Videogames are for boys: male gaming as an anti-gender identity

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ENG Abstract. The videogame industry is the most important cultural and entertainment industry of our times with 3,2 billion players worldwide and with a social and cultural impact in every aspect of our lives. The industry itself has historically been constructed as a masculinist space where geek masculinity was the role model to follow.

In this work we propose to analyse how the masculinist culture that developed this space have generated an affinity between a sector of the gaming community and the anti-gender groups from the manosphere. We will study the creation of the gamer identity as an anti-gender identity that it´s born from a rhetoric of victimhood and betrayal that is normal on current far-right wing forces.

Keywords: Far-right wing; Masculinities; Games Studies.

ES Los videojuegos son para chicos: El "gamer" varón como identidad anti-género

Resumen. La industria del videojuego es la industria cultural y del entretenimiento más importante de nuestros días, con 3.200 millones de jugadores en todo el mundo y con un impacto social y cultural en todos los aspectos de nuestras vidas. La propia industria se ha construido históricamente como un espacio masculinista en el que la masculinidad geek era el modelo que seguir.

En este trabajo nos proponemos analizar cómo la cultura masculinista que ha desarrollado este espacio ha generado una afinidad entre un sector de la comunidad de jugadores y los grupos anti-género de la esfera masculina. Estudiaremos la creación de la identidad gamer como una identidad anti-género que nace de una retórica de victimismo y traición que es normal en las actuales fuerzas de extrema derecha.

Palabras clave: Extrema derecha; Masculinidades; Games Studies.

1. Introduction

Our work proposes to explore the general framework of the antigender backlash of the last decades around the concept of the man-sphere first, and of their different agents as we understand that there is not a single source but a plurality of actors who participate in this reaction to the advancement of the feminist movement. The idea of our paper is to present a common background and to map the different actors of the antigender discourses that nowadays have become prominent in different aspects of politics and whose discourse have acquiree strength, especially among the youth, to later focus on the specific case of videogames using the example of the GamerGate and it´s relation to what has been called geek masculinity.

Many has been said about the GamerGate, the alt right and geek masculinity, there are important works that explores masculinities and games (Taylor &Voorhees, 2018; Condis&Morrissette 2023), and that also explore geek masculinity and the geek identity (Salter&Blodgett, 2017; Scott, 2019). Similarly, there are also literature on the alt right and the GamerGate itself (Shaw, 2015; Bezio, 2018).

However, as one of the latest systematic literature reviews on gaming and right-wing forces explained (Wells et al., 2023) the literature normally focuses on the gendering of games, the relation to the rise of

extremist groups, the lack of diversity in the industry and the lack of political answers without normally giving any type of solutions.

Our work looks to review the relation between the general ambience of the man-sphere and how the alt right has profited from the intersection of different crisis (masculinity; geek; gamer; neoliberalism) to generate a social base among a certain part of the gaming communities. Finally, we will also explore which type of solutions have been proposed by the industry and it´s different actors to this situation.

2. Methodology

Our work starts by doing a literature review on the topics of masculinity and the antigender backlash to present the political background from which the actors of the alt right have profited. Later, following a perspective of going from the general framework of the problem in the first part of the paper, on the second part, we try to approach the specific case of gaming to explain how the intersection of the crisis mentioned before ended up becoming a gateway for the alt right to project their discourse among many online communities by talking about GamerGate and the gamer identity.

Finally, we will describe which types of solution have been proposed by different actors of and around the industry to tackle a present problem that nowadays seem to resurge as a GamerGate 2.0 (Farokhmanesh, 2024).

3. Masculinities: a quick literature review

Before delving into the issue of the current crisis of masculinity relates to others to create an anti-gender identity among the different identities that we could find in the gaming community, we propose to explore first the concept itself of masculinity as a social construction and its possible ties to the current far right-wing movements.

One of the pioneering works in the critical examination of masculinity is "The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies" edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (1987). This collection of essays delves into various aspects of men's studies, exploring topics such as the social construction of masculinity, men's roles in society, and the influence of patriarchy on men's lives. Flood centered his analysis of masculinity on deconstructing traditional notions of manhood and investigating how masculinity is constructed and enacted across diverse social contexts.

From this concept of masculinity not as "an essence" but rather a social and historical construct we can advance into the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" described by Raewyn Connell as the dominant and normative forms of masculinity within specific societies (Connell, 2000). At the same she also advanced the concept of the "crisis of masculinity contending that socioeconomic and cultural shifts have destabilized the traditional foundations of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

More recently some authors have studied how the latest economic crisis in conjunction with the cited crisis of masculinity have influence in the rise of the alt right as an answer for some sectors of the male population towards these crisis (Kimmel, 2017; Kimmel & Hughey, 2018).

After this first review on the study of masculinities which serves as the bases to understand the built up of a gamer identity as a anti gender identity, we would like to introduce a more specific approach onto the antigender backlash.

4. Antigender backlash: introduction and actors

In the last decades, and more clearly, in the last ten years since the global extension of the economic crisis, discourses linked to both the political and social extreme right have acquired a growing role in the public agenda and the mass media. In many cases, this has meant a parallel increase in the popularity of certain political leaders as well as of proclamations that cry out against what they call the "gender dictatorship" or "hembrism" (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012).

We do not consider that these are only specific or provisional statements with a populist spirit to attract the vote and consideration of groups that feel marginalized — the losers of globalization — by traditional political parties. Instead they are a complex network of interests that have become a visible head in the political arena as a whole plethora of political parties are gaining prominence in national parliaments for a decade (Camus & Lebourg, 2017).

The discursive agenda of these parties usually focuses on the superlative defense of national identities in connection with an explicit rejection of immigration and the existence of multicultural societies, while at the same time on anti-feminist positions and in defense of a past patriarchal status quo. It creates an agenda to launch a (counter) offensive that could be called neomasculinist or neopatriarchal.

The position of opposition actors towards women's rights activism seems to be strengthened by two recent political developments: democratic retreat and the closure of civic space (Roggeband, 2019). We could add that today the conditions of perfect transversality exist economic crisis, refugees, "civilizational collision", sexual frustration and sexual hyper consumption.

We could affirm therefore that at the center of the activities of the extreme right movement in different countries, and in parallel to the development of its other two great foundations — ultranationalism and racial and cultural supremacism —, is the mobilization against the "ideology gender" as a civilizational threat that attacks traditional societies (Tranfic, 2018). Three interrelated elements could be identified that have questioned a traditional model of masculinity and the subsequent neopatriarchal reaction.

1. Irruption of the concept of gender and translation from the academic field to public discourse through the media.
2. Visibility of the LGTBI community and legal recognition in some cases.
3. Expansion of the feminist agenda and feminist public policies with more central issues such as violence and harassment towards women or the discrimination suffered by them in society, the economy or politics.

    We could add three more factors to the former ones:

4. An even greater intensification of the commodification of social and emotional relations (neoliberal bi-opolitics) in the current state of capitalism
5. A supposed crisis of white Western civilization once controlled by sexist supremacism and facing the challenge of multiculturalism and growing social plurality.
6. Another factor seems to be the advent of deep questions within one's own masculine identity that would attempt to break with the idea of hegemonic masculinity. That is, the patriarchal offensive accelerates when many men have begun to question their own masculinity and, therefore, the traditionally patriarchal one.

4.1. Actors

The actions developed around this "anti-gender" reaction usually involve far-right political parties, religious leaders, conservative politicians, right-wing think tanks and anti-election groups, massive grassroots movement of conservative parents and, of course, online mobilizations through a multitude of forums. We would focus on the manosphere as the closet group related to our case of study:

4.1.1. Manosphere

The so-called manosphere encompasses all those forums or blogs, Internet personalities and users that make up the radical male Internet community. According to this group of bloggers and activists, white men would have been the guardians of civilization, of intellectual authority, and it is now that they understand that this intellectual authority is being questioned by women and non-white people (Nagel, 2018; Zuckerberg, 2018).

This set of niches and thematic threads focus on openly criticizing feminism — as well as its associated subthemes, such as LGBTQ rights — and praising their own concept of masculinity. It is impossible to ideologically categorize such a large mass of individuals, which includes a minority of women. There are, however, parallels between a part of the users of the manosphere with ideas of the alt right: neofascism or alternative right.

The far-right — parties and formations — take advantage of these spaces to capture those men who are irritated with the system, if not openly opposed to it, who seek a safe environment against what they consider a hostile ideological status quo due to feminism and the supposed exchange of roles between men and women (Träbert, 2017). Neomasculinist groups express the idea that they have their privileges stolen by both the neoliberal elites and the feminist movement and that this have broken the natural order of society. In their minds the ongoing crisis of capitalism is connected to the subversion of the "natural gender norms" by the feminist movement and society would not be able to recover until this subversion is destroyed.

Another key point of their discourse is based on the evolutionary psychology and genetic determinism to explain the supposedly "core nature" of men and women and how they should behave to fulfil their "natural roles" in the gender regime (Ging, 2019). Basically, they define women as irrational, hypergamous subjects hardwired to pair with alpha males and with the need to be dominated by them. At the same time, they also propose that women control society because they profit from selectivity deciding who they have sex with which allow them to control men with weak wills which are most of the men population. Men and women are divided in different categories based on supposedly genetic attributes that determined their place in the social hierarchy and that the individual is unable to escape this fate (Van Valkenburgh, 2021).

While scholars doesn´t have a clear answer to whenever the manosphere had a clear connection with offline masculinist groups, there are clear examples of the manosphere acting as hub of organization such as GamerGate (same name as the event) or the Redpill where they tried to influence in certain events. We will explain in the last part of this article one of this event, the GamerGate, as it is key to understand the gamer identity as an antigender identity.

The manosphere would work as the nexus hub of this process where different groups are able to influence the mainstream debate thanks to the tools and sometime the direct support of social media platforms that helps them to position themselves more visible than they would normally appear. It doesn´t matter who exactly is promoted by this online universe if the minimum political program that they all share is promoted on the public debate: the idea of eliminating the feminism movement and reinstating the traditional gender regime. Similarly, to the alt right as a whole that have worked as a volatile coalition of different far right groups with a minimum program as a consensus to support, for example Trumpism in the USA (Stefanoni, 2021), we could say the same about the manosphere when they promote any discourse advocate for the core idea of their online universe.

Manosphere can be understood as the online expression of this movement where different groups compete in trying to propose a reactionary solution to the crisis of the hegemonic masculinity. Its online success

is related to the fact the digital world itself has a masculinist core in its design, structures and norms that made the manosphere a natural place for these groups to reunite. To explain this last idea, we will develop in the next section the concept of geek masculinity and how the subjects of this masculine model have designed the digital world in image of their desires and wills.

5. Geek masculinity

We use the term geek masculinity to describe a model of subaltern masculinity born in the 80s and related to the digital world and the technological fields related to it. We can summarize this model of masculinity as a masculinity based on claiming for themselves the hegemony and control of the technological fields, and the aptitudes related to the scientific field such as rationality as key points of their masculine identity. To protect their self-stem, and their social capital they need to have a high specialized technological knowledge and abilities which poses a difference with the traditional masculine model based on physical strength and sexual success (Condis, 2018).

Scholars have explained the support that this model of masculinity could have received in its origin in western societies because it both suited the needs of the Cold War, and the conservative movements in the 80s, with key figures of the neoliberalism contra revolution such as Reagan giving them a legitimacy as an acceptable model of masculinity for boys who were not fit for the traditional and hegemonic model (Kocurek, 2015).

Supporting this model also implicated to masculinize these new spaces because following the logic of the hegemonic masculinity this new type of masculinity would desire to enjoy some part of the masculine privilege even if they knew they would not be at the top of the chain. Women were expelled or forgotten even if their achievement have been key in developing some fields in their early years, for example, programming. Neoliberalism imposed a trinity of values in the core of geek masculinity: individualism, competitive spirit, and being aggressive, all of these supported by a meritocratic point of view.

One of the main consequences of this masculinization and developing of the geek masculinity is that the logic of this model of masculinity became the "natural norms" of the digital world, and every subculture related to them such as the gaming world would follow them. One of the most important ones was the idea that women didn´t belong to their world and any presence of women in their spaces was fake or with a malicious intent.

An idea immortalized in "the rules of the Internet" by the popular geek forum 4chan with their rule 30: "There are no girls on the Internet" (Encyclopedia Dramatica, s.f.). As a result of this hegemonic model in the digital world, women had to either endure harassment or hide their gender identity to be able to participate in most online spaces. Because following the hegemonic masculinity logic the only correct place for women in this subaltern model was to be the sexual object and the prize to win by the boys, an idea also summarized in another "rule of the Internet", rule 31: "TITS or GTFO — the choice is yours", women can either become a sexual object or must leave the online space there are no other options allowed.

In the last decades, the geek identity has suffered a huge crisis because of its arriving to the mainstream putting doubts about the status of the geek masculinity as subaltern (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). As geek culture became the prominent drive of the pop culture, geek masculinity might have revealed itself as another aspect of hegemonic masculinity changing roles with the more traditional model.

This generated different contradictions for the subjects as it is difficult to consider yourself oppressed if your subculture becomes hegemonic, and the role model of masculinity shift more accordingly to your new status as key individuals in strategic fields of society and the economy.

Another consequence of the crisis of identity was the need to define the purity of the members of the group. Although geeks already gatekept who could belong to their subculture before becoming mainstream (Salter & Blodgett, 2017) the need to do it become more prominent, especially as the crisis of identity initiated a questioning of the masculine privileges of the group. Concepts such as "fake geek girl" (Scott, 2019) and the difference between casual and hardcore gamers appeared to police individuals to follow certain guidelines and to expels those who were not supposed to get a voice.

6. Gamer identity: who are the gamers?

In popular culture videogames are associated to male teenagers' geeks who dominated this space while hiding from the real world and the hardships of hegemonic masculinity who denies them the ability to prove their virility. Videogames seems to be only for (heterosexual) boys and other groups such as women cannot be part of this culture.

Nevertheless, the reality is that videogames have a far more inclusive audience than this stereotype normally allow us to see. For instance, women are half of the audience in important markets such as Asia (48% of world´s total gaming revenue in 2020) or the United States (Forbes, 2021). Then, why videogames are still seen and represented as a boy's thing where women are treated as intruders or in the best case are allowed to fulfil the role of the girlfriend of the main player?

We argue that this dissonance between the statistical evidence and the popular perception of both industry and community is related to the influence that geek masculinity has exerted in the videogame industry from its origins until today. As researchers have pointed out geek masculinity have played a key role in the design of the digital world and the videogame industry as their subjects occupied key roles in these new industries. The consequence is that, as architects of these spaces, they reproduced and normalized every

gender inequality that they themselves didn´t perceive as problematic or were even aware of its existence (Salter, 2018).

In the case of the videogame, we can discuss how the creation of the gamer identity as a consumer identity might have motivated a masculine hegemony on the gaming culture. Although we don´t deny the existence of others subversive or non-hegemonic gamer identities as the gamer identity can be understood as an intersection of other identities such as gender or race (Shaw, 2012) we have decided to focus on how the hegemonic one.

The "white heterosexual male default", as an identity default that sometimes go unremarked as Games Studies in the past focused more on the marginalized identities (Salter&Blodgett, 2017). By this reason we are going to study how the origin of the "default" gamer identity helped to build this concept of gamer as a masculine identity that later could potentially be radicalize on a masculinist path.

Originally videogames were not genderized, scholars have studied the first period of the industry where arcade machines were played by both boys and girls equally without any identification between gender and videogames (Kocurek, 2015). However, this started to change as the industry looked to legitimate itself as a cultural product rather than risking becoming another toy more, to do so they pushed to generate a proper videogame culture and an identity for those who were to become it´s consumers (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

Defining a consumer identity such as the gamer identity needed to fulfil certain requirements, for example, specialist media started to educate consumers in a gaming canon of what were "good games" and how to identify them (Consalvo & Paul, 2019). This canon started to shape what a gamer should be as logically not all people would necessarily share the same criteria. Many of these new criteria were related to the technological capabilities of the new industry which helped to promote the geek male subject, already an expert in these fields, as the intended player, he who understood the potential of these news platforms and games. Other significant criteria would be the longitude and difficulty of "good games" who normally require investing huge amount of hours to beat them, and the high economic investment required to keep up with the rhythm of the industry. Being a "good gamer" according to the industry is buying new platforms and products regularly without caring about its high prices and relative short lives of every gaming generation. All these factors started to shape by class, age and gender limitations who could be a gamer.

Defining a consumer identity is also a process of saying who is the industry talking to, who are the intended consumers who are going to like it´s products. In the case of the videogame industry, the focus shifted from selling their platforms as a familiar product towards being a cultural product for male teenagers as the industry looked to build a loyal consumer base (Kirkpatrick, 2013). As scholars have pointed out over the 90s the specialist and the official videogame media focused on generating a culture where the already mentioned young male geek seemed to be the only valid subject of this new subculture. Be it game reviews, game manuals, trailers, game characters... every videogame and the content generated around it (paratexts) was directed toward representing and fulfilling heterosexual teenager male fantasies (Condis & Morrissette 2023). Women only appeared as sexual objects or secondary partners of the real gamers without acknowledging the possibility of a girl being able to be a "true gamer" (Cote, 2018).

This situation continued in the following decade (Fisher, 2015) reinforcing the false idea of the videogame culture as an exclusive heterosexual (white) masculine space and making other collectives, especially women, unable to identify themselves as gamers because of a lack of representation or because they don't think they fulfil the requirements to be a gamer (Shaw, 2021; Kivijärvi & Katila,2022). Another consequence of this process is that misogynistic attitudes were normalized in some sectors of the community which created another problem for women as not only they were not represented or acknowledged by the industry. They were also attacked and chased out as they were perceived as intruders and "false gamers" (Paaßen et al., 2017).

This problem was not only present in the gaming community, but in every community related to the geek culture and became progressively more explicit as women tried to dispute the masculinist hegemony (Lane, 2018; Scott, 2019).

However, geek hegemony suffered a huge blow with the growth of the videogame industry that provoke the arrival of new audiences to the community who were not necessarily socialized in the traditional gaming culture. Companies started to make new types of games and platforms to appeal to these new clients who allowed them to reach higher profits, while at the same time trying to maintain the old gamer identity as the intended player. The evolution of the industry generated a crisis among gamers because new players started to question classical narratives and norms. For example, the industry started to make games who were "easier" or didn´t urge the player to invest huge amount of time to beat them, or the point was more to use the game as an excuse for social gathering rather than a platform to display the user skills (Juul, 2010).

Old school gamers started to differentiate between "hardcore" or "casual" gamers trying to discriminate between those who knew the "essence" or the "real games" worth to play and master (a key aspect of the geek masculinity), and those who only played because videogames became mainstream and didn´t were "true gamers". Women were seen as part of the second group unable to truly understand "real games", even though it has been proven that they play the same platforms and games that hardcore gamers do (Kotaku,2021). Gamers feel menaced by the new audience who could put in question their hegemony, in a more general phenomenon of crisis of the geek culture who could not reconciliate their classical identity of outsider and victims, with the fact that their subculture have reached the mainstream and was now an object of consume for everyone (Lane, 2018).

Gamer identity entered in a crisis in the early 2010s because of the "casual revolution" who made videogames the mainstream product that it is today, as the new public no longer desired to follow the geek

hegemony. One of the main criticisms to this hegemony was made by feminist activists who questioned the classical narratives in the videogame culture defining them as sexists.

The "casual revolution" has proved that the gamer identity it is not a "close identity". On the contrary it is a disputed identity, each person who identifies themselves with gaming can call themselves gamers by consuming products related to gaming creating new types of gamers (Muriel, 2018). Although the main two label promoted by the community to discuss this issue has been the already mentioned division between "hardcore" and "casuals" gamers.

We will now explain this event, the GamerGate, who pre-emptively gave a lot of clues about how the alt right would design its antigender agenda as they try them out first in the gaming community with a success that allowed them to reach the mainstream political debate in the following years.

7. GamerGate: gamers as an antigender identity

GamerGate was an event in the gaming community that started in 2014, a witch hunt against women in the videogame industry that revealed to the public eye that reactionary discourses were present in these communities where many young people socialized.

It started in 2014 supposedly as a denounce of journalism corruption in the videogame industry. Zoe Quinn, videogame developer, was accused by her ex-boyfriend of having sex with journalists to obtain better reviews of her indie games. Another target of the witch hunt was Anita Sarkessian, journalist and youtuber, who was doing a series of videos criticizing gender narratives in classical videogames tropes affirming that they were sexist. Thousands of young (and old) males started a harassment and death menace campaign against both Quinn and Sarkessian, and in general against women in the videogame industry and online spaces. Even when accusations against Quinn were proven false the campaign didn´t stop because it never was a campaign to protect journalism integrity, but rather to protect the masculine privileges against the perceived rise of the feminist movement in our societies.

GamerGate has been studied by scholars as one of the first public mobilizations of what later was defined as alt right (Nagle, 2018). It became the source and paradigm of many tactics adopted by the far-right movement in the next years such as using trolling, doxing, hiding ideological messages in pop culture memes or humor to influence people (Greene, 2019). Tactics that were already common tools to autoregulate the online communities and that were born from geek masculinity itself to impose their gender norms in the online space (Condis, 2018). Hiding themselves behind the idea of making a crusade to defend freedom of speech against the supposedly censure that feminism wanted to apply in games, GamerGate movement incite their people to use these tactics to destroy their opponents, while trying to appear in the public eye as a legitimate and peaceful movement. Geeks wanted to be perceived as victims defending themselves from outsiders to their world, while at the same policing subalterns' groups into submitting to their gender rules in their spaces.

GamerGate tried to evolve the gamer identity, which until that point was more of a consumer or cultural identity, into a political identity with an antigender agenda as the core idea. They were aware of their own cultural identity and desired to protect their status inside the gaming community as the "true gamers" because is a necessity to validate their masculine identity. To do it they started to associate the gamer identity to an antigender political program of defense of the videogame culture, admitting it was a masculinist one, against the menace of feminism (Dowling et al., 2020). They wanted to project the idea that their ideas were born from a rational and meritocratic point of view, in contrast of the "irrationality and passional inspired" project of vengeance defended by the feminist movement who didn´t respect geek culture (Mortensen, 2018).

To achieve this objective GamerGate started to do something that nowadays antigender groups do normally, they started to say that feminism wanted to "politized" videogames and that put gaming in danger. If games became "political" their essence would be destroyed by an outside ideology, who would eliminate every key aspect of what made videogames enjoyable to their "true" audience. Proposing feminine protagonists or that women weren´t made to be sexual objects for the male gaze was seen as political censure for example. For GamerGate activists, the gaming community has always been a meritocratic regime without any gender, race, or class inequality and where people could win the respect of the community by proving their skills, until feminist groups and other political left leaning groups started to question the geek hegemony. As any other group that use the meritocratic argument, these activists wanted to omit the social inequalities that were structural to the gaming industry and community, and that were the source of their privileges among these spaces.

Gender was not the only debate made public as the far-right wing groups started to participate in the movement. For example, whiteness also became a subject of concern for "true gamers" that didn´t want to play as non-white characters, even in historical based videogames where it was a fact that non-white people existed in the period and place where the game´s narrative placed the player (Aguirre, 2021). A sector of gamers started to use the concept "historical realism" to justify the political program of white supremacism of hiding colonial crimes and erase the history and culture of non-white people.

However, we must remark that antigender agenda was the axis that unified every group in the GamerGate movement. Men´s Rights Activism (MRA) groups used GamerGate as a vehicle to project their discourse into a wider audience and were able to appear in the mainstream debate (O´Donnell, 2020). It wasn´t a hard task, because as we have explained geek masculinity already saw women as a menace towards their hegemony over the digital technologies after videogames and social media became mainstream. GamerGate looked to allied other groups who saw in the antigender crusade a way to win a cultural war against the feminism women who questioned the symbols, and key aspects of the masculinist dominance.

The alt right successfully growth in some sectors of the gaming community by proposing the idea that young white heterosexual males were victims of a totalitarian feminist movement, who wanted to steal them of their identity, their culture, and their rightfully owned space (Bezio, 2018). Profiting from having a common objective: the defense of the masculinist privileges and in some extent, the close relationship between military fantasies and the gaming world, the alt right and the MRA groups were able to introduce a military discourse in the movement, making feminism and women in general an enemy to destroy to protect videogame culture (O´Donnell, 2020).

The extra advantage was that GamerGate activist perceived this military discourse as another element of gaming, like many militaristic titles that flooded the gaming industry since its origins. It made easier for this group to convince gamers of using certain tactic such as doxing to destroy women activist personal lives. Although, as a weird contradiction, by the same logic it keeps some part of the activists from advancing into more material actions outside social media, where the harassment against women was treated as another game where to display their skills.

For some scholars, the possibility for the alt right to recruit a social base with this type of actions was helped by the influence, or the perspective that many games which follows the logic of being world-saviors games educate the audience in a more sympathetic authoritarian point of view (Jennings, 2022).

GamerGate helped the far right to grow outside their classical political ghettos and allowed them to impact the public debate without needing to have huge resources.

The political program of this movement was in essence the one of the far-right wings after the capitalistic crisis of 2008, the idea that white middle-class men were the "true victims" of the crisis and that one cared about them (Kimmel, 2017). For these activists, the objective of the feminist critique of videogame culture was to impose their political agenda into the games and by that way win the cultural war over men (Mortensen, 2018). Adopting the term of "cultural Marxism" created by the far right, GamerGate activists saw their fight to protect videogame culture as a vanguard of defending western culture against their internal enemies. Defending videogame culture was one front in the cultural war where feminists and Marxists desired to destroy western capitalism and the traditional family. These activists tried to convince gamers that they were being robbed of their refuge against the crisis of western society, by the same forces that supposedly provoked this crisis by attacking the pillars of the traditional gender regime. Some gamers were attracted to this discourse because it gave them a solution for the crisis that their masculine identity was suffering after the capitalistic crisis. This crisis made difficult for them to fulfill the obligations that hegemonic masculinity put in men to consider them real men.

Uncertainty in being able to stick to the mandates of hegemonic masculinity is the fuel for many reactionary groups (Kimmel, 2017; Ranea, 2021) that propose to reinstate the traditional gender regime, rather than wonder if there is an alternative to the hegemonic masculinity itself.

In this sense, the crisis of gaming identity, and the attempt to drive it into a reactionary political identity can be understood as an expression of the crisis of geek masculinity by virtue of this uncertainty. Geek masculinity no longer felt in control of its culture, and more importantly their hegemony was put in question by those were not acknowledged as valid agent in their point of view, women. Because even though the crisis of gamers was also provoked by the casual revolution, being mainstream gave a lot of geeks economic and social capital, even if most of them didn´t received this improvement in their personal lives.

While GamerGate itself wasn´t necessarily successful, geek hegemony is still questioned by other collectives and women weren´t expelled from the industry, it achieved the objective of constructing a social base inside a part of the gaming communities. Some gamers understood the reactionary program of the alt right as the solution for the intersection of the different crisis that they struggle with. For the alt right, the movement helped them becoming mainstream, and teach them many lessons about introducing ideological messages in the public debate using the tactics developed by the geek masculinity to police their own spaces (Greene, 2019).

7.1. GamerGate 2.0

Recently, a GamerGate 2.0 obtained attention from certain gaming communities and online alt right groups (Farokhmanesh, 2024). In this case, the focus is on the company Sweet Baby Inc which would be the responsible for making mainstream videogames "woke". The discourse of this new wave of targeted harassment is based on the idea that Sweet Baby Inc would push for introducing non white, and non-heterosexual characters in popular videogames to project left-leaning ideologies in the industry.

To "protect" the industry, the activists of GamerGate 2.0 have created a website called "The official WOKE games ranking" where they have collected more than 1.500 videogames which would have "woke" content. Mainly they include videogames that have "Diversity and Inclusion statement" (DEI), which for the creators of the website means that the videogame includes LGTB messages, have a non-white, and/or non-heterosexual protagonist, or are not "historically accurate" (*The Official WOKE Games Ranking*, s. f.). The idea is that "true gamers" should boycott these products to push the industry towards its "origins" expelling "woke people".

As we mentioned before the concept of "historical realism" is an excuse for these groups as they don't normally cite any historiographic sources, or they appeal to the concept while talking about fictional narratives that doesn´t have to follow any "realism". The "historical realism" is in fact the appeal to what Aguirre called "white mythical spaces" (Aguirre, 2021). A discourse where historical or fictional scenarios have been "re-imagined" as a homogeneous racial space which is taken as the "authentic" representation, even if historiographic sources, or the authors of a fictional world deny the truthfulness of this discourse. This "realism" has also been used to "re-imagine" the spaces as homogeneously masculine and heterosexual.

Following this logic, the new wave of GamerGate is, for example, denouncing videogames such as *The Witcher III, Fallout: New Vegas* or *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – The Definitive Edition* as "woke", even if previously they were claimed as "true games" for "hardcore" gamers, because they contain positive representation of LGTB characters even if they are not the focus of the narrative.

This revisionism of the history of videogame culture is one of the qualitative differences between both waves of GamerGate. If originally GamerGate was about "defending" videogame culture from "outsiders", ten years later as videogames have conquered the mainstream culture globally, these "new" groups seem to be elevating the conflict by trying to purge the "canon of videogame culture" to reimagine the whole culture.

8. How to blind videogames from hate?

In the following decade after GameGate, there has been many debates about how to resolve the menace of the alt right in the gaming communities and the antigender discourse in gaming communities. We could summarize the answers to the problem in two types of solutions.

First, the political institutions are demanded to implement different public policies to moderate, eliminate, or counterattack the discourse of the far-right groups in the online communities (Schlegel & Kowert, 2024). These demands sometimes are also directed to the videogames companies themselves, as they are expected to adopt a proactive role of moderation and regulation of the online spaces they have created. Although, one key limit of these proposals is that they focus on certain expressions of the alt right, normally the terrorists' groups, or those more related to them leaving apart the more general problem of the geek masculinity, and aspects of the antigender discourse that are common speech in gaming communities.

On the other hand, workers of the industry, who nowadays are living a process of collective organization and action forming many unions (Carpenter, 2022), have insisted on the importance of structural factors (Jong, 2020; Bordon, 2021). The industry is still in the hands of the same hegemonic group, white heterosexual men, who control most of the resources (Harley, 2020), leaving marginalized groups with a distinct lack of resources to develop their own proposals (Carpenter, 2024).

For many workers, changing the power relations inside the industry are a key point to obtain the necessary freedom to create an alternative model of videogame industry, where the alt right would fail to growth a social base among a part of the audience.

9. Conclusions

The battle for the gaming identity have become a clear case of how the far right mobilizes itself on the online world to recruit and growth it´s social base far beyond their traditional reach. However, it is also an example of how difficult it can be to hijack an entire cultural industry into a political spectrum as the cultural war for videogames still rages on, new games generate new scandals and opportunities for different actors to push their ideological agenda.

The best example of this is the existence of GamerGate 2.0 which proves two important ideas. First, the gamer identity itself is still in dispute by both subversive and traditionally marginalized groups. As such this new wave of GamerGate has not obtained the same impact that ten years ago. GamerGate 2.0 has yet to produce new public figures and obtain relevance on the public sphere. For example, a videogame denounced as "woke" like *Dragon Age: Veilguard* have broke records in Steam release becoming the best release for Bioware (Williams, 2024) even if it has been targeted by a boycott campaign by GamerGate 2.0.

Secondly, the existence of GamerGate 2.0 also proves that the alt right and a certain sector of the gaming communities is still able to mobilize people by developing ideological element from the first wave of GamerGate such as the crisis of geek masculinity. Nowadays, the problem is not only feminism, but the whole spectrum of people and discourses that the alt right have called "woke".

However, if certain hate discourses are still able to use the videogame industry to reach a wider audience, we should look at the situation in the industry, a massive oligopoly where a minority of owners have shared interests with other capitalistic owners who reproduce and maintain specific structural oppressions within and out of the industry.

To deal with this problem we find two separate solutions, although not necessarily the opposite one against the other.

On one hand, the proposals related to the promotion of public policies toward the industry and the demand of the industry itself promoting their own policies to deal with the problem. Or, on the other hand, a perspective where only the democratization of the power structures inside the industry, alongside a more diverse control of resources can resolve the structural issues that have historically made easier for masculinists discourses to obtain a considerable influence in gaming communities. The key difference might reside in which subject should take the initiative in resolving the problem, and whenever certain structural issues which are not explicitly spoken about when discussing hate discourses might need to be addressed or not to fully resolve the problem. The only consensus seems to be in the need of taking active initiatives to confront an ideological discourse that have consolidated a foothold inside some part of the gaming communities.

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