

Kicking Butt Up and Down DM3: The Discourse of Grrrl Online Computer Gamers

Amy D. Ruzycki-Shinabarger
Arizona State University

1. Introduction

Computer gaming, much like most other things computer oriented, has traditionally been considered a male domain. However, according to Jenkins (1999), 40 percent of PC gamers are women (Aurora, qtd. in Jenkins, 1999, p. 338). Recent changes in two facets of this issue have brought women into the world of computer gaming more than ever. First, the computer industry appears to have recognized the need for “girl games” and is making software which is more “female friendly,” often referred to as “pink software” (Girls and Gaming). Second, females are beginning to play the traditionally “male” computer games in an exponentially growing quantity.

The hypothesis of this paper is that, since female gamers are entering a predominantly male domain, they will be forced to adapt to the communication style of the male gamers rather than exhibiting characteristics associated with a stereotypically feminine communication style, as discussed by Tannen (1997), Herring (1994), and others.

2. Computer Games and the Geeks Who Play Them

Despite the fact that the age of the average gamer is about 30 (Sex in Games Revisited), with 72 percent over the age of 18 and half of those over the age of 35 (Aurora qtd. in Jenkins 1999, p. 338), computer gaming is often associated with adolescent boys, particularly those who might be considered “geeks” or “nerds”. However, many gamers of all age groups and genders may fit into the “nerd” category.

While many people try to adhere to the confines dictated by a certain social group, geeks or nerds shirk such boundaries and also challenge the boundaries of gender and sexuality by refusing to participate in the heterosexual matrix and by flouting conventional displays associated with masculinity and femininity (Bucholtz, 1996). Identifying oneself as a nerd has even been associated with allowing females to achieve more authority than possible with an affiliation to another social group (Bucholtz, 1996). This evidence leans in support of the hypothesis that female gamers would use discourse forms often

associated with males or that gamers of both sexes would shirk the confines of their gender and communicate without regard to the expectations for their sex.

Thornborrow (1997) examined the discourse of the computer game magazine *Sega Mean Machines*, a publication with a primarily teenage male readership, and found that male-centered discourses were the norm. She concluded that females wanting to play or read about computer games are forced to “take up the male-gendered identities established within the discourse of these games and their associated texts” (p. 54), seemingly suggesting not that those identities, in turn, become demasculinized or degendered in general, but rather that the female gamers assuming those identities become defeminized.

There seems to be a strong tendency for members of the gaming industry to refer to female gamers, regardless of their age, as some derivation of the term *girls*. It is sometimes spelled the traditional way but equally often spelled in some alternative variation, either *girlz*, *grrrls*, or *grrrlz*. The spelling *grrrls* is borrowed from the Riot Grrrl (feminist punk rock) music movement of the early 1990’s, where it was also used as a term of empowerment.

Quake will be the game most thoroughly discussed in this paper, followed by EverQuest (EQ). Quake is a first-person shooter, an action game viewed from the player’s perspective in which players spend most of their time shooting their opponents. EverQuest is an MMORPG (a massively multi-player online role-playing game) in which participants can play characters of several humanoid races, with differing crafts and skills.

3. Methodology

The dataset for this paper is comprised of two smaller sets of data. The first set consists of the biographies of two Quake clans, or teams, the five-member, all female *Femme Fatales* and the four-member, all male *Clan Capitol*. Clan and individual gamer biographies for members of the Professional Gamers League (PGL) are posted on the PGL website. The second set of data comes from two EQ based websites, *EQgirls.com* (a site dedicated to females who play EQ and males who play female characters in EQ) and *EverQuest.com* (the official site for the game, created and maintained by Verant, the game’s manufacturer). The data from the EQ sites is in the form of message board chats and is topic-specific. While all of the topics on *EQGirls.com* are gender-related, only topics that were gender-related were selected from the *EverQuest.com* site. This data set included the eight gender-related threads found on *EverQuest.com* and eight threads from *EQGirls.com* randomly selected from the 20 available threads in order to match the dataset from *EverQuest.com* in size.

While these two sites are not in direct opposition to one another in the same way that the biographies of the male and female Quake clans are, they still allow for gender-based comparison, as most computer gamers are male, so it is probable that a majority of the posters on *EverQuest.com* are male. However, the gender-based topics being examined may attract a higher than normal ratio of female posters. While *EQGirls.com* is a site targeted primarily towards women, some posters do identify themselves as male. Unlike with the biographies, the additional problem of identifying the gender of the player arises on these sites, as, unless the posters identify themselves as female or male (which many do), it is impossible to tell. Consequently, only data in which the posters identify themselves is used herein, except in cases where it is clearly noted that the poster does not identify his or her gender.

4. The Femme Fatales vs. Clan Kapitool

The Femme Fatales and Clan Kapitool are both Quake clans in the PGL. The Femme Fatales is a clan of five females ranging in age from 18-23. They are Pookie, a 23-year-old cognitive science student at Berkeley; Kornelia, a 21-year-old Hungarian native living in Los Angeles who claims that playing Quake has helped her improve her English skills; Jasp, an 18-year-old gamer who even dreams in Quake; Mystique,¹ an 18-year-old long-time gamer; and Tika, a 22-year-old Stanford University senior.

Clan Kapitool is a clan of four males ranging in age from 15-22. Apocalypse is a 16-year-old who has been gaming for most of his life; Wilder is a 15-year-old who says, as a result of his professional gaming, “I am a hero in my school;” Krave is a 17-year-old who wraps up his bio with the quote “it’s just a game!”; and Cronus is a 22-year-old computer engineering major.

The discourse of the two clans will be analyzed according the following categories: (1) screen names, (2) pronoun usage, and (3) gender references.

4.1. Screen Names

The screen names used by the Femme Fatales (Pookie, Kornelia, Jasp, Mystique, and Tika) do not convey the sense of violence demonstrated by the screen names of all-male clan members. Pookie is often used as a pet name between lovers, and the *-ie* ending indicates that it is diminutive. Kornelia is the real first name of the gamer, but the feminine *-a* marker might be perceived as indicative of femininity, and, thus, weakness, by gamers who hold onto the stereotypes that grrrls cannot compete with male gamers. Jasp is the most ominous sounding of the Femme Fatales, perhaps due to the *-sp* ending also found in *wasp* and *asp*. Mystique sounds intriguing due to the initial *myst-* but feminine due to the *-ique* ending and common references to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. The feminine *-a* ending in Tika, as with Kornelia, might convey a sense of femininity, and therefore weakness, to competitors. As with the screen names of the gamers, the name of the clan provides an impression. Merriam-Webster’s on-line dictionary (www.onelook.com) defines a femme fatale as “a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations,” suggesting that these gamers are female but also dangerous.

On the other hand, the members of Clan Kapitool go by the screen names Apocalypse, Wilder, Krave, and Cronus. The moniker Apocalypse, and its definition of “an unveiling of hidden things” carries with it a sense of impending doom. Wilder indicates that not only is the gamer wild, but the comparative *-er* suffix indicates he is more wild than his opponents. Krave, like some of the female gamers, may also rely on sound symbolism, as the *-ave* sound is not only found in *crave*, but *rave* and *grave* as well. In addition to being a raving killer who sends his opponents to their graves, he shares the initial *K* placed on a word that is generally spelled with a *C* with the name of his clan. Cronus explains that he could not think of a suitable name, so he looked for names of mythical gods until “I stumbled upon Cronus, who was the god of the universe during the Golden Age, and I really liked the name and of course the idea of being god of the universe.” While the clan

¹ The title of this paper comes from Mystique’s discussion of playing her favorite Quake level with her boyfriend, who introduced her to the game (“Course now I kick his butt up and down DM3”).

name the Femme Fatales clearly indicates the gender of its members, the name Clan Kapitool does not. The “misspelling,” however, may conjure references to Hitler’s Das Kapital, and their reference to capitol might be construed as indicating that they are the clan that protects the capitol and, thus, an important clan.

4.2. Pronouns

Group membership and identification can be expressed through the pronouns speakers select (van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, and Troutman, 1997). Inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *our*, and *us* indicate closeness or group membership, while exclusive pronouns such as *they*, *them*, and *you* establish distance between the speaker and the referents. Stereotypically, it is claimed that women value connection and intimacy, and, thus, tend to use inclusive pronouns, while men value autonomy and distance and, thus, tend to use exclusive pronouns (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986).

Despite being members of the PGL, three of four members of Clan Kapitool use exclusive pronouns when referring to the organization in response to the following string of questions: “How do you feel about the PGL? What opportunities do you think it offers players? What is your take on the whole concept of professional computer gaming?” Apocalypse uses *they* or *their* throughout his discussion of the PGL.

- (1) The resolution comes into play when the league admits their problems and addresses them.

At no point in his commentary does Apocalypse refer to his membership in either Clan Kapitool or the PGL with inclusive pronouns. Instead, he refers twice to *they*, twice to *their* (“their problems” and “their players”) and once to *the league*.

Wilder is the exception to the rule in Clan Kapitool. He does not use exclusive pronouns to refer to either the PGL and does so to refer to Clan Kapitool only on one occasion. Instead, he refers to each once by the organization’s title.

- (2) Having CK for a team seems to be my biggest advantage.
- (3) I like the idea behind PGL, although I may be a bit partial.

Krave does not refer to Clan Kapitool in his biography and only mentions the PGL once.

- (4) The PGL obviously treats their players right. Personally, I think professional gaming should be on lan, but this is the best online gaming competition I’ve been in. They offer their players wonderful prizes =)

Krave refers to the league as *the PGL* on one occasion and *they* on one occasion and uses the exclusive *their* to modify *players* on two occasions.

Cronus also does not refer to his clan in his biography, but he refers to the PGL by its abbreviation two times, by *they* four times, and uses *their* two times to modify *rules* and *horizons*. His first reference to the PGL by *they* comes after the two references by *PGL* and after he has established membership in the group.

- (5) I realize that PGL takes some hits about cheating and not being stringent about their rules, but it is a very difficult thing they are doing.

The members of the Femme Fatales tended to be more inclusive in their pronoun usage. In Pookie's biography, she refers once to the PGL and once to her clan.

- (6) We've got team unity, which counts for a lot in the heat of battle. That's one advantage that women have even at this early stage – they tend to stay a bit calmer under fire.

Pookie, like all four of her male counterparts, refers to the PGL by its abbreviation rather than a generic or exclusive *they* or an inclusive *we*, but refers to the Femme Fatales with the inclusive pronoun *we* and women gamers in general as *they*.

Kornelia uses inclusive pronouns to refer to the Femme Fatales even though she is discussing their lack of unity. She refers to her clan as *us* on one occasion, *we* on two occasions, and *the Femme Fatales* on one occasion. She only refers to the PGL twice, both times as *the PGL* rather than the exclusive *they*.

- (7) Since most of us are in other clans and since we've assembled only to compete in the PGL, I don't think of the Femme Fatales as a clan. We're a team.

Jasp also uses inclusive pronouns to refer to her clan. She refers to *we* twice and *our* once, *us* once and *the Femme Fatales* once. She refers to the PGL only once, by its abbreviated form.

- (8) We're an all female clan and that could work to our advantage – a lot of guys still make a big deal out of playing with or against 'girls.'
- (9) But regardless of whether we win, the PGL will give us a chance to meet and hang out with a lot of cool Quake people out there—and that's enough of a reason to join.

Mystique does not refer to her clan in her biography and only refers to the PGL once, by its abbreviated form.

- (10) One of the great things about the PGL is, as a competitive sports league, it's a really democratic environment – the only advantage that men as a group have right now is experience.

Tika refers to her clan four times, twice as the Femme Fatales and twice with the inclusive pronoun *we*. She refers to the PGL once, by the abbreviated form of the name.

- (11) I think the same holds true for the Femme Fatales clan – we may not win the PGL championship, but if we have some fun and change a few people's minds about women in gaming, that's great.

In summary, the female members of the Femme Fatales use inclusive pronouns to refer to their clan and also use some indicators of inclusion in referring to the PGL, while the male members of Clan Capitol, with one exception, do not mention their clan and refer to the PGL from an exclusive standpoint. Table 1 summarizes the usages by both clans of inclusive and exclusive pronouns as well as references to one's clan or the PGL by name

or abbreviation. The pronouns speakers select to use have been deemed to reflect aspects of their attitude, their sex, their social standing, and many other social variables as well (Wilson, 1990).

Table 1. The use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns by Quake clan.

	Clan (Inclusive)	Clan (Exclusionary)	Clan (Name)	PGL (Inclusive)	PGL (Exclusionary)	PGL (Name)	M/F Gamers (Inclusive)
Clan Kapitol	0	1	1	0	14	8	0
Femme Fatales	9	0	3	0	0	5	1

4.3. Gender References

In conjunction with the potential differences in the use of language by the male and female gamers, it was suspected that the ways in which male and female gamers mention or refer to the genders might differ as well. None of the members of Clan Kapitol make references to males or females in particular; therefore, an analysis of their use of gender references is impossible. It should be noted that it is probable that the female clan was explicitly asked about the topic of female gamers, while the male clan clearly was not, quite probably accounting for the lack of gender references in their biographies. Nevertheless, these data provide a basis for comparison with similar usage by EverQuest gamers in the following section.

Four out of the five members of the Femme Fatales discuss the growing trend of females playing computer games. When discussing female gamers, they use the terms *woman/women* eleven times, *girl/girls* four times, and *female/females* once. No uses of *girlz*, *grrrls*, or *grrrlz* are present. When discussing male gamers, the Femme Fatales use the terms *man/men* four times, *guy/guys* twice, and *male/males* once.

Pookie makes the most gender references with five uses of *woman/women*, one use of *girl/girls*, three usages of *man/men*, and one usage of *male/males*. In her use of the term *girl*, she equates it with the term *male*.

- (12) It's only a matter of time before a significant number of girls achieve the skill level of our male counterparts and give them a run for their money.

Jasp makes five gender references with two usages of *girl/girls*, one usage of *female/females*, and two usages of *guy/guys*. She uses *female* and *girl* interchangeably as equivalent to the term *guy/guys*. Jasp's first reference to *girl/girls* appears in quotes, while the second does not.

- (13) We're an all-female clan and that could work to our advantage – a lot of guys still make a big deal about playing with or against 'girls.'

Both Mystique and Tika use four gender references each. Mystique uses *woman/women* twice, *girl/girls* once, and *man/men* once. However, unlike Jasp, Mystique

specifically uses *girl* to refer to a child and uses *woman/women* as the female equivalent to *man/men*.

- (14) If more girls had gotten video or computer games for their fifth birthday, you wouldn't be asking this question.

Tika uses four gender references, each *woman/women*, and Kornelia does not make any gender references in her biography.

5. EQGirls.com vs. EverQuest.com

As previously mentioned, it is only possible to detect one's gender on these sites if the poster provides that information, and, while these sites target predominantly female and predominantly male audiences respectively, there are some posts from people identifying themselves as males from EQGirls.com and people identifying themselves as females on EverQuest.com.

5.1. Screen Names

Overall, the screen names used for EQ players reflect the diminished importance on fighting found in the game. It should be noted that these players identified the gender of their characters, but that the player may or may not be of the same gender. It should also be noted that some players, primarily those identifying themselves as females, criticize male gamers who play female characters for over-feminizing their characters, making them seem feminine to an unrealistic extent, and it is possible that this may be reflected in the names of the characters as well.

From EverQuest.com, the two most directly war-influenced names, CecilDarkKnight and LightFighter, are from players who do not disclose either their gender or the gender of their character. These are followed by female players using the screen names Mortal and Mischief, then by male players using the screen names ph0rk and Squidwalker. CecilDarkKnight and LightFighter both connote warriors, while Mischief suggests a much milder form of trouble and Mortal emphasizes the mortality of the player in a game where dying is but a temporary setback. The animal based ph0rk and Squidwalker, as with the other screen names of characters who identify themselves as male, neither connote war or peace. Many female characters have feminine influenced names such as Moonshadex, which emphasizes the connection between the moon and the feminine cycle, and Liandriana, which has the stereotypically feminine *-a* ending.

From EQGirls.com, the only player who identifies both himself and his character as male uses the screen name Wizhorn, with the *wiz-* stemming from wizard (a male magician) and the *-horn* lending additional emphasis to masculinity, as, with many species, only the males have horns. Three players on this site identify themselves as male gamers who play female characters; they use the screen names Dagis, Falaanla, and Ladyhawk. While Dagis shares the same initial syllable with dagger and Ladyhawk connotes both femininity (from lady) and strength (hawks are among the more powerful bird species), Falaanla's vocalic sound and *-a* ending exudes femininity. Posters identifying both themselves and their characters as female include Selestial Aurora, EQGal, and DnissetheWierd. Selestial is comparable to the feminine name Celeste, while

Aurora carries the stereotypically feminine *-a* ending. EQGal is the web “mistress²” of the EQGirls site, and her name connotes both her interest in the game and her emphasis of her femininity. DnissetheWierd appears to stem from the feminine name Denise, but her “weird” spelling for the latter part of her screen name emphasizes her self-proclaimed strangeness.

Overall, there is no alarming trend either that the names EQ gamers use for their characters reflect stereotypical gender roles or that they run counter to those stereotypical gender roles. While the names of many female characters do include the *-a* ending and/or connect the character to some aspect of femininity, the names of the male characters do not, as a group, carry the impending sense of violence found in names of the members of the all-male Quake clan. While gender-based differences in screen names are visible among players of both games, they are not a significant source of gender-based distinction in these games.

5.2. Pronoun Use

While the all-female Quake clan had a slight tendency towards inclusive pronouns and the all-male Quake clan had a slight tendency towards exclusive usages, few pronouns, either inclusive or exclusive, were used to describe groups within the posters on the EQ sites. The difference in the pronoun usage between the Quake data and the EQ data may stem from the fact that the Quake data is based upon the gendered groups functioning as a team or clan. Overall, the usage of pronouns to indicate the presence or absence of group membership in the EQ data is limited to a handful of “us” and “them” references scattered throughout the data. However, one thread from EverQuest.com, entitled “The EULA and married couples” includes several pronoun usages. In this thread, a female poster with the screen name Minniyar questions why the rules of the game prohibit her and her husband from sharing an account, and several posters, both male and female, respond. In her initial post, Minniyar uses the same “us” vs. “them” dichotomy sometimes set up between the male and female gamers to refer to herself and her husband vs. Verant, the manufacturer of the game. She uses “our” twice, “we” once, and “us” three times after her initial reference to “my husband and I.” A male poster named goofu responds, using “we” once (in reference to himself and his wife) and “our own” twice to modify “space” and “thing.” Rather than prioritizing himself by listing himself first and his wife secondly, the form Minniyar uses to discuss her marital dyad, goofu uses “me and my wife.” However, three other male posters respond, all using the other first/self second ordering (“my wife and I” is used twice and “my girlfriend and I” is used twice). As a comparable structure is used only once by a female and four times by a male, any conclusions made may be misleading.

Despite the use of inclusive pronouns by both male and female posters to refer to themselves and their partner or child(ren) in this thread, one exception, made by a male poster using the screen name Wiliam_Xegony, occurs, when he uses the inclusive pronoun “us” to refer to the gamers as a unit and the exclusive pronoun “them” to refer to Verant.

Overall, the EQ data do not reflect the use of inclusive pronouns by women and exclusive pronouns by men discussed by some researchers and found, to some extent, in the Quake data. Both genders of EQ gamers demonstrate some usage of inclusive

² EQGal chooses to use the term webmistress, while most others in her position, regardless of gender, tend to use the term webmaster.

pronouns to refer to both themselves and others not present in the discussion (family members and/or significant others) and themselves and other gamers.

5.3. Gender References

Much as the topic of female gamers may have influenced the quantity of the use of references to gender on the Quake sites, the fact that the topics of the EQ threads being analyzed are all gender-related may influence the overall quantity of the references. However, more important is the form those usages take, and, in this case, the larger quantity of tokens provides data enough for a more detailed analysis. References to players based on their gender were counted and compared from the eight threads from each of the EQ sites. The use of the following terms were examined: *female(s)*, *male(s)*, *woman/women*, *man/men*, *girl(s)/grrrl(s)*, *boy(s)*, *guy(s)*, *gal(s)*, *lady/ladies*, and *chick(s)*. The first six terms function primarily as gender based converses, while *guy(s)*, *gal(s)*, *lady/ladies*, and *chick(s)* do not have a clear converse for the opposite gender or are used as converses for more than one term. It should also be noted that there are six terms referring to females, four terms referring clearly to males, and *guy(s)*, which refers to males in all but one case, in which a female poster with the screen name Selestial Aurora clearly indicated that she included females under the *guys* category as well.

(15) To all the “good guys” (women included ☺) on EQ, good hunting.

In this example, the presence of the emoticon indicates that the poster was clearly aware of the implications of her usage and that the extension of the gender-marked term was intentional.

Overall, in the EQGirls.com postings, 153 references are made to females, 115 references are made to males, and one reference is made to a gender inclusive *guys*. In the EverQuest.com postings, 255 references are made to females and 176 references are made to males. The higher usage of references to females may be influenced by the gender-related topics of the threads being analyzed. In the EQGirls.com threads, the most popular way of referring to females is *female(s)* (76 times), followed by *woman/women* (53 times), *girl(s)/grrrl(s)* (17 times), and *lady/ladie*” (two times). In the EverQuest.com threads, the most popular way of referring to female is *female(s)* (135 times), followed by *woman/women* (70 times), *girl(s)/grrrl(s)* (35 times), *lady/ladies* (six times), *gal(s)* (five times), and *chick(s)* (four times).

In the EQGirls.com threads, the most popular way of referring to males is *male(s)* (42 times), followed by *man/men* (36 times), *guy(s)* (20 times, excluding the one reference to *guy*” that included females), and *boy(s)* (17 times). In the EverQuest.com threads, the most popular way of referring to males is *male(s)* (86 times), followed by *guy(s)* (48 times), *man/men* (37 times), and *boy(s)* (5 times).

Table 2. The use of references to gender on the predominantly female site EQGirls.com compared to those on the predominantly male site EverQuest.com.

	Male(s)	Man/Men	Guy(s)	Boy(s)		
EQGirls.com	42	36	20	17		
EverQuest.com	86	37	48	5		
	Female(s)	Woman/ Women	Girl(s)/ Grrrl(s)	Lady/ Ladies	Gal(s)	Chick(s)
EQGirls.com	76	53	17	2	0	0
EverQuest.com	135	70	35	6	5	4

The threads from both sites reflect the same order of preference for female reference. However, the threads from EQGirls.com reflect *man/men* as the second most preferred way of referring to males and *guy(s)* as third, while the threads from EverQuest.com reflect the reverse order of “man/men” and *guy(s)*, possibly indicating that, while female and male gamers use the same terms in the same order of preference to refer to females, female gamers are more likely to refer to males as *men* than *guys*, while male gamers are more likely to refer to themselves as *guys* than *men*. This trend is demonstrated by a male poster with the screen name JCDDreamer (16) on the EverQuest.com website and a female poster with the screen name Xelene (17) on the EverQuest.com website.

(16) I know of only 1 guy that plays a woman. And he’s playing in character and doesn’t use the fact that he’s playing a woman.

(17) Put the newbie men in speedos too.

The use of the word *girl(s)* or *grrrl(s)* is followed by the word *gamer(s)* more often than not, as demonstrated by a female poster in the EverQuest.com site named Gikkwinny.

(18) I am also a girl gamer.

The popularity of this usage may be due, at least in part, to its alliteration, which is also present in the frequently used *guy gamers*.

Guy(s) seems to function as a converse of *girl(s)/grrrl(s)*, as demonstrated in (19) by a person of unknown gender with the screen name Rikken on the EQGirls site, a converse of *female(s)*, as demonstrated in (20) by a male playing a female character with the screen name Falaanla on the EQGirls site, and a converse of *woman/women*, as demonstrated in (21) by a poster of unknown gender with the screen name klinzhai on the EverQuest.com site.

(19) Guys level faster than girls etc.

(20) I am a guy playing a female character

(21) Just the image of a guy sitting around with a bunch of women knitting a quilt.

Overall, the use of gender-based references are similar for male and female posters, with *male* and *female* being the most common way to refer to the genders by the posters on each site. The use of *girl(s)/grrrl(s)* seems to be the exception, as it is primarily used by posters identifying themselves as female.

6. Conclusion

It was predicted that, since grrrl gamers were entering a predominantly male domain, they would be forced to adapt to the communication style of the male gamers rather than exhibiting characteristics associated with a stereotypically female communication style. Although the female Quake players fail to adhere to stereotypical characteristics of female speech, they also do not display the characteristics such as exhibitions of aggression, face threatening acts, and taking up more than their fair share of conversational space that Herring (1994) attributes to masculine online discourse or display radically different discourse from their female counterparts, so the hypothesis was neither validated nor proved invalid.

Female EQ players demonstrate less divergence from their male counterparts in their discourse than do female Quake gamers, utilizing similar gender references and pronoun usages and using screen names that were, overall, less violent and gender-marked than those of the Quake players of both genders.

Bucholtz's claim that nerds or geeks flout the heterosexual matrix and refuse to participate in prescribed gender identities appears to be reinforced by this study. While the female Quake players do not adhere to the prescribed characteristics of female speech, neither do they adhere to the prescribed characteristics of male speech. However, the male gamers adhere much more closely to prescribed characteristics of male speech, such as demonstrations of power.

The female EQ players seem to utilize a discourse very similar to that of their male counterparts, and one without strong usage of the stereotypical characteristics of feminine discourse provided by Tannen and others, thereby, perhaps, supporting Thornborrow's claim that, to participate in the discourse of computer gaming, women have to adopt a male-centered discourse. This may also provide support for Herring's claim that entire online communities can become gendered towards the discourse of the dominant gender. While the EQGirls.com site targets a primarily female audience, the composition of EQ players overall is still largely male, perhaps influencing the discourse of the minority, even in an alternate environment.

However, another option presents itself in this data, particularly based upon the lack of ascribed characteristics of both female and male discourses: perhaps the discourse of the online gaming community is less influenced by the gender-based expectations that are so prevalent in real life, and, rather than failing to conform to their gender roles or adopting the gender roles of the opposite sex, gamers, both male and female, utilize a less-blatantly gendered discourse. This theory is supported by the use of cross-gender playing in EverQuest but countered by the gender-based clan formations in Quake.

Despite the implications of this study, analysis of the discourse of computer gaming is rare, and that including aspects of gender are rarer still. It is therefore impossible to directly compare this study with others besides Thornborrow (1997) to look for trends, which is a clear indicator that, with the rising number of females participating in computer gaming, more research needs to be done in this area.

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Dept. of English
 Arizona State University
 Tempe, AZ, 85287-0302
 amy.shinabarger@asu.edu