

Critically evaluate Lisa Nakamura's claim that 'racism and sexism have continued to flourish on the Internet, and indeed to some extent have even come to define it, despite our supposedly "post-racial" historical moment' (2014, p. 81). Focus your response on one concrete case study, and draw from at least two theoretical sources.

In this essay, I will be responding to Lisa Nakamura's claim about racism and sexism and how it has come to flourish on the internet... to even come to define it (2014, p. 81).

In this essay, I will be answering via a case study which will be the #gamergate scandal, and secondly, discuss what is specific about racism and sexism's' online presence.

We supposedly live in a "post-racial" (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 81) society, which basically means that a lot of people see racism (and sexism) as a thing of the past-tense (sometimes even eradicated) and racist incidents are a result of ignorance and personal dislike; not a culturally systematic problem (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 81). However, we have come to see that racism and sexism is still a very serious problem and is not a thing of the past; especially on the internet (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 81).

Racism and sexism online is are two very broad topics, so I will narrow down my research, and will specifically look into the online gaming community and the #gamergate scandal.

Mia Consolvo, who is a leader in gender and video games wrote about how the harassment of female players has been happening for quite some time. However, she also analyses that it seems to have gotten worse over the last couple of years (2012;

Nakamura, 2014: pg. 82). Furthermore, Consolvo also discovered in her studies; that when there were fewer women playing games, the culture was not as toxic (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 82; Consolvo, 2012). Consolvo wrote, “all of these events have been responding to the growing presence of women - in gaming... The “encroachment” of women and girls into what was previously a male-gendered space has not happened without incident” (2012). There is a clear sexist problem within the gaming community; this research shows that with more female presence in the online gaming communities, there more sexist comments there are; [sexism in gamer culture] “ will probably only become worse before it (hopefully) improves” (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 82, Consolvo, 2012).

Gaming culture can be a toxic place for women, and people of other minority groups such as LGBTQ+ and people of colour. There have been sites made such as *Fat, Ugly and Slutty?* And *Not In The Kitchen Anymore* that were made to critique gaming cultures big problems with racism, sexism and homophobia (Nakamura, 2014; pg. 87). The way that sites like *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* help it’s victims of racial or sexist (homophobic, transphobic etc) abuse, is that they publish the gamers’ online identity along with the horrendous message that they have sent; this will expose them to some semi-public ridicule and shame, and also have it so, that readers of *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* will not play with them online. An example of abuse published by *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* is; user “xXSTONERXx1690,” was the person behind a horrible message posted to the site; he used several racist slurs. He will find that the readers of *Fat, Ugly or Slutty*, may not accept their requests to play with them (Nakamaru, 2014, p. 89).

It is argued that fighting games such as *Mortal Kombat* or FPS games such as *Modern Warfare: Call Of Duty* promote violence and abusive behaviour (Nielsen et al. 2008; Nakamura, 2014, 91) however *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* show that sexist and racist comments are found on all platforms, for example, “Dabby Dot” sent a *Fat, Ugly or Slutty* contributor message, which read “hi wanna suck my d*ck” after winning a game on *Word With Friends* (see Figure 5.2 in Nakamura, 2014, pg. 90). *Words with Friends*, is a game on the iPhone app store, additionally, is basically a casual game of Scrabble, which contains no gamic images or texts that might refer to sexism in anyway (Nakamura, 2014, pg. 91).

Racism and sexism are on many platforms, but now I will specifically analyse the #gamergate scandal; I will start with talking about what happened (or is happening) and how does this relate to sexism and racism online?

The #Gamergate scandal started its rise in popularity on Twitter August/ September 2014 (Mortensen, 2018; pg. 788). It saw several users being harassed, this included, scholars, critics and designers, but mainly targeted Zoe Quinn (K. Stuart, 2014; in Mortensen, 2018: pg. 788) and critic Anita Sarkesian (Wingfield, 2014 in Mortensen, 2018: pg. 788); and many people who stood up for them (Mortensen, 788). The #gamergate scandal followed many years and horrible attacks on feminists in gaming, Anita Sarkeesian being one of the main ones (Mortensen, 788).

The #Gamergate scandal, from a feminist perspective, can be viewed in two different ways: the first one being that; there is a group of men who are anxious about losing

ground in a once homogenous and comfortable place (Gray et al, 2017: pg 2), and the second, as a response from the default gamer being forced to accept the inclusion of women and other minorities into game narratives (Gray et al, 2017: pg. 2). The rallying point, so the rise in the hashtag, came out of the retaliation. The gaming world had seen a recent increase of feminist critiques, more women were speaking up about the sexist game culture; the objectification of women in video games (Chess & Shaw, 2015 in Gray et al, 2017: pg. 2).

Zoe Quinn was the first of these women to experience the violence in both the physical and digital form. Quinn was being accused of trading sexual favours, with journalists for positive reviews for her recent game. Quinn was also the ex-partner of Eron Gjoni who set up *The Zoe Post* where he wrote about his relationship with Quinn and he claimed that she had sexual encounters with several people throughout their partnership (Gray et al. 2017: pg. 2). Quinn became a main target of many online threats, and she was doxed in the August of 2014 - this meant that her personal information was published online (Parkin, 2014 in Gray et al, 2017: pg. 2). This threatened Quinn's physical safety and this forced her to flee her home.

Anita Sarkeesian, was also a large target for the #gamergate scandal. She was accused of promoting feminism in the gaming community and this led to her supporters, as well as herself being attacked (Gray et al. 2017: pg. 2-3). There was an incident where Sarkeesian was going to present at Utah State University, but she had to cancel the event due to having been sent threats via email and letters, some of these messages read, the lecture would become "the deadliest school shooting in American History" whilst

another one read, “one way or another, I’m going to make sure they die” (McDonald, 2014 in Gray et al: pg. 2). Nobody was physically harmed due to the event being cancelled, but the threat was very real (Gray et al: pg 2-3).

The #gamergate scandal mainly highlights sexism online; (although sexism and racism usually go hand-in-hand (Nakamura, 2014: p. 81)). These women amongst many others suffered many cyber misogynist attacks (Golding, 2014; Perreault, Vos: 2018, pg. 559) online, not only threatening their digital presence, but also their lives outside of the web. The threats largely stemming from its malecentric gaming culture (Perreault, Vos: 2018. Pg. 559-560).

Gaming culture being very male dominated is not unheard of, Nintendo Power for example, in the 1990s did not “treat women as equal members of the gaming community” (Cote, 2015: 16–17). This means Nintendo treated their male audiences as superior to their female audiences. As of now however, females represent nearly half of the gaming communities audience (Casti, 2014: Perreault et al: p. 559) and this maybe a reason for the traditional and exclusionary masculine audience to feel under threat (Perreault, Vos: 2018. Pg. 559-560).

The #Gamergate scandal has highlighted that women, (and in particular those who are more open to the public), who oppose marginalization and symbolic violence, such as Quinn, or Sarkeesian, are met with real violence; death threats, doxing and many other threatening messages (Gray, et al. 2017). This ultimately, linking back this essay question is a good example of sexism (and of course, racism) online, this scandal

highlights that online gaming culture is malecentric, and anybody who questions it, is met with a lot of online abuse, as shown with Sarkeesian, in particular.

Both examples, the #gamergate scandal of 2014, and the Ugly, Fat or Slutty site highlight how very real racism and sexism have come to flourish online, from racist comments made in chat rooms in friendly Scrabble games, that you can buy on the iPhone App store, to being doxed because you disagree with gamings' objectification of women.

I will now move onto analyse what exactly is specific about sexism and racism online?

Daniels' wrote that, "some scholars theorized that the emergence of virtual environments and a culture of [a] fantasy would mean an escape from... race and the experience of racism... (2018, p 695). People would be able to start using the fun possibilities of gaming to visit different identities (p. 695) However, this utopian vision of the internet is not the reality, instead the reality is that race and racism has persisted online and in new ways that are both new and unique to the internet, alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberate both offline and on (Daniels, 696); the internet is not an escape from race, racism, gender or sexism.

Safiya Umoja Noble coined the term, algorithmic oppression (2018, p. 4) and sexism and racism are its' largest victim. What this means is, as Noble analyses; everyday racism and commentary online is an abhorrent thing in itself, but it is different from a corporate platform's (p. 5) racism and sexism. A corporation platform algorithmically

crafts our web searches that offers up sexism and racism as its' first results (p. 5); this reflects a corporations logic of willful neglect or a profit imperative that makes money from the likes of sexism and racism (p. 5).

An example of sexism from a corporation's point of view; on Facebook, gender is one of the main factors that determines the type of advertisements that we see. Facebook seemingly tried to embrace gender multiplicity (by adding 49 more genders in 2014 (Auerbach, 2018: pg. 217)), however advertisers choose from only three options: male, female and all (Auerbach, 2018: p. 547-548), this is part of algorithmic oppression, as coined by Noble. As a consequence of gendered stereotypes, men and women have very different experiences on Facebook. The effect is that both genders are encouraged to keep consuming along a firm divide and crossovers are discouraged by these algorithms (p. 547-548).

Additionally, Noble also wrote an article (2012) about how feminism and women are marginalised by search engines. What she meant by this was, in 2012, Panda (which was an update to Google's search algorithm) had been released, and for "black girls" (pg. 4, 2018), pornography was no longer the first set of results, however, for other women of colour, like the such of Asian women and Latinas were still very muchly exposed to being the subject of much pornographic content (pg. 4). Ultimately, women are the selling point for pornographic content.

Algorithms determine what advertisements that we see, and are promoted by major online corporations, this amplifies sexism and racism in search results, and thus on the internet.

Ultimately, I have shown Lisa Nakamura's claim about racism and sexism and how they have flourished online (2014, pg. 81) is correct, and I have shown this through the research into the #gamergate scandal, and additionally, the use of sexist and racist algorithms that corporations such as Facebook and Google promote. The #gamergate scandal was a huge attack on feminism and feminist theory in gaming; attacking many feminist scholars and critics. The algorithmic systems on Facebook send us advertisements, but what we personally see, is usually down to our gender, race, ethnicity etc. The internet has still has many areas of improvement, and the removal of sexist and racist culture is definitely one of them.

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