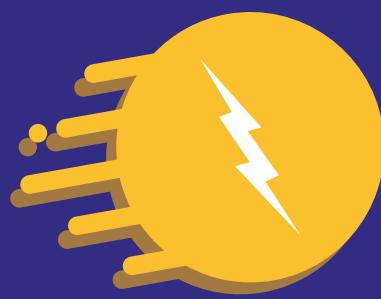




#GAMERGATE & the Internet Culture War

Reading "ZOE AND THE TROLLS"
by Noreen Malone





So What is "Gamergate"?

(click the screen to watch a brief video)



Before there were #MeToo and #TimesUp, there was Gamergate--a harassment campaign conducted primarily through the use of the hashtag #Gamergate. The 2014 controversy (which centered on issues of sexism and progressivism in video game culture) has been described as a manifestation of a culture war over cultural diversification, artistic recognition, and social criticism in video games, and over the social identity of gamers.

In 2013, Eron Gjoni, an ex-boyfriend of video game developer Zoë Quinn, published a 9,425-word online manifesto attacking her for breaking up with him. Linked to 4chan, a message/image board website often recognized as the birthplace of trolling, Gjoni's blog post went viral, and Quinn and her family soon found themselves under assault, on- and offline, by an organized mob of misogynist harassers. Within a year, the attacks spread to other women associated with the gaming industry, including developer Brianna Wu and gaming critic Anita Sarkeesian. Of course, it's not surprising that gaming would spawn a venomous backlash against women.

As Noreen Malone, the author of this selection, notes, sexism and misogyny have been the stock and trade of the video gaming industry since the birth of the GameBoy in 1984. Beyond raising questions about the male-centric culture of video gaming, Malone's retelling of Quinn's experience also traces the links between gaming and the racism and sexism we've come to accept as the new normal in American politics.

Noreen Malone (b. 1984) is the features editor at *New York* magazine. In 2015, she won the George Polk and News Women's Club Awards for "Cosby: The Women, An Unwelcome Sisterhood," a *New York* magazine feature story detailing the accounts of thirty-five women accusing comedian Bill Cosby of sexual assault.



Vocab/Buzzwords

Use for reference as you read

Cyborg (p.1): A person whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body.

4chan (p.2): An anonymous Internet image-board forum associated with trolling, hacking, and alt-right subcultures.

Milo Yiannopoulos (p.3): Pen name of Milo Hanrahan (b. 1984), a conservative British political commentator and writer who is known for his critiques of feminism, Islam, social justice, and political correctness.

Breitbart (p.3): Founded in 2007 by Andrew Breitbart, Breitbart News Network is a far-right American news website that features conspiracy theories, misleading stories, and content that has been considered misogynist, racist, and xenophobic.

Mike Cernovich (p.3): Alt-right social media personality and writer (b. 1977) infamous for spreading conspiracy theories.

Waiting for Godot (p.6): A famous 1953 play by avant-garde playwright Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) in which two characters wait for a mysterious person named Godot who never arrives.

Elliot Rodger (p.10): In 2014, Elliot Oliver Robertson Rodger (b. 1991) posted a racist, misogynist manifesto online before killing six people and injuring fourteen near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Dylann Roof (p.10): In 2015, the white supremacist Dylann Storm Roof (b. 1994) killed nine African Americans during a prayer service at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Schrödinger's murderer (p.10): In 1935, Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger proposed a “thought experiment” to test the idea of indeterminacy in theoretical physics. He proposed that if a cat were placed in sealed box with a radioactive atom that might or might not kill it, one wouldn’t know if the cat were alive or dead until the box was opened; hence, the cat would be, indeterminately, both “alive and dead” inside the box. Here, the notion is that someone randomly may or may not be a murderer.

USC (p.13): The University of Southern California

E3 (p.13): The Electronic Entertainment Expo is the largest trade event for the video game industry.

Fumblecore (p.13): A type of video game that involves controls that are deliberately difficult to manipulate.

Steve Bannon (p.14): an American media executive, political strategist, former investment banker, and the former executive chairman of Breitbart News. He served as the White House's chief strategist during the first seven months of Trump's term.

Pepe the Frog (p.15): Originally appearing in *Boy's Club*, a comic by Matt Furie, Pepe the Frog became a popular racist meme after it was appropriated by the alt-right in 2015.



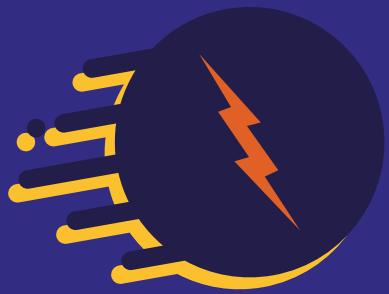
Other Key Players



Anita Sarkeesian

The campaign expanded to include renewed harassment of prominent feminist media critic [Anita Sarkeesian](#), who had previously been a target of online harassment due in part to her YouTube video series [Tropes vs. Women in Video Games](#), which analyzes sexist portrayals of women.

Sarkeesian's attackers took her critical commentary as unfair and unwarranted, and considered her an interloper



**Click screen to watch an interview
with Anita Sarkeesian**





Questions to Consider



In what sense might the #Gamergate controversy be seen as “the epitome of everything wrong with not just gamer or internet culture but culture in general and even politics” (Malone 3)?

How, specifically, does Gamergate connect or relate to contemporary American culture and politics?

To what extent do video games exploit sex and violence?

Can you think of any games that still portray women as “panting onlookers” or feature female protagonists with “builds that would give Barbie a crisis of confidence” (Malone 8)? How have video games evolved since the early days of *Grand Theft Auto* or *World of Warcraft*?

Why would a group of “demographically advantaged young people” lash out against someone like Zoë Quinn (Malone 8)?

If, as Quinn suggests, they think of themselves as the “hero of their own story” (Malone 12), what story are they telling themselves, and what roles do they and Quinn play in it?



What does Malone mean when she talks about “gamer culture”? What behaviors, beliefs, and values do you associate with gamers and the world of video games?
What kind of person, in your view, is the typical gamer?

What do we learn about Zoë Quinn as a person from the details Malone provides throughout this article? For example, what does the fact that she wanted to “make herself a cyborg” by implanting a microchip in her hand suggest about her (Malone 1)?

What other details help us understand who Quinn is?

