog. We started posting our stories in Xbox forums.*

Mzmygrane: *What does that mean? What stories?*

ThugMisses: *Well we tell about what women are going through. Like how they hear us and start [calling] us bitches and stuff.*

MissUnique: *Yeah she likes doing that. But tell her what happens.*

ThugMisses: *Well they usually delete the forums as soon as they're posted.*

Mzmygrane: *Why is that?*

MissUnique: *Because, and I quote, we are violating terms of service. Talking about gender and race may incite racism and sexism they claim.*

Mzmygrane : *Oh wow. So really there's nowhere to talk about these issues?*

ThugMisses: *Nope. But I keep posting them. They can't suspend me from the forum so I post one everyday.*

This method of utilizing Xbox's own forums to discuss issues of race and gender seemed like a great strategy to begin the conversation on race and gender in Xbox Live. But Microsoft Xbox, as the authority, has not created a forum to address these kinds of issues. And by deleting the forums, it reifies power structures along the lines of race, gender, and class.

Mzmygrane: *What else do you do?*

cdXFemmeFataleXcd: *Oh yeah, we boycott games.*

Mzmygrane: *What kinds of games do you boycott?*

cdXFemmeFataleXcd: *Grand Theft Auto. Any game where girls' tits are out or too much skin is showing.*

Mzmygrane: *So you boycott the games that feature women and people of color stereotypically?*

cdXFemmeFataleXcd: *Yeah.*

Mzmygrane: *So what affect has the boycott had?*

cdXFemmeFataleXcd: *Mygrane. Women make up a small portion of gamers. Women of color is even less. So you tell me. It ain't done shit. Games is still on the shelf. Other girls still buy the game. Black dudes ain't caring what we talk about. It's just us by ourself.*

The members of Conscious Daughters were motivated by the possibility of effecting change through a boycott. However, numerically, their efforts were not felt by the larger community. They even posted announcements urging the larger community to do so. They

informed me that their forums regarding the boycott were removed immediately. They did continue their effort in their blog space which will be discussed below.

*Mzmygrane: Well surely your blog has had some kind of impact. Being in a public space like the internet and all, right?*

*ThugMisses: We have a few followers that regularly read it. But that's it.*

*MissUnique: I think people are paying attention to larger issues impact the Black community. Video gaming just ain't high on that list.*

*ThugMisses: We are also too segregated from the larger female community. We have different issues. Theirs is just gender, and ours is gender and race. On top of other shit.*

In spite of the collective activities attempted by this clan, they were still unable to garner significant support from Xbox Live or from the mainstream gaming community to take them seriously. In 2005, Microsoft representatives even proclaimed that racism was not a major issue on the network (Totilo, 2005). This trend to overlook issues with the minority gamer transcends the larger gaming community. The violent video game created about feminist critic and blogger Anita Sarkeesian reveals that the larger gaming community is not willing to deal with women's issues or issues related to other minority gamers (see Funk, 2012). They also discussed the disconnect from the larger female gaming community. Their issue stems from a larger debate within feminism. There has always been an issue among Black and White feminists in discussing which issues are the most pertinent. White feminists were focused mostly on gender issues with race secondary (The Combahee River Collective, 2009). Black feminists faced similar issues within the larger Black Civil Rights movement. Black leaders wanted to focus primarily on race and gender issues were secondary (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003). Neither movement made Black women's issues central because the nature of their intersecting reality could not be recognized.

Although this did not constitute a significant amount of gameplay, a couple of members of Conscious Daughters revealed in-game strategies of resistance that weren't disruptive.<sup>[4]</sup> Instead, the resistance mirrored the tactics associated with civil disobedience. Specifically, *MissUnique* was urging members to begin sitting-in on gaming sessions and not engaging in gameplay. She even encouraged members to openly engage with male gamers during the sit-in. This tactic only elicited strong emotions by male users as the excerpt below reveals.

*Mzmygrane: Ok so it's only me and you.*

MissUnique: *Yeah nobody else likes doing this really because we usually get booted and they file complaints on us. But I like it. At least for a second, these ass holes are listening.*

Mzmygrane: *Ok so explain to me what I do.*

MissUnique: *Nothing.*

Mzmygrane: *Come again.*

MissUnique: (Laughing) *No seriously. We don't do nothing. Just sit there. But move your controller every now and again. We don't wanna time out.*

(In this particular example, we were playing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 which disconnects gamers for inactivity).

Mzmygrane: *Can I talk to them?*

MissUnique: *Hell yeah! Tell them what we're doing. They're just gonna mute you.*

Mzmygrane: *Well how about I listen to you and follow your lead.*

MissUnique: *I forget you doing research. I keep wondering why you acting so dumb like you don't know what I'm doing.*

Mzmygrane: (Laughing) *Shut up and just talk.*

MissUnique: *Ok. Let's get out of private chat.*

(We leave the private chat and enter the larger gaming session)

MissUnique: *Hey BizzyBoy, what do you think of girl gamers?*

BizzyBoy: *Hate em! They suck.*

(Other male gamers in session begin laughing)

BigState88: *Your score proves it. Look at your K/D.*

(KD refers to the kill to death ratio within a game. MissUnique's KD was 0 kills and 8 deaths)

MissUnique: *Well I'm not playing for a purpose. I want guys like you to pay more attention to women and...*

(BizzyBoy cuts MissUnique off and begins talking)

BizzyBoy: *Oh shut the fuck up.*

BigState88: *Mute her ass. Like I'm getting ready to.*

BizzyBoy: *Yeah I'm about to...*

MissUnique: *You see Mygrane, this is why ThugMisses and Boss don't like doing this shit. Cuz they don't listen and sometimes they start acting out [acting in a racist/sexist manner]. At least I didn't get called bitch. (We both laugh) Let's go back to private chat. I ain't getting ready to keep doing this right now. I ain't got the energy.*

Mzmygrane: *So how far can you get usually? With talking to them?*

MissUnique: *It depends. If it's only a few people on the mic, sometimes they listen. But if it's a big group of guys, they egg each other on, and I get nowhere.*

Our other attempts at sitting-in on games had similar outcomes. Other clan members explained that this method was not preferred because it usually led being referred to in a derogatory manner

and the women of Conscious Daughters did not want to encourage this behavior and activity. *MissUnique* also explained that she prefers to wait for people to ask her why she's not playing rather than initiating the conversation herself, as in the above example.

My observations revealed that the sit-ins were actually not very effective and sometimes had the opposite effect, encouraging more racism and sexism. Half of the responses were derogatory and resulted in racism and/or sexism. These respondents wanted Conscious Daughters to refrain from this type of conversation and began the barrage of insults when they refused. A significant portion of time is devoted to us being removed or booted from the gaming sessions. This was game specific. In *Gears of War*, when we began discussing women's issues or issues related to people of color, the gaming host would remove us from the session. In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, we would mostly be removed for inactivity. *MissUnique* began instructing us to move our controller's to ensure we would not be removed.

An equal portion of gamers either responded positively or didn't respond at all. The positive response actually meant that they wanted to engage in our conversation further regardless if they agreed or not. And sometimes we ended up being the only people talking within the space. Sometimes there were gamers with no mics, or they were in private chat, or they just did not engage in conversation with us. There was no way to uncover why some gamers did not respond when they were obviously present in the gaming space.

## **Discussion: Collective Organizing, Individual Resistance, or Asshole Griefers?**

As Resource Mobilization theory states, individuals engaged in collective organizing must be viewed as rational actors that secure resources to foster mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). And an important assumption with resource mobilization, is that in order for a social movement to be successful, groups should have the opportunity to challenge those in power (Jenkins, 1981). So were their tactics successful? Were they able to reach and challenge those in power? I think an aspect missing from resource mobilization theory is if the group engaged in collective organizing felt empowered or felt that their methods employed were meaningful to them (even if not to those in power). I contend that their methods are actually reminiscent of groups who traditionally protest dominant structures; their resistance strategies, no matter the choice, are a means to combat the oppressions experienced within the space.

Women in this study, specifically the Puerto Rican Killaz have revolted and lashed out forcefully (by co-opting resources available to them within Xbox live). This modification of resource mobilization theory was a means to resist the oppressive structures impeding their full inclusion into the community. Unfortunately, the structures that hold privileges within the space – the default gamer and Xbox Live, defined their activities as griefing (Xbox Live even suspended several of their accounts for violating terms of service). But I found their efforts more collective and organized and not irrational (although they did not communicate this purpose). Their actions originated from the intersecting oppressions they experienced hence the term resistance griefing. These women have used resources available to them to thwart their negative experiences and fight back against the dominant structures within the space.

Members of Conscious Daughters mirror tactics also employed in previous social movements. Conscious Daughters recognize that their attempts to dismantle racism and sexism are futile within the Xbox Live gaming space. Even the sit-in, as a collective activity, was not significant enough to generate that much attention. But Conscious Daughters utilized other means outside of the gaming space that constituted the bulk of their resistance activities. By creating websites and posting stories of women in gaming forums, they are trying to get the message of inequality out to the larger gaming community.

In Shaw's (1994) theory on leisure as resistance, there is a focus on ways that leisure participation serves as effective resistance to oppressive gender relations. Specifically, resistance becomes a form of self-expression, self-determination, and empowerment (Shaw, 1994; Shaw, 2001; Shaw, 2007). Even more importantly, the act of resistance can be both individual and collective leading to the empowering of others in similar settings, thus leading to possible social change within particular arenas. As Pena (2013) explains, gaming is considered highly gendered and masculine and women often report feeling unwanted or unwelcome because of the competitive nature of the space and overt masculine presence. As Bryce and Rutter (2003) explain, stereotypes towards female gamers are reinforced especially in gaming culture from the default male gamer (as cited in Pena, 2013). In digital spaces, this default, dominant group is still the white male (Everett, 2009; McQuivey, 2001). And because our virtual bodies bring physical world manifestations into virtuality – gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, education, etc. – we begin to replicate real world inequalities into virtual space. So digital technologies are beginning

to resemble real world spaces, making it is easier for offline inequalities to manifest online as Nakamura (2002) suggests. So even though a user may be able to leave the body behind when entering cyberspace, the real body still lingers – creating a racialized or gendered cybertype, and our “fluid selves are no less subject to cultural hegemonies, rules of conduct and regulating cultural norms than are solid ones” (Nakamura, 2002, p. 325). Beth Kolko (2000) reinforces Nakamura’s argument when she suggests that there is an inherent desire to ignore race and ethnicity in virtual worlds. She notes that the default ethnicity in most virtual communities is set to white creating a default whiteness for virtual worlds, replicating real world spaces where unmarked whiteness is the cultural norm. This recreates hierarchical structures present in the real world leading to the domination of marginalized populations.

In the physical world, marginalized communities have a variety of responses to the inequalities they face which since the earliest suffrage movements, some members within these groups have learned to resist. Some ignore it, some aggressively oppose it, and some protest it. This scripted response is similar to the responses by marginalized populations in Xbox Live. Many members have simply normalized the inequalities they experience at the risk of appearing too sensitive or risk being accused of pulling the race card. Still others opt for a more aggressive approach and engage in equally offensive behavior (Gray, 2011). And others choose to organize and resist dominate structures. The focus of this article is on the latter response because overwhelmingly, of all the gamers interviewed within this larger project, women of color were the only cohort of gamers who attempted to respond to inequality in an organized, collective, manner (regardless of the outcome).

## Notes

[1] Xbox Live is Microsoft’s console video gaming community that features multiple modes of media such as TV, movies, music, social networking sites, in addition to gaming.

[2] I created names for these clans that would not reveal actual clan names and protect their identities although I attempted to create names that were reflective of the actual clan.

[3] Members of Puerto Reekan Killaz referred to themselves as Black Latina and gave themselves the term Blatina.

[4] Conscious Daughters initially formed to combat discrimination and inequality within the gaming space. Although I was not able to observe this, interviews with members of the clan revealed that the majority of their time playing was devoted to griefing activities.

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