Privileging the Past

Problematic and Gendered Rhetoric in Retrogaming Content

Ian, R, Larson
Department of Informatics, University of California Irvine
larsoni@uci.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper presents qualitative analysis of 5 of the most popular retrogaming channels on the streaming site "YouTube" to understand how notions of gaming past are brought to bear on the present. Findings suggest that content creators draw upon personal histories and well-trodden discussions to present informational content about products of the past. However, these accounts are often situated in privileged and gendered accounts that are indicative of what Salter and Blodgett term "Toxic Geek Masculinity"[29]. Although seemingly innocuous, these narratives potentially contribute to barriers of entry into the gaming community for marginalized individuals that do not fit within the hegemonic gaming norm.

KEYWORDS

Retrogaming, Game Culture, Gender, Class

1 INTRODUCTION

Accounts of video game's past have been routinely framed around the experiences of white, male players [3, 17] presenting a masculinized hegemony of play experiences [6]. These narratives have been paired with exclusionary practices in the community and industry that privilege certain populations over others and deny access to those outside of the hegemonic gaming norm [5]. While these critiques have typically been launched against game culture at large, the subcultures that populate the gaming community hold unique stakes in the reproduction and maintenance of various gaming narratives. The retrogaming community, a subcommunity dedicated to preserving, discussing, and maintaining gaming's past [32, 35], is one such subculture which holds a stake in preserving certain elements of gaming's former cultural norms. Yet the "subtle but tectonic shifts" [10] in game culture have reconceived what games are and who gets to participate in the medium, potentially entrenching the retrogaming community in a struggle between technological and cultural progress and the preservation of established gaming

ideologies and traditions. Little attention has been paid to this growing subcommunity of players within the field of game studies and it represents a case study to further understand how gaming subcommunities reproduce or depart from the general gaming community. As a generative step in understanding the subculture of the retrogaming community and its response to changing culture, this paper analyzes a selection of the most popular retrogaming channels on YouTube to dissect the rhetoric used in discussions of gaming's past. Findings suggest that, despite content varying in regards to format and style, the standard rhetoric used between channels rely on a problematic recounting of the past that privilege the experiences cis-white-male gamers and is reflective of concepts including what Salter and Blodgett term "toxic geek masculinity" [29].

2 BACKGROUND AND RELATED LITERATURE

Analysis of video game culture has traditionally been concerned with understanding players, the types of games they play, and how they play [30]. This prevailing interest has led to an essentialization of hallmarks that are assumed when discussing video game culture: certain habits, commonalities, tastes, and canonized gaming figures. While useful for creating cultural touchstones and norms, game scholar Adrienne Shaw argues that this emphasis has defined a rigid notion of who and what is classified into normative gaming culture [30]. This proposition fits in with Fron et al's classification of video game culture as being one that is hegemonically defined, gatekeeping and restricting access to those outside of the dominant group [10].

Gatekeeping and restriction in gaming has been well documented in the video game community across intersectional lines, including race, gender, and sexual orientation [20, 27, 31]. It has also been analyzed and critiqued in the telling of video game history, where accounts of gaming evolution have been routinely framed around the experiences and contributions of white and Japanese men [17, 19, 23]. As Shira Chess discusses, the standard perception of the prototypical gamer has traditionally been a young, white male player [3]. Players who fall outside of this group have been relegated to secondary spots in marketing and emphasis, or as Chess terms the position: player two status. Yet the privilege of being the dominant gaze of gaming has often been at odds with the cultural outsider status these players experience. As Lori Kendell [16] notes, a generation of white men have grown up with the perception of being on the peripheries of culture due to their interests in geek culture. However, normative culture and masculinity has subsumed these interests and once "nerdy" pastimes have become the dominant trends. Rather than reorient culture to be more inclusive, Salter and Blodgett argue that nerd and geek culture have only

repackaged toxic masculinity into new gatekeeping mechanisms and tactics [29]. The authors contend that the video game community is one field in which toxic geek masculinity abundantly rears its unfortunate head.

Yet the medium of video games is more popular and diverse in its player base than ever. The Entertainment Software Association has found that the majority of Americans consumers now engage in the medium of gaming in some form [8] and globally the video game community is more diverse than ever [22]. The ubiquity and prevalence of the medium has welcomed in new players and new communities, signaling a more inclusive and diverse gaming future. But as a subcommunity centered on gaming's past, how might these progressive steps in gaming culture been embraced within the retro gaming community?

2.1 Retrogaming

The retrogaming community can be classified as a sub-community centered around discussions of old video game products [21]. The definition of what constitutes retrogaming has continued to evolve and change as new games and platforms enter the realm of aged technology, but the general definition is very much still reflective of this desire to play and discuss games and platforms of the past. Today, the modern retrogaming community involves a range of members with varying interests and types of engagement and a growing interest among scholars has been to understand how aged products are resold and recirculated in the contemporary game industry [25]. In her article "*(Re)Playing (with) Video game History: Moving beyond Retrogaming*" Kristian Redhead Ahm [26] puts forth that retrogaming enthusiasts typically fall within three player types: the art historian, the amateur archeologist, and the techno-historian. This classification can be seen in the myriad communal practices undertaken by retrogaming enthusiasts both offline and online. From game collectors who attempt to own every commercially released game for a single platform to amateur hackers who alter well-known titles and games into new experiences, the retrogaming community encompasses a wide range of engagement across a multitude of activities. Such engagement can be seen in physical events such as the annual Portland Retrogaming Expo, where enthusiasts from all over the world flock for game swaps, discussions, and networking, as well as digital content like the podcast *Retronauts,* where game journalists do deep dives on specific retro games and moments in gaming history.

Despite growing research within the field of game studies, little attention has been given to the retrogaming community as a unique subculture. Research on retro video games more broadly has tended to focus on the varying methods and tactics players take to play aged and retired games and devices [35], the community's belief on emulation and piracy [7, 11], as well as the role the community has played in the preservation of gaming artifacts [32]. While useful for understanding the motivations and practices associated with the retrogaming community, I adopt a framework that sees the community as a subculture to better understand how this community compares to wider communal norms and practices. Jessa Lingel defines a subculture as "*any group of people who have practices that are outside (but not necessarily in opposition to) the mainstream*" [18]. This definition fits the retrogaming community, which largely reflects the same values and norms of video game enthusiasm that the wider gaming community exhibits but departs from it through unique practices and methods of play. Accordingly, I echo Swalwell, Stuckey and Ndalianis's call to game studies to "*recognize the impact and centrality of videogame fan communities – as a collective intelligence, as a pool of individual creators of games and as interested and engaged parties in the collecting and remembering of game history*" [32].

Analyzing how the subculture of the retrogaming community reify or reject these problematic linkages may contribute to community-based game scholarship and provide new insights into how the game community operates more generally.

2.2 Connections to the Past

A larger vein of research has considered the unique role nostalgia has played in the continued consumerization of video game products. Laurie Taylor and Zach Whalen, editors and contributors of the anthology *Playing the Past*, put forth that "*nostalgia is best understood as a process of looking back to an unattainable past and trying to bring the past to the present*" [34]. This connection to the past can easily be seen in retrogaming content as channels promise to "take you back" to gaming's past as well as the promise of repackaged gaming experiences that allow the player to "relive" and "replay" gaming memories [37]. Sean Fenty argues that video games enable the player to engage with nostalgic memories in more complex ways than other forms of media, claiming that:

"V*ideo games can represent the past as it was, or as it never was, but they can represent how players wish to remember it, revisiting or revising the past to make players yearn for it, and they can offer players the possibility of not only being there but of doing things there- of playing the past*" [9].

However, Fenty contends that this seductive promise of the past is fickle and ultimately one denied to the gamer seeking to relive their gaming memories. The author argues that the nostalgic plays for the past discount the transformation both the user and medium have undergone and, accordingly, the promise of the past is ultimately rebuffed. Given this paradoxical relationship with the past, how might retro game content mirror this struggle?

This troubling of nostalgic gaming experiences is further complicated by questions of access and legitimacy. In her chapter "Classic Gaming" Melanie Swalwell [33] proposes the often conjured depictions of gaming's past are ones mired in subjective narratives centered in privileged access. The author dissects the wide usage of the moniker "classic" within the retrogaming and wider gaming community, arguing that such a term favors specific gaming narratives over others. Swalwell's analysis is chiefly concerned with geographic variance in content, but her argument can more broadly be adopted to critique classic and retro gaming narratives as ones centered on predominantly western, white, male experiences. This privilege of access coincides with literature that suggests that members of the game community use context specific knowledge and connection to a standardized selection of well-known titles, developers, and platforms to create hierarchies of legitimacy and access [4, 5]. Access and knowledge of specific titles and content then can be seen as an extension of gaming cultural capital [4] and

a form of subcultural capital: "highly contextual tastes and preferences that are valued only within the specific subcommunity" [36]. Understanding how this subcultural capital is enacted and conjured in fan produced content may serve as a launching point for even more nuanced analysis the usage of context specific markers in subcommunities.

Centered on reflections of the past, but still well within the scope of digital technologies, the retrogaming community's usage of digital platforms for community building is an area of novel contribution to works interested in digital subcultures. Previous literature has considered how subcultures and countercultures utilize digital platforms to find and grow likeminded communities [14, 18]. Content creators on media sharing platforms like YouTube and Twitch contribute to the ever-expanding games media sphere by producing content aimed at specific communities. Given the large breadth of research on topics including participatory culture and connected learning [15], analyzing retrogaming fan created content as a subculture case study may prove valuable.

A rewriting of narrative through produced content would be in keeping with literature that suggests retrogaming community members reinterpret dominant gaming trends. David Heineman's article "*Public Memory and Gamer Identity*" [12] takes on the notion of cocreated histories directly to analysis of the retrogaming community, finding that the retro community enacts its own alternative version of game history that parallels, but diverts from the standard telling in interesting ways. The contends that retrogaming discourse has a unique form of reconstruction against dominant gaming trends:

"The discourses of retrogaming suggest that the most salient function of this official memory is its capacity to (re)construct the identity of retrogamers. . . In other words, when retrogaming goes mainstream, online communities become just as much marked by their oppositional rhetoric as by their interest in older games."

While Heineman's observations of oppositional rhetoric are foremost concerned with the community's stance on new and remade releases, it signals the possibility for other types of recalibrations to be occurring as well.

Gathering a better understanding of how rhetoric and language is used in digital subculture communities to gain followings and communicate communal practices may similarly build upon these evolving definitions of community, participation, and subculture. Analyzing the fan created content is a generative first step in understanding the narratives and messages conveyed by the community.

2.3 Research Questions

Building upon the existing literature, three research questions were designed to gain an understanding of the type of rhetoric used in retrogaming content:

R1: How do retrogaming content creators draw upon notions of the past to present informational content?

R2: How are narratives of game consumption intertwined with content creators' personal histories and perceived histories of gaming more generally?

R3: Does retrogaming content reproduce or break with dominant trends of hegemonically privileged access in gaming communities?

In exploring these questions for this study, I hope to shed insight into the unique working of the retrogaming community and promote it as a space of further analysis by game studies scholars.

3 METHODS

3.1 Site

Data for this study was collected via publicly available videos posted to the digital video-sharing platform *YouTube*. Although retro video game content exists on a host of various video-sharing platforms, such as *Twitch* and *Facebook Gaming*, YouTube was chosen because it has the largest repository of new and old community created retro video game content. Launched in 2005, many retrogaming content creators were early adopters of the platform and helped grow the community to be the most widely used video-sharing platform for retrogaming content. As Lucas Hilderbrand [13] discusses, YouTube serves as a hub for cultural and collective memory, making it an appropriate site at the intersection between the present and the past. Accordingly, Heineman [12] proposes that retrogaming content on YouTube has been so popular that it has spawned many "retrogaming celebrities" through curated content aimed at the growing retro audience. This celebration of certain creators fits in with research that critically analyzes YouTube as a complex setting where social interaction between content creators and viewers foster unique social bonds and engagements [1, 2].

Beyond the affordances of being a popular social platform, YouTube also affords the opportunity to analyze curated content rather than improvisational content. The videos analyzed for this study are highly edited curated videos that reflect certain narrative decisions made by the creators about both the gaming culture of today and yesteryear. The choice to view this type of content, as opposed to less structured streams, was twofold: 1) curated content reflects the dominant method of discussion for the community on the platform, and 2) viewing curated content allows for a wider look at the discourse used across time. Analysis of informal content - like livestreams and lets plays- could yield potentially interesting and varying results and accounts for potential future work.

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3.2 Sample

25 videos across 5 YouTube retrogaming channels (N=25) were analyzed for this study. The selection criteria defined for determining which channels were eligible for analysis were as follows: 1) the majority of the content on the channel had to be centered on retro video games, 2) the channel had to have a large following as indicated by video view counts and total number of subscribers and 3) the channel must be currently active. A list of the most subscribed channels fitting these criteria was then established, with the top 5 being chosen as the sites of analysis for this study. The choice to look at only the top content producers was chosen to understand the type of discourse being consumed by the largest number of viewers. Although this choice inherently impacted the types of voices and content analyzed, I believe starting with the channels that are the most widely watched serves as a generative starting point for understanding the rhetoric used in the community.

Accordingly, the top 5 retrogaming related videos from each content creator were analyzed between April 2020 and January 2021. Like the choice of looking at only the top contributors, this decision of looking at each channel's top videos also inherently impacted the data sample. Rather than being a representational sample of the channel, choosing the top 5 videos could be argued to be a better representation of what the retrogaming community sees as valuable in this type of content. Videos ranged in length, with the shortest video being 9 minutes long and the longest video being 45 minutes long. The observed channels ranged between 3.6 million subscribers and 201 thousand subscribers, indicating a wide range in popularity. Likewise, content varied in terms of when it was first uploaded: the earliest video was released in 2006 and the most recent video was posted in 2019, with an average uploaded

date of around 7 years. This dominance of old content is logical given the selection methods, but it should be noted that it extends analysis to an extensive timeframe. Future research may consider looking at a mix of new and old content to gather a more holistic view of the channel.

The channels analyzed are as follows: Cinemassacre, MetalJesusRocks, Continue?, GameSack, and Pat the NES Punk. These channels were, at the time, the most subscribed to channels of retrogaming content. Despite all being retrogaming focused, the content of these channels ranges substantially in style and format. Channels like Cinemassacre, arguably one of the progenitors of retrogaming content on YouTube, focuses heavily on game discussion through comedic skits centered on James Rolfe's character the Angry Video Game Nerd. This is in comparison to more informational content by creators like MetalJesusRocks, who center their videos on discussing retro games and retrogaming products. Taken together, the variety of types of content provided a strong base of understanding for the type of retrogaming content on the platform. Likewise, finding thematic themes across various genres has the potential to yield more interesting findings.

Representationally, it is difficult to surmise how much the sample population is indicative of the larger retro game community. All 5 channels were from the perspectives of male figures roughly between the ages of 30 and 50. Interestingly, of the channels analyzed only one, MetalJesusRocks, featured recurring perspectives from a female figure. This omission of non-male perspectives could be attributed to the selection criteria but could be representative of larger social inequities and the general lack of diversity in the retrogaming community more broadly.

3.3 Content Analysis

This study adopts a content analysis approach to understand the type of discourse used within retrogaming content. Content analysis was chosen because it allows for the researcher to analyze multiple sources of visual and auditory data with a keen eye towards understanding recurring themes and patterns that emerge [28]. Both the visual and rhetorical content of videos were analyzed, with an eye towards the types of narrative structures and imagery used. I adopt this framework in following Christopher Paul's postulation of the importance of rhetorical analysis: "...*the words we choose and the symbols we select matter. They tell us something about what we value, how we think, the environment in which we exist, and who we aspire to be*" [24].

Selective sampling of dialogue from the videos were applied to record and document recurring themes and patterns, resulting in over 200 pieces of textual data to analyze. Data collected was then systematically coded using the qualitative data analysis program *Dedoose*, where each piece of dialogue was coded for thematic codes. These codes were then sorted into categories that represented the overarching three research questions, resulting in a final codebook. The resulting findings represent the dominant codes.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Informational and Technology

Although content varied across genres, the most common trend across the sample data was centered on informational delivery;

content creators most used their platform to highlight, inform, or provide perspectives on retro video games and platforms. The type of information delivered ranged from personal to technical, exhibiting a wide range of perspectives. Channels like Cinemassacre and Continue? mostly focused on perspectives grounded in personal experiences, whereas other channels drew upon technical specifications and hardware capabilities. This focus on hardware specification can best be exemplified by Pat the Nes Punk's video "Retron 5 Game Console Review & Compatibility Tests',' where the content creator reviews and tests a more recent retrogaming piece of hardware for its compatibility with a range of retro video games. In cases like this the content creators use their platform as a hub for information and informed perspectives.

Although hardware was a focus for many of the channels, many videos were meant to highlight specific games and franchises. The channel Continue? features improvised reactions to retro games in real-time as the three hosts play a lesser-known game together. Upon coming to the end of the video the hosts discuss whether the game was interesting or fun enough to warrant a continued play. Cinemassacre furthers this goal of highlighting games in an opposite direction, with the creator suggesting that he plays the worst retro video games so the viewer doesn't have to: "*You should thank me for telling you stay away from this horrible steaming pile of goat shit*" (Simon's Quest Video). This sentiment is echoed by Pat The NES Punk, who exclaims: "*Who else besides us surrounds ourselves with these dusty obsolete relics. . . we're sharing our love and hatred for all of these old games for some of the people who weren't even alive when these games came out*" (Bayou Billy Episode) This sort of highlighting of rare, exceptional, or unknown games was frequent among the videos analyzed, suggesting that fans may find interest in watching videos to learn about the merits of certain retro games and platforms.

Moving beyond technical specifications, many of the channels used their platform to discuss retrogaming practices that extended beyond just play. For example, in one video MetalJesusRock provides informative content centered around spotting counterfeit games and products presented by game store owner Kelsey Lewin (How to Spot Fake Nintendo Games). Another video features a guide to collecting for the retired *Sony Vita* platform and highlights some of the titles that may be of value to collectors (Sony Vita Buying Guide). With many of the channels featuring extensive collections of games, the practice of preservation and accumulation is a topic of recurring discussion amongst the channels. However, this more objective content was often mixed in with personal accounts and recommendations that extended beyond just technical specifications. For example, GameSack's deep dive into the Sega Dreamcast platform features a mix of hardware specifications with personal recommendations, blurring the line between personal preference and technical facts. This form of weaving personal tastes and perspectives was not uncommon among the videos analyzed and represents a larger finding that will be discussed further.

Although personal narratives become mixed with objective informational delivery, this form of content seemingly represents the primary objective for many of the channels: informational hubs guided by an insider perspective. In these instances, the channels serve as informational hubs for the community; digital communities to find out about potentially unknown games and devices,

get perspectives on modern retrogaming options, and gain insight into participation within the community more broadly. If one is to consider the retrogaming community as a subculture, this form of content provides exemplary evidence of the type of unique practices that differentiate it from the wider gaming community.

4.2 Relations to the Past

Although informational content was central to many of the channels analyzed, as mentioned much of the content could be best situated in relations to the personal and shared gaming histories. James Rolfe's hyperbolic comedic character The Angry Video Game Nerd in many ways represents this perspective of the past, exemplifying the challenge of inconsistencies in quality amongst many early gaming software. The content creator draws upon general statements about shared knowledge between retrogamers and the history of consumer products. Speaking on the prevalence of Tiger Electronic games, Rolfe exclaims "Tiger *was like the poverty version* [of handheld video games] ...*They were everywhere. Everybody bought them. Everybody had at least 1 or 2 of them. On the school bus people were playing them. At lunch time everybody was swapping them around and playing each other's games. It was like chicken pox. We all got it!*" (Tiger Electronics). This form of connecting information to personal experience was observed across the channels but was especially apparent in content that was more dramatized and scripted. Imagery of retrogaming setups, extensive gaming collections, and the act of play were often situated against memories of playing or obtaining certain games. In cases like MetalJesusRock's channel, personal accounts were used to inform why the creator thought certain games should be played by the viewer or to highlight specific tastes. In one instance the content creator explains his reasoning for his favorite of the PlayStation 2 Grand Theft Auto games, stating: "*I'm an 80s child, so I had to go with gta vice city*" (Top 10 PS2 Games). This grounding of individual tastes in personal narratives is contrasted by more general recollections of the past, such as those on Continue? where personal accounts often arose around discussions of what the content creators were doing when the game was originally released. For example, a lengthy discussion of popular emo rock bands occurred while the creators played a BMX game that featured many popular artists of the era: "*this is like freshman of high school for me!*" (BMX XXX).

These types of personal narratives were often used to situate the creator within their longer history of gamerdom. Aged rivalries between platforms and subsections of fans were often reconjured in the videos, and nods to the many "fanboy" sections of the community often frequented conversations of old hardware. However, content creators' personal histories that extend well beyond discussion of games often seeped into the content. For example, one host of Continue? poked fun at the mentality of popularity within high school by emphasizing what he believes to be the perspective of popular views: "*he's a dork because he chooses to do something different from me!*" (Rugrats). This framing of the outsider was observed across multiple channels, suggesting many of the content creators still viewed gaming as a practice looked down upon. In one instance James Rolfe's Angry Video Game Nerd character recounts the lack of privilege of owning specific gaming hardware: "*The only kids who owned this were usually the richer ones who thought they were*

Figure 1: Screenshot from GameSack's episode on the Sega Dreamcast in which the host reenacts what it was like to be confined to only having one platform. Screenshot by Author.

Figure 2: Screenshot of Continue? Episode on BMX XXX that compares created character with real life porn star Christy Mack. Screenshot by Author

Figure 3: Screenshot from Pat the Nes Punk's episode on *Alisia Dragoon* in which the creator is propositioned sex for reviewing a Sega Genesis game. Screenshot taken by Author.

cool. Well, they're not cool" (Tiger Electronics). This identification within past narrative exhibits how views on products of the past are still much painted by the experiences of the content creators' youths. Furthermore, it should be noted that this positioning of outsiderness was often lacking in any critical analysis of the privilege involved in owning gaming content at all or the privilege of being welcomed into the medium.

Given the nature of the content presented, nostalgic perspectives may be assumed. However, instances like these point to situations in which perspectives of the past are tied more directly to narratives of access, performance, and identity without critical reflection of those narratives. How a content creator's identity is tied to normative values of the gaming more generally is an area of further exploration.

4.3 Gendered Discourse

Although discussions of gender may be reasonably absent in the content analyzed, one of the more alarming findings is how gendered rhetoric pervaded many of the videos analyzed. Multiple of the channels often drew upon, what could be best described as, male adolescent humor to make claims about the world and the products exhibited. While some of this usage could be considered hyperbolic for the sake of comedy, direct references to male genitalia, human-waste, and masturbation painted the otherwise informational content into CIS hetero male oriented content. In one video, the hosts of Continue? Continuously make references between their in-game created character and the porn star Christie Mack. In another video by the same creators, one of the hosts jokes that the only reason to continue playing the game Super Putty is because one of the enemies in the game can be interpreted as nude: "*I'd continue cause I want to see more naked witches on brooms*" (Drunkstravaganza part 2 with JonTron). These comparisons were accompanied by jokes and comments about being aroused, masturbation, and objectification of the in-game character.

Problematic language used to describe female characters was observed across multiple of the channels. Female characters' bodies and roles were often critiqued and commented upon considerably more than their male counterparts. In one instance, James Rolfe's The Angry Video Game Nerd reduces a female character into one

facet of her body: "*her boobs are bigger than her head. Here comes Ms. Tits like she's jumping on the moon*" (Action 52). This reduction of female character is further exemplified in an instance in which the content creator separates out female in-game enemies as hookers, despite not classifying any of the male enemies in the same regard: "*what are these hookers? I guess this guy doesn't understand the concept of hookers; you're supposed to fuck her not fuck her up. Die boob lady!*" (Action 52). Not only is this language violent and reductionist, but it also makes the few instances in which female characters are present in retrogaming content as ones centered on sex.

Depictions of females as sexual objects were often in opposition of the male content creator. In an extreme example, Pat Conti's character is persuaded to review a non-Nintendo platform game by a mysterious woman dressed in a leather bustier and stockings. The female character gestures to her body and proclaims: "*if you review a Sega Genesis game, all this is yours*" (Alisa Dragoon).

In this instance, sex is comedically offered as a reward for breaking the norm of the channels focus on Nintendo games- but more broadly for going against gaming preferences and well-worn platform rivalries. Not only is the female character featured reduced to a CIS male fantasy of a leather clad woman, but her body is commodified into a reward for playing video games.

Although female perspectives were rarely centered in the content, the work of gendering retrogaming experiences is very much

at work in the content observed. By centering the fantasies, discussions, and rhetoric around male experiences retrogaming content creators contribute towards maintaining an inhospitable community that is equally as outdated as the content played.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Subcommunities of Gaming Past

The results presented here suggest that content creators use rhetoric grounded in a mix of personal and technical accounts to convey a range of information to their audiences. Personal narratives are often drawn upon to situate the creator into a wider narrative of their own identities and the history of video games through the recollection of things like platform rivalries, personal stories of playing specific titles, and imagery that evokes the past. However, it's when these personal narratives are intertwined with perceptions of one's gamerdom that they become emblematic of such concepts as toxic geek masculinity [29]. In instances like positioning one as an outsider for playing games or as less wealthy for only owning certain platforms, these personal narratives are transformed into a definition of geekdom and gamerdom that is still very much situated in hegemonic values of gender, class, and race. Although gaming culture is very much the norm in today's media landscape, retrogaming content creators recollect instances in which gaming was not the norm; saccharine accounts of the difficulties of the gaming culture of yesteryear, yet simultaneous celebrations of times in which adolescent males were the center of the gaming universe.

As Fenty argues, the deep roots of nostalgia that run through the retrogaming community mark attempts to bring the past to the present. The archetypes observed here in many ways represent those defined by Kristian Redhead Ahm [26], but such classification miss the nuanced ways retrogaming content creators form their narratives. Some content creators rely on technical knowledge and communal engagement, whereas others rely on personal experiences and dramatic characterizations of personalities of the past. In total, they contribute to a distinct community with unique desires, narratives, and methods of participation, all empowered by the usage of digital technologies.

5.2 Privileging the Past

Although most of the content analyzed could be considered informational, the rhetoric used was often grounded in non-critical privileged accounts. Content creators often made direct references to well-known titles, standardized game mechanics, and insider information to situate themselves within a wider narrative of gaming. As Swalwell suggests, these acts, although seemingly innocuous, create a standardized notion of retrogaming that may conflict with the histories of gamers at the gaming margins both culturally and geographically [33]. Not only do these accounts reify the dominant histories and consumption models of "hacker heroes" and "game gods" that Laine Nooney [23] warns populate too much of accounts of game history, but they reproduce notions of the dominant retro player and the designed "player one" Chess defines [3].

This reification of outdated narratives and privilege access is especially problematic when paired with gendered rhetoric, language, and depictions that demean and make rare characters and

perspectives outside the dominant norm. Although sexualized characterization of females was often in pursuit of humor, the position of power enacted by content creators further solidifies the retrogaming community as inhospitable to female and non-binary gamers. Narratives of geekdom and gamerdom are intertwined with toxic geek masculinity [29], and barriers of access to gamers at the cultural margins become increasingly insurmountable. A privileged past is brought to bear on the community of the present.

6 CONCLUSION: HOPES FOR A BETTER RETRO FUTURE

This study has been one part of a larger project to understand the retrogaming community, and a generative first step for future work on understanding the unique intricacies the retro community holds. As a collective of players with various interests and stakes, the retro gaming community is inevitably a hard one to rigidly define and the content of popular youtubers certainly does not translate to the feelings and ideas of all participants. Undoubtedly the community is home to players and stakeholders who are actively pushing for more inclusive and fair play in retro content and documentation practices.

Although the content analyzed in this study was often ripe with misogynistic, ableist, and other abhorrent language, the more recent videos across all the channels observed were often the ones to feature this type of content least. With many of the observed channels spanning more than a decade of the content creators' lives, many of the creators have undergone transformations both personally and through the intent of their content. While this does not suggest a complete condemnation of the creators' former biases, it at least points towards a gradual maturing of retrogaming community by both the content creators and the community at large. Further research will have to be conducted to understand the length and authenticity of this shift in perspectives, but it at least points to an increasingly changing community. As new games, platforms, and communities enter the designation of retro the barriers to access will only be further challenged. Paired with numerous creators who are making more inclusive retro-inspired games and content and we may see a more diverse and representative retro future.

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