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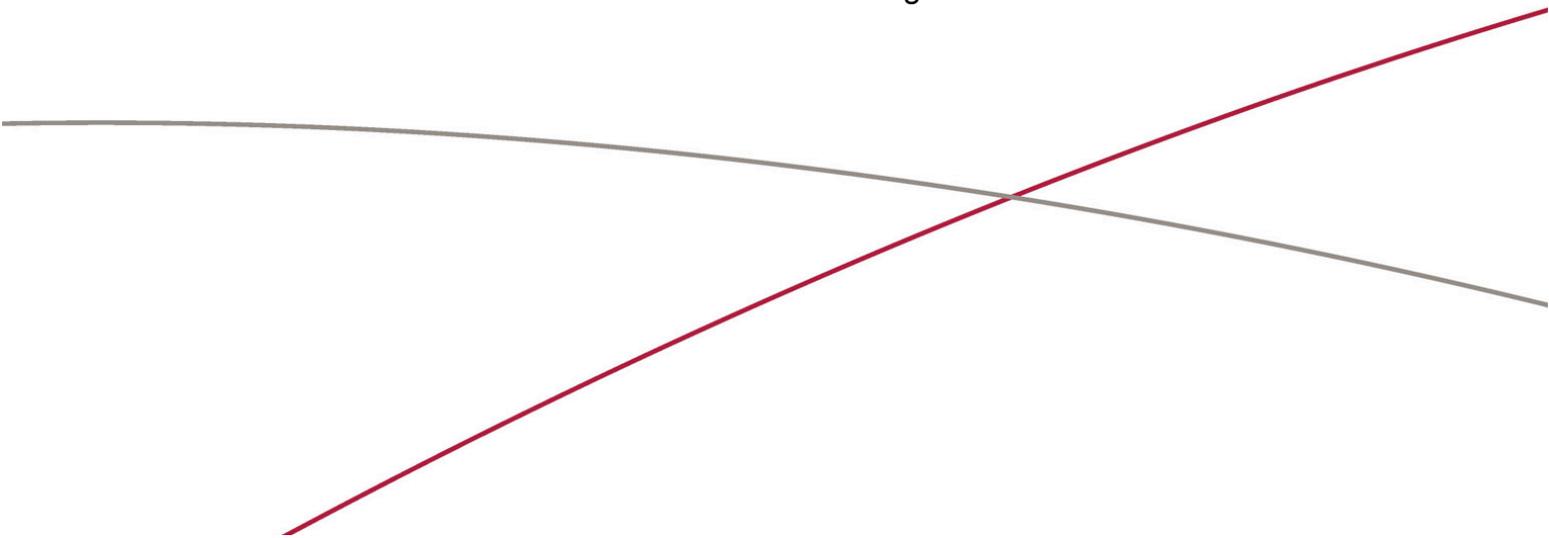
# “Misogyny in the world of online gaming?”

*A critical discourse analysis about how female gamers are portrayed in the Swedish Media*

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# Abstract

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## **Misogyny in the world of online gaming? - A critical discourse analysis about how female gamers are portrayed in the Swedish Media**

This paper's purpose is to investigate the discourse in the Swedish media about sexism in the gaming world. A social issue that is highlighted is the constitution of gender in relation to online games. The goal is to gain knowledge about how women are represented in news articles. Producers of news articles seem to take gender constructions for granted. Through Norman Fairclough critical discourse analysis this study analyzes how the language is used in news articles about sexism and games. The theoretical framework of Judith Butler and Yvonne Hirdman are used to discuss gender balances, hegemonic structures and norms that are incorporated in society. The empirical material consists of four articles published in Swedish newspapers about women in gaming. The selection of articles provides an image of how the industry, companies, game critics and gamers look at sexism in gaming. Commentaries to the articles are also discussed in order to show how the audience reacts. The findings indicate that discourses in Swedish news articles are involved in maintaining and legitimizing the social order of hegemony in the world of gaming. Discourses in news articles actively contribute in placing women in the gaming world as victims when writing that women are weak, threatened and harassed. They are part of a wider social practice that together constitutes this image.

**Key words:** *female gamer, gaming, Dataspelsbranschen, misogyny, women, harassment, hatred, threats, critical discourse analysis, discourse, Fairclough, GamerGate.*

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# 1. Introduction

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*“People live in ways which are increasingly mediated by discourse which construct work, family, gender (femininity, masculinity), sexuality and so forth in particular ways, which emanate from experts attached to social systems and organizations, and which come to them through the mass media (print, radio, television, and the internet)” – Fairclough 2010, p. 169.*

The focus of this study is to analyze how news articles frame and construct women in gaming. The constructed identity and subject position that women are positioned in is discussed through a discourse analysis. Media contribute in shaping identities, socialization processes and social hierarchies. Traditional news media is today shared with the techniques of micro blogging, social networking pages and direct messaging. This has made media more available and the audience has started to invest more personal time to engage in media- related activities (Hallahan 2010; Fill 2006). This thesis will discover how media can influence people’s behavior through written language. Language has the power to construct people’s meaning and our social reality. Media reports plays an essential role in how we gain knowledge since the media’s use of language affects how we see the world and how we make sense of things. To understand how human beings think and act we have to study texts and the use of language according to researchers (Bergström & Boréus 2012). This thesis will study the comment section of the articles in order to understand how people react. How people react and interact in the debate is of interest since this reflects how the situation in reality is. Also, research show that interaction affects people’s attitude and decision-making (Berger & Milkman 2012).

## 1.1 Background information

Computer games have been criticized for objectifying and sexualizing female characters, while manly characters are presented as strong and heroic. Since autumn 2014, the media has begun to pay more attention to how female gamers and developers

in the gaming world are treated in a demeaning way. The starting point for this was GamerGate, a twitterstorm that resulted in a global discussion about how female gamers had become the target for hatred and harassment. GamerGate started off in the USA, online when an upset man, actor David Baldwin, accused his ex- girlfriend and game developer Zoe Quinn for cheating on him with game critics. This resulted in a ‘Quinnspiracy’ and Quinn was accused of sleeping with journalists to achieve better ratings. Quinn’s personal information leaked on the Internet, she received death threats, and more people joined the discussion. At the same time the ‘youtuber’ Anita Sarkeesian released a new video about men’s hatred against women in the gaming world, and shortly after the release she started to receive threats as well. At this point the #gamergate movement began. GamerGate claims to be a movement towards ethics and transparency in the gaming world but turns out to be a hate campaign against female developers and feminists (Larsson 2014; Wofford 2014). Female game developers receive much more criticism and hate than game critics and journalists according to the social media company BrandWatch. BrandWatch analyzed more than 500 000 tweets with the hashtag #gamergate. Quinn and Sarkeesian claimed that threats related to GamerGate have driven them from their homes (Woffordm 2014). Due to GamerGate, both the international and Swedish media have covered the discussion about sexism in the gaming world. The debate has resulted in many initiatives promoting an equal and more inclusive industry from the Swedish Gaming Industry “Dataspelsbranschen”, some examples of this below:

- Diversi: A grass root organization working for greater diversity in games. They inform and share knowledge on their website and social media channels, they arrange meet-ups and they have a petition called #gamediversity.
- A critical marking system is under development, in order to label games that are violent and sexist (Dataspelsbranschen 2014).
- The game company Massive Entertainment has hired a gender expert to improve the gender imbalance at the company (Holm 2014).
- Dataspelsbranschen published a debate article published in SVD (one of Sweden’s biggest news papers) and it got 50 representatives’ signatures from the industry supporting it.
- Dataspelsbranschen hired Johanna Nylander, a former gamer, journalist and game blogger, to work on social issues within the industry.

Dataspelsbranschen is acting strategically in order to keep their customers; they want both female and male customers. This is a strategic move, as it is planned communication with a purpose. Their aim is to change the attitudes and opinions of the public. I have experienced how PR professionals help companies with communicative strategies. They often have close contact with the media and sometimes sell or write articles for different newspapers. Dataspelsbranschens efforts and methods of tackling sexism have led to international attention (The Guardian 2014). Their efforts have been produced and reproduced in Swedish media and internationally.

## 1.2. Research problem

Sexism in gaming is not a new topic for the media, but after GamerGate the debate shifted from being about stereotypes in games to sexism amongst gamers and developers of games. Media has produced several articles about the gaming industry and sexism, and can therefore be seen as a driving force that constructs women as victims. Sexism within the gaming world is not an issue solely for the game industry but an issue about unequal power balance in society. The image that media presents affects how people look at women in the gaming world, but also in society in whole. The media discourse of threats and harassment in the gaming industry focuses on women, while less focus is placed on those responsible for the threats. The media discourse may reflect the reality, or part of it. Some female gamers and developers probably identify themselves with this media image. The global perspective is of interest since it affects the Swedish discourse. The media is both an arena and an actor for these discourses. Readers and journalists produce and re-produce the discourse. It is interesting to study how the media writes about sexism in the gaming world in order to illustrate how people are affected by social practices in which we are embedded. According to the sociologist Steven Lukes, a text can influence an individual's thoughts to the extent that they want something that they previously believed was not in their interest (Bergström & Boréaus 2012).

This is relevant for the PR field, since PR Professionals works with changing the representation of gaming in Sweden. Furthermore, PR professionals work with producing articles, press releases, blog posts and other written texts that are published in newspapers and social media channels. Consequently, PR professionals can be the actors that constitute the media representation but also the ones changing it.

### 1.3 Purpose of the paper

This paper aims to analyze the discourse in the Swedish media about sexism in the gaming world in order to gain knowledge about how women are represented in the Swedish media and how people react to it. This is of interest because the media constructs our collective perception of women and their position in the gaming world, which in turn affects the game industry. Also, media discourse affects the perception of women in the society in general. I intend to discuss why the current media image looks the way it does, and what it can mean for the actors involved at an individual and societal level. This will be performed with the support of previous research and acknowledged theories.

### 1.4 Research questions

- How is the perception of women as victims constructed in the gaming space?

#### ***Sub questions***

- Which discourses are communicated in the Swedish articles about sexism in the gaming space?
- What does the relationship between discourses and the social practice look like?
- Is it possible to identify weak and dominant actors in the discourse?

### 1.5 Hypothesis

The media discourse has influenced society to view women in gaming as a homogeneous group. Women in the gaming world are portrayed as victims; threatened and harassed.

### 1.6 Preconceptions

To demonstrate openness and transparency in the paper, this paragraph clarifies my views and preconceptions about computer games and sexism in the gaming world. This is explained because it affects how the paper is written. When I was younger, I played several different games. I have played both computer games and video games. I have played games that are classified as “games for girls” such as ‘The Sims’ and ‘Roller Coaster’ that are about building houses and amusement parks. I have also played games that contain violence and sexualized women, Tekken (fighting game) and car games. I have not critically considered the content of games before, but my interest has increased

in line with the outbreak in the news about sexism and games. When I started this paper I contacted PR professionals and Johanna Nylander who is working with social issues at the Swedish game association (Dataspelsbranschen) and asked them about sexism in games and which initiatives they are working with to change the structure. They all gave me the same response; they are working with Diversi and a critical marking system. The fact that I have followed the debate and played computer games myself can affect my understanding and interpretation of the empirical material. However, I do not see this as problematic, I rather consider it an advantage that I have an insider perspective of this culture. My contact with PR professionals in the industry has also shaped my writing and interpretation of the articles.

### **1.7 Delimitations**

This paper is limited to studying contemporary Swedish articles from the time period October 2014 to January 2015 that discuss the debate about sexism in the world of games. The chosen time period reflects the point at which the debate reached its peak. Articles about this debate were published in Swedish newspapers beginning in October. The methodology is limited to a discourse analysis with a focus on the written language. Discourse analysis was chosen because this thesis aims to find out which values and ideologies are incorporated into the language of media reports on computer games and sexism. The sample of articles is small, as the goal with this analysis is to get close to the texts and find patterns in the language.

### **1.8 Structure of the study**

The paper starts off with reviewing previous research, to obtain background knowledge of how research has been examining the women's position in the media and IT- industry. The empirical materials, i.e. the articles are discussed in the following chapter. The methodology and theory chapter follow this. Next, the thesis will reach its main point, the analysis. In this chapter the articles are analyzed from a critical discourse analysis and critical feminist perspective (Hirdman and Butler). The thesis finishes off with a concluding discussion and ideas for further research.

## 2. Literature review

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Computer games are a popular subject for research but have mainly been studied from the perspective of "learning through computer games", "Computer Mediated Communication" and "stereotypes in games." This study is not interested in those areas, instead it will focus on what image the media is conveying of women in the gaming world and whether that image manifests itself in reality or not. In order to find this out, this literature review addresses how the IT- and gaming industry looks at women's representation, how women are represented in gaming discourses and finally how media reports represent women. Research about how the IT industry looks at women's representation is of interest since it gives a historical background to how women are perceived. The game industry is interesting to look into since it provides the industry's view on women's representation. How women are represented in gaming discourses leads us through previous events.

### 2.1 Representations of women in IT

Looking back at the constitution of games, developments in the IT industry have made it possible to develop games. The gaming industry is closely connected to the IT industry, and can be seen as a part of the IT industry. The two industries have a similar gender imbalance. Both the IT industry and Game industry contains few women. Research demonstrates that women do not have the same level of interest as men in working in IT and that women who do work in IT do not stay as long as men (McKinney 2008). Men enter the industry because they have an interest in technology and computers, while women's motivational factors are secure conditions and flexible working hours (ibid). Women do not show as much of an interest in studying computer science and learning about programming. They are not as attracted to the field as men (De Palma 2001). Williams (2014) argues that the issue in the IT industry is the culture that does not allow women to take the same place as men. He believes that people need to act and interrupt prejudices that hold women back in order to change the pattern. William does not believe

that the numerous amounts of research studies are the solution to the problem. Instead he suggests a three- step method in order to change the unequal gender balance within the IT industry. The first step is to identify if there is a problem, that is, if women within the organization face gender bias. The second step is to identify key metrics in order to measure the result of the changes. The third step is about testing, measuring successes and to keep trying (Williams 2014).

## 2.1 Representations of women in gaming discourses

Research shows that discourses concerning online games and gamers are dominated by a masculine culture and hostile language towards women. These discourses mainly take place online, and they are characterized by sexism and hyper masculinity. This has caused women to be bound to play certain roles, as sex objects or invisible actors. When women speak out about the industry and criticize gender roles in games they are regarded as the enemy. In return for speaking out, women receive verbal assaults and harassment. The discourse of online games and technology has to change in order to make women more visible (Saltera & Blodgetta 2012). Consalvo (2012) reasons that the misogyny that characterizes the gaming culture seems to become worse and more intense. In the past couple of years she identified many individual events of hatred towards women that together demonstrate a pattern of a patriarchal structure and misogynist culture. For example, Sarkeesian was exposed to death threats and harassment already in 2012, when she proposed to investigate portrayals of women in videogames. Felicia Day, a video game celebrity was also attacked in 2012 by a male game journalist on twitter. He questioned the value of her work and called her a “glorified booth babe” (Tomkinson & Harper 2015). Consalvo (2012) identifies two factors for the misogynist culture: sexist beliefs about women and a fear of change in the nature of gaming. Another factor that plays a role in this culture is how male and female characters in games are represented. Women are often sexualized and weak while white, strong men are the norm. This reflects how people act in reality and how the discourses are shaped in gaming communities (Consalvo 2012; Saltera & Blodgetta 2012). Consalvo (2012) predicts that this male- dominated game culture probably will get worse before it changes and improves. Media reports indicate that the male- dominated culture has become worse when they write about events like GamerGate. The Swedish researcher Sveningsson

(2012) argue that this image of a misogynist gaming culture is not entirely true. Her study results show that women are welcome in certain contexts and position. Although, she confirms that there exists male norms in the world of gaming. She found her study on thematic analyses of three forum discussions and qualitative interviews with seven female gamers.

### 2.3 What has the game industry discovered about sexism in games?

The game industry publishes indexes yearly: about the industry, including gender balance and whether sexism exists in the business or not. The Swedish Game Industry 'Dataspelsbranschen' does not describe sexism as a universal problem in the game industry but states that harassment can affect women in certain circles. They believe that it would be positive for the gaming industry to employ more women, and that it would benefit the industry to reflect society as a whole. The Swedish Game association's index reveals that only 16% of employees in the industry are female. (Dataspelsbranschen 2014) However, almost as many women as men play games today, 47 percent women and 53 percent men (Dataspelsbranschen 2012). The Game Developer Association (IGDA) found that the majority of game developers believe sexism in the game industry is negative for production. Moreover, the majority also sees sexism as a problem. The study is based on a questionnaire conducted during 2014 with 2,202 answers (Game Developer Association 2014).

### 2.4 Representations of women in media

Many articles about how women are represented in gaming discourses exist, but there seem to be a gap in the literature about how women in gaming are represented in Swedish media. Men and women are represented differently in the Swedish media, which affects how we look at the different sexes. It is also clear that females who produce media, or are in the public eye, get different reactions than males. Women in the public sphere, especially those promoting feminism and anti-racism often receive threats and hatred. The misogyny in media is dependent on a power imbalance between men and women, according to Sveland (2013). She argues that the offenders are men from all social classes, and the hatred often takes shape in the virtual world. This type of misogyny is present in the GamerGate debate and in commentaries to articles discussed in this thesis

(Karabuda 2014). It is possible to find a similarity in how media frames and represent female athletes. Female athletes have been made invisible and marginalized in sports media. The media has made a distinction between female athletes and male, by using the term “football player“ for men and “female football player” for women. This creates a norm where the man is seen as normal and the woman is seen as different (Jarlbro 2006). This is present in media articles about gaming too, a “gamer” is considered being a man, when women who play are presented as “female gamers” (Karabuda 2014; Erlandsson 2015). Also, It is usually men who work with, and write about sport (Jarlbro 2006). It seems to be the same in the game industry, more men than women work with developing games (Datorspelsbranschen 2014). Ponterotto (2014) finds that media reports portray female athletes in a sexist manner, or as a sweet little girl who lack competence and athletic skills. Media constructs an image of sport as an activity for, by and about men. This phenomenon is present in gaming communities too; a common perception about women in gaming is that they are invisible. Furthermore, female characters in games are often portrayed in a sexist manner or as weak and in need of protection (Sveningson 2012). Swedish TV- channels have shown a growing interest in changing the representation of female athletes in the policy documents. Jarlbro (2006) argues that this is not enough; action is needed in order for change to happen. The Swedish Game Industry also mediates in their indexes that the industry is in need of a change concerning gender representations (Dataspelsbranschen 2014). Many initiatives for changing this have been initiated by the gaming industry in they year of 2014 (Frank et al. 2014).

### 3. Empirical material

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The empirical material consists of news articles and comments on articles. By using the media search tool 'Retriever info' (2015) I have made the selection of articles. I used the keywords 'sexism', 'AND', 'games'. This resulted in 69 articles from 2014 and 15 from 2015. From this I could separate articles about sports, politics or gambling, leaving me with about thirty articles about sexism in the gaming industry. Some of these articles had the same content but were published in different newspapers. Furthermore, by setting the time limit from the second half of 2014 (after the start of the Gamergate movement) and the beginning of 2015 left me with fewer articles to choose from. The selection from there was based on authorship and virality. Two of the articles have gained viral attention on social media sites. The virality is measured through the number of comments and shares the articles got on social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). The other two articles are chosen due to authorship. Virality is of interest since it shows how sexism in the gaming world is reflected in the real world, also it indicates what sorts of language that create attention and awakes emotions. Authorship is of interest since it shapes how the article is written and what meaning that is transferred. The selection of articles provides an image of how the industry, game critics and gamers look at sexism in gaming. The articles represent different genres and styles since they are written differently and by different authors. I believe that it is interesting to investigate how different types of articles represent the same topic. Four articles from four different newspapers were chosen, these are presented below:

1. ***“Sexism has no place in the world of gaming” (SVD)*** is a debate article that is written by representatives of the gaming industry, Frank et al. Debate articles differentiate from others by their argumentative language (Infokoll 2015). This article is of interest because it demonstrates how the industry looks at, and writes about sexism in gaming. It has also received international attention and many comments and shares on social media channels.

2. ***“Pewdiepies jargon shut out women” (Aftonbladet)*** is an opinion piece written by Effie Karabuda, a female gamer and game journalist. The article is written from her perspective and after it got published Karabuda received a serious amount of threats and hatred. The article went viral and many newspapers wrote about how Karabuda suffered from net hatred.
3. ***“Experts helps company to find women to employ” (Sydsvenskan)*** is written by the male journalist Niklas Holm. It contains interviews from two people, the CEO from a game company and a gender equality expert that was hired through the company. This article did not go viral but the content has been reproduced in different media channels in Sweden and internationally.
4. ***“No one understands that I want to play games for my own sake” (Fria Tidningar)*** is written by the female gamer Anna Erlandsson. It is written from her personal perspective and understanding of sexism and the gaming world. This article has not gone viral but it represents the view of view of a female gamer.

The articles are published in different newspapers and reach out to a diverse range of people. The newspapers reach (how many people they reach per day):

- SvD: 157800
- Aftonbladet: 3 403 000
- Sydsvenskan: 95000
- Fria Tidningar: 4900 (TS mediefakta 2015; Aftonbladet 2015)

The reach is of interest because it shows how many people the newspapers reach on a daily basis. With these numbers it is possible to estimate how many people the authors may influence with their texts.

## 4. Method

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In this section I will describe the methodological position of my analysis. Since the empirical material of this paper consists of articles, and because I want to highlight the values and ideologies that they hold, the most natural methodological viewpoint is discourse analysis. This paper is taking on Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. Fairclough's analysis has been selected since it does not only focus on how language constitutes our social reality, but also how social practices affect discourses. Furthermore, It demonstrates how discourses constitute meaning and power through the language (Fairclough 2010). This paper aims to study the relationship between the discourse and the social structures in the society. It is not a systemizing investigation since the critical discourse analysis is not suited for that (Fairclough 2010). This study focuses on the interpretative aspect, that is, what thoughts and ideas that are expressed rather than the interpersonal aspect that is more focused on action (Bergström & Boréus 2012). It also pays more focus on what is being said, rather than who says what. I have chosen the concepts of Fairclough's analysis that are the most relevant for this paper. The different concepts that will be used in this thesis are *order of discourse* (other discourses the text is affected by), *intertextuality* (the relations between texts), *interdiscursive* (social practices that may affect the discourse), *ideologies* (the relations between text and power) and *linguistics* (the structure and grammar of the text).

### 4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

A discourse is the process when two or more people interact through speech, texts and/or visual images. Discourses can be a driving force of producing knowledge within institutions. News articles are examples of discourses that are produced within an institution (Berglez 2013). Fairclough (2010) views the social reality as a network connected by social practices. He explains a social practice as a form of social activity that always includes discourse, subject, object, activity, values, time and place. The social practices are different but dialectically linked. Actors within a social practice can produce

representations from other social practices based on their own experiences, and construct a new meaning of the discourse. For example, it is possible to discuss women in the gaming industry from a political, economical and cultural perspective. The critical discourse analytics Laclau and Mofe's assume that everything is constituted by discourse (Jørgenson & Phillips 2002), while Fairclough (2010) argue that discourses influence social practice and that they are influenced by social practice. This paper aims to find out how news articles interact and counteracts with societal ideas and ideologies, which is why Fairclough's methodology is chosen. News articles are produced by the texts, which Fairclough defines as:

*"Text: the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event."*- Fairclough 2010, p. 95.

The materials of analysis are Swedish articles; the research takes place in Sweden and the author is Swedish. Therefore, the author influences the interpretation and understanding of the discourse. This thesis aims to analyze the written language. That implies that the interpreter and authors will not be in the same context, and consequently cannot share knowledge face- to- face, so that excludes facial expressions and gestures (Fairclough & Chouliaraki 1999). When reading a news article everyone has preconceptions and experiences, which results in different interpretations (Berglez 2013). This thesis is interpreted from the author's perspective, with my experiences and preconceptions. I have followed the debate about sexism in the news, I have played games myself and I have interacted with PR professionals in the gaming industry. The producers of the articles also affect the paper, and what interest and experiences they had when writing their articles.

News articles are structural phenomenon's that are embedded in social structures and language (Berglez 2013). For example, the opinion piece by Karabuda (2014) mirrors her own experiences as a gamer and follower of the youtube gamer "pewdiepie". Her writing is affected by the global debate about women in the gaming world. Critical discourse analyses is partly about opting out of the discourse and look at it from an

outward position, while using the fact that being in the society that the discourse is produced in (Berglez 2013). The concept of "intertextuality" is central to CDA and it is about examining how texts relate to each other. Texts are often influenced by other texts and can sometimes be a reconstruction of another texts (Bergström and Boréus 2012).

#### 4.2 Fairclough's central concepts

Fairclough believes that discourses have three functions: a focus on the content, relational function (what relations that is created between groups) and identity construction. His critical discourse analysis is "critical" in the sense that it aims to create change by highlighting the role of discourses for the social world (Fairclough 2010). The societal problem that is discussed in this thesis is how media constitute women in relation to gaming. The gender construction seems to be taken for granted that is why this thesis will highlight it in order to create change. Discourses can constitute and maintain unequal power relations in society. It is possible to study these power relations in social contexts through CDA (Jørgenson & Phillips 2002). According to Fairclough (2010) discourses are guided by events, norms and history. Discourses are influenced by external events of politics, economy and gender structures. Discourses are constituted by societal structures but these structures can be shaped by discourses. When doing a discourse analysis the dialectical relations between discourses and other objects, events, and/or the internal relations between different discourses are also important (Fairclough 2010).

**Ideology** is a central concept of Fairclough that refers to many things; he sees it mainly as representation. Ideology is a relationship between texts and power, and a relationship between order of discourse and power, but also language and power. Discourses are ideological when it is possible to find a relation between the meaning of the discourse and a connection of social relations of power. Ideological discourses can maintain and change power relations. Ideologies can also effect constitution of relations, subjects and objects that exist in the social world. Ideological processes of discourse constitute what meaning women and gamers hold for the gaming world and society. Meanings are constituted when reading and interpreting a text. Texts are open for different interpretations. Reading a text is a process between persons: the producer of the text interacts with its readers (Fairclough 2010).

**Linguistics** is an important analytical tool in Fairclough's text analysis. Linguistics involves studying the texts structure, modal verbs, grammatical structures and implicit meanings. Fairclough studies the relations between words, which context words are presented in and how common metaphors are in texts. He also studies how often words appear and whether they are exchangeable or not. In texts it is possible to hide events, phenomenon, and subjects. For example, it is possible to hide an offender in text: "The victim is killed" or "The offender killed a person". This is called discursive silence (Fairclough 2010).

**Order of discourse** is one of Fairclough's key concepts; he uses it when explaining how genres, discourses and styles are interconnected and relate to each other. A genre is a way of acting and interacting with other people in speech or in texts. In a text it is about producing or reproducing different social relations. Genres are found in semantics and grammatical features of texts. A style is a particular way of being, a particular identity. For example, there are different ways of leading an organization, or representing a social event in an article. An order of discourse describes how to create social order in the discourse. This may involve maintaining and legitimizing an order of hegemony through the discourse. The **interdiscursive** analysis makes it possible to detect shifts in the order of discourse. It explains how overarching societal practices affect discourses. In this paper it helps to detect if the order of discourse is heading towards a socio-cultural change or if it maintains a hegemonic order. **Intertextuality** describes the relations between texts. Texts are parts of an intertextual chain of social practices (politics, economy, culture), events and other texts. Discourses contribute with constituting identities, knowledge and truths in these chains (Fairclough 2010).

The normative power of discourses has affected social structures and institutions, and within the institutions, there are norms and structures of how individuals should act. By observing institutions it is possible to understand how discourses are embedded in social practices. Institutions control their subjects with certain norms that individuals follow unconsciously. Individuals are ideological and discursively constituted and limited by the

institution. When the institution sends out messengers to their followers they act in line with the institutional norms. The institution controls the discourse; for example, the corporate language at a restaurant differentiates from the corporate language at a bank. Hence, discourses construct identities that are forced upon individuals (Fairclough 2010). This kind of subject position can both constrain and enable individuals' actions (Borgström och Boréus 2012). Discourses can be the driving force of maintaining norms of women as undermined in the gaming community. Norms are constructed in the way that the norm is not visible. Norms become something that we take for granted. For example, a male nurse or a female football player. What is mentioned is the abnormal; it is different and strange. No one would write a female nurse or a male football player. In order to question a norm we have to make it visible. Media construct images and texts of identities in society. The representation of men and women are different, and media reports men in a different manner than women. Stronger and more direct words are used when talking about men, and weaker words are used when talking about women (Jarlbro 2006).

#### **4.3 Methodological limitations**

This paper conducts a qualitative research. The chosen method is theory consuming rather than testing a theory or building a theory. The paper will not give a statistical or numerical result; the goal is rather to understand words and meanings. A qualitative analysis makes it possible to get close to the research object (which in this case is texts) and get a more detailed image than the quantitative research that is all about statistical coding (Greener 2011). This paper aims to find patterns in the written language.

#### **4.4 Validity and reliability**

Discourse analysis has been criticized for not being systematic, transparent, and having strict guidelines or governing principles. Critical discourse analysis problematizes many concepts in the language, like how we gain knowledge and therefore, cannot rest on the conventional research values of reliability, validity, generalizability or replicability. The discursive analysis is personal, but not necessarily subjective. The analysis process is a dialogue between reader and text in which the reader interprets the text (Gilles 2009).

The interpreter's task is to study the function of the discourse in relation to social practice (Bergström & Boréus 2012).

## 5. Theories

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The methodology takes up more space than the theory in this paper. The theoretical framework functions as a supplement to the methodology, it analyzes the texts through another perspective. Since this paper studies how women are represented in news articles, feminist theories are chosen. Hirdman's and Butler's theories are used to analyze gender relations, balance of power and norms. They complement each other because Hirdman focuses on the balance of power between women and men, while Butler problematizes gender constructions and the distinction between sex and gender.

### 5.1 The gender system

To understand the role of women in gaming, Yvonne Hirdman's theory of a gender system is useful. Hirdman focuses on the distinction between women and men in society, and as many other researchers in the field of women research, she asks the question of why women have a lower social value than men. Hirdman recognized a problem in how the concept of gender and sex are used synonymously. Gender is often described as socially constructed, while sex is described as biological. However, Hirdman chooses not to focus on the construction of sex and gender, instead she focuses on the distinction between men and women. She introduces the concept of a gender system to share her reflections on this. The gender system is a system that arranges sexes into gender, and shows a regularity explained by two logics/rules:

1. The rule of distinctive separation between the sexes. This is found in all levels of life within male and female categories.
2. The rule of the male norm; men constitute the norm for what is normal. What is masculine has a higher value.

Hirdman concludes that the male norm is legitimized throughout the distinctive separation of the sexes. That separation is based on a contrary approach, that one sex has

the power and the other sex does not. Hirdman argues that we are all born into a system with notions on how to be. We are all integrated into a system on how it should be, where women accept being identified as the weaker sex. With the concept of a “gender contract” she explains the invisible rules that govern each gender. The invisible rules control how men and women should act and think. They affect how women and men behave at work, in relationships and how they dress. These notions are inherited from generation to generation. The gender contract enables the gender system to continue, creating new segregation and hierarchy between the sexes (Hirdman 1988). Even though Hirdman published this article in 1988 it still functions as an analytical tool. It is possible to find a similar pattern of women’s representation in the empirical material of this thesis. Women are described as victims, suffering from hatred and harassment. Women are underrepresented in the labor market of games. In some of the texts the man is explained as contrary to the women. The man is explained as the offender, and the one responsible for changing that structure. This distinctive separation between the sexes might sustain in the gaming community, if female gamers continues to be seen and created as victims.

## 5.2 Gender trouble

Butler problematizes gender relations, gender constructions and the category of women. She believes discourses are influenced by history and culture and controlled by relations of power. She argues that discourses construct gender in relation to power. Women have become visible as a political subject through representations within political discourses. Representations serve as the normative function of language that can reveal or distort what is true about the category of women. For feminist theories, establishments of representations in language have been necessary to foster the visibility of women in the political sphere. This has had an impact on women's studies that no longer observe the category of women as stable and abiding, rather something that is open for modification. Butler thinks that juridical and political practices influences discourses and subjects. The political life is governed and negatively affected by legal restrictions, rules and prohibitions. Legal and political structures of language constitute power in in society today. Butler questions whether legal and political structures have created women as a subject of feminism. Butler questions the universal notion of "woman" and whether there is a commonality or cultural factors that shape women to fall into subordination and

suffering from oppression. She argues that it is politically problematic that feminist theories are assumed to have a universal base in the identity of women as oppressed in a hegemonic structure controlled by male domination (Butler 1990). Butler also questions the distinction between sex and gender made by feminist schools. The general idea is that sex is biological and gender is culturally constructed. Butler questions whether feminist schools have the right to establish these facts. She wonders how it is possible to refer to these concepts without defining their meaning. Is gender something you have or something that a person is? Butler sees gender as an independent and floating phenomenon, and that man and masculine can belong to a female body and vice versa. Being feminine does not necessarily imply that you are a female. Additionally, she believes that gender does not have to stop at two.

If one looks at sex and gender in the way that many feminist schools do, the body is just a passive instrument that gain meaning through external factors of culture. Butler means that the stage when the body goes from being a passive instrument to be something that has immaterial will, is blurry and unclear. The body can also be seen as socially constructed since a group of bodies constitute gendered subjects. If sex is seen as a social construction there would not be a difference between sex and gender, and gender would lose its meaning. Historically, the term gender is not created in a coherent and consistent manner. Gender has been influenced of class, race, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. Butler argues that it is not possible to separate gender from politics and culture since the term is created and maintained within these social practices. Discourses are also constrained by the order of hegemony (Butler 1990). It is interesting to put on Butler's "glasses" when reading the different articles, as the news articles refers to women as one group. The news articles do not mention transgender people, or men that are feminine. Although, one of the articles mention that female gamers sometimes pretend that they are men when playing games.

# 6. Analysis

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The analysis is personal and it consists of interpretations of texts from four articles. The societal problem that is discussed is how media constitute women in relation to gaming. The gender construction in media articles seems to be taken for granted and that is why this thesis aims to highlight it. This is of importance since news articles are structural phenomenon that is embedded in language- and societal structures that can actively affect people. The texts analyzed in this paper differ in structure, meaning and authors, which affect how women are framed in articles about gaming. This thesis aims to answer the research questions stated in the introduction. These are:

- ⇒ *Which discourses are communicated in the Swedish articles about sexism in the gaming space?*
- ⇒ *What does the relationship between discourses and the social practice look like?*
- ⇒ *Is it possible to identify weak and dominant actors in the discourse?*

The different concepts by Fairclough that are used to answer these questions are order of discourse, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, ideologies and linguistics. The theories of Hirdman and Butler are used to analyze gender balance, representations in the language, power balance and norms. When referring to the different articles the author's names are used.

## 6.1 Order of discourse

Order of discourse is used to explain the interconnection of genres, styles and discourses, and what social order is hidden in the discourse (Fairclough 2010). The articles by Karabuda (2014) and Erlandsson (2015) follow the structure of an opinion piece; they use a personal language and bring up a current issue. They express their own reflections and opinions and bring up concrete examples. Both of the texts follow a clear structure (Infokoll 2015). They follow the style of identifying themselves to the category of women and female gamers. That they explain as victims that are oppressed by men. They use the

term “I” when expressing their opinions and reflections, which make their texts personal. They create a relation to the reader and awaken emotions. Their texts contribute in creating a social order of hegemony since they place themselves as victims, and men in as the dominant actor. The article by Frank et al. (2014) and the article by Holm (2014) use a more distant language. The authors are not visible in the texts, and they do not express any personal opinions or reflections. The article by Frank et al. (2014) follows the structure of a debate article; it is argumentative, the author is familiar with the subject and tries to persuade its readers to take on the same position. The introduction and the title aim to raise an interest among the readers (infokoll 2015). The pronoun "we" is used throughout the text when referring to the representatives in the industry. For example in this sentence: “*We – representatives from the industry as well as the education managers – reject, in the strongest possible way and without reservation, all harassment and sexism.*” It generates a personal feeling of the institution when using the term “we” even if the language in the text is somewhat distanced. Frank et al. also constructs a social order of hegemony where women are described as victims. The article by Holm (2014) contains quotes from interviews that shape the article. In quotations from interviews with the CEO, the CEO uses the term “we” when referring to the game company Massive Entertainment and “I” when referring to himself. For example in this sentence: ” *We are not trying to avoid employing women. But we don’t have more than seven percent of female candidates. I want to find out why it is like this...*” The usage of subjective terms creates a closer relationship with the reader. The quotes of the gender expert does not contain any subjective terms, her meaning is expressed in a more distant way. This could be a strategic move by the author or it can be the exact quotes from the different actors. Either way it is used in a strategic way that influence how the readers view the different persons in the texts. The CEO is most likely understood as a person who does something good.

**Concluding comments:** Neither of the texts shows an objective perspective of women in the game industry. They all contribute in maintaining and legitimizing an order of hegemony in the discourse where women stand without power.

## 6.2 Linguistics

The articles differ in format, genre and style. This also makes the grammatical structure dissimilar. Linguistics elements that are present in the different articles are metaphors, modal verbs, relations between words, hidden meanings, discursive silence, repetitions of words and interchangeable words.

### 6.2.1 What meaning do the usage of words has for the texts?

Something that is found in all text is the use of the term “women”. Woman is used when referring to the female gender. The use of the term women constitutes a meaning for the entire text. The word “women” create a stronger image of the female gender than if adding “young” before the term or use the term “girl” instead. In the Swedish language it is quite common to use young women and girl interchangeable with women (Jarlbro 2006). Although, the text by Erlandsson (2015) uses “female” synonymously with “girl” twice: “*...from considering that it is accepted with a sexist language where girls are downgraded, to female gamers being harassed*” and “*... many female gamers often hide the fact that they are girls when they play games, and in some cases they stop playing.*” The term “girl” refers to a young woman (NE 1, 2015), while “female” refers to a full-grown woman (NE 2, 2015). This use of language creates some confusion and weakens the female gender.

The text by Frank et al. (2014) has some sentences that differ in meaning regarding which women that are oppressed. In the introduction the text express “*...Lately, more women in the game industry and game media have suffered from threats, harassment and attacks*” and in the text “*...women who speak out publicly about sexism in games suffer from hatred and harassment...*” Is it all women in gaming who suffer from threats and harassment or are only women who speak out about sexism that suffers from it? Furthermore, the selection of the word “Lately” suggests that this is a new event that has not occurred before. Further down in the text, the author writes, “*... we have worked with questions concerning gender equality and diversity during a long period of time ...*” This indicates that problems with misogyny have been addressed earlier.

Furthermore, two of the texts have the term women present in the title of the article. The words chosen in relation to women awake an interest and make the reader reflect and generate emotions. The title "*Pewdiepies jargon shut out women*" (Karabuda 2014) and the introduction "*The thought of improving the situation for women has never occurred to Felix Kjellberg*" are strong and accusatory towards the male gamer Felix Kjellberg, who is also known as Pewdiepie. They awake emotions and the audience could generate an opinion here without reading the rest of the article. The title by Holm (2014) "*Experts helps company to find women to employ*" raises interest but also doubts of this could be possible. The other two words do not use the word women in the title, but an underlying meaning imply that they mean women with other use of words. The title "*No one understands that I want to play games for my own sake*" (Erlandsson 2015) uses I interchangeable for the female author. The title creates a meaning of that it would not be okay for women to play games for their own sake. The title "*Sexism has no place in the world of gaming*" (Frank et al. 2014) is a distinct statement. The usage of sexism in this title is about sexism directed towards women, which is clarified in the introduction. The statement awakes an interest and makes the audience reflect over the women's situation.

Karabudas (2014) text contains interchangeable words for the male main character: "Pewdiepie", "Felix Kjellberg", "Kjellberg", "the largest youtuber in the world", "white heterosexual man". The latter two words imply that Kjellberg is a dominant actor in the discourse. The text also has an instance of a (Swedish) metaphor: "...he just pours gasoline on the fire with his masculine way of talking". The metaphor contributes in constituting Kjellberg as dominate.

### **6.2.1 Modal verbs and imperative moods**

The text by Frank et al. (2014) is the only text that contains modal verbs. Instances of dynamical modalities are found "*...hatred, intimidation and harassment can never be accepted,* " and epistemic (probability) modalities like "*We will defend the right of everyone to be and act in games*". In the text there are also instances of deontic (obligational) modalities: "*The positive trend must continue,*" and "*Hatred should always*

*be taken very seriously...*” The using of modal verbs creates a stronger feeling of what meaning the author have.

The text by Frank et al. (2014) also has instances of an imperative mood, that means he encourage the reader to interact. *“In just a few days, hundreds of people in the gaming world of Sweden, has endorsed the initiative. Sign the petition: [diversi.nu/petition](https://diversi.nu/petition) ”*. The article invites readers to sign a petition, and they attach a link to it. This creates a personal relationship with the reader, since the institution wants the reader to join their efforts for a better gaming world. It creates awareness among readers and knowledge on how to help. The author creates a positive value in signing the petition. Holm (2014) also encourages the reader to interact by reading more about the topic: *“ Read more about developments in the computer games industry in Näringsliv, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October ”*.

### **6.2.2 Discursive silences**

In texts it is possible to hide events, phenomenon, and subjects. For example, it is possible to hide an offender in text: “The victim is killed” or “The offender killed a person”. In the article by Frank et al. (2014) the offender is hidden in sentences like: *“...anonymous persons on the internet”* or *“...many females have been exposed to harassment, attacks and hatred*. Karbuda (2014) uses a similar method, the offender is hidden in the constructions of the sentences: *“Women in the game industry suffers daily from sexual harassment and serious threats”* or *“When Sarkeesian did it way earlier it was because angry gamers threatened to rape and murder her”*. Erlandsson (2015) state that as a female gamer she has been exposed to harassment from guys. However, she does not mention anywhere else in the text that the offenders are men. She hides the offender by silence in sentences like *“females are oppressed”*, *“female gamers are threatened”*, and *“On her blog Maddelisk wrote that she received hundreds of threats from anonymous human beings that hoped that she would die or get raped”*. The offender is missing which makes it hard to find someone who is responsible for the actions of harassment. The fact that the offender is hidden and sometimes not mentioned creates a gap. Karabuda argues that Pewdiepie should be held responsible and that he could make a change. If we turn back to Hirdman and the gender system (1990) both

sexes should be held responsible, since both sexes participates in creating this order. None of the texts mention that men or other groups in the community are exposed to threats and harassment.

### **6.2.3 Notions on how the industry should be (values and repetition of words)**

Text styles can include implicit and explicit values that contain meanings of what is positive and negative. The different articles uses words in relation to gaming to explain how they want the industry to be, they build up an ideal scenario. These conceptions and representations in the language aim to explain how the gaming world could be and should be (Fairclough 2010). In the texts there is a goal that the gender balance between the sexes is equal. Holm (2014) and Frank et al. (2014) claim that gender equality is the goal for the industry. Frank et al. (2014) uses the terms “gender equality” and “diversity” repeatedly in the text. Gender equality is mentioned six times and diversity is mentioned five times, which makes them somewhat diluted. The text describes the terms as something that is obvious, desirable, and necessary. But a clear description of the concepts meaning or how they will be achieved is missing. There are instances of substantiated notions of the meaning of gender equality, as in this line: "*In the high-performance gaming world, Swedish gaming companies compete for the international expertise to offer a functional everyday life to families with young children by offering parental leave for father*". The sentence suggests that women can work more when fathers go on parental leave. In the text of Holm (2014) the word “modernity” (mention once), “gender equality” (mentioned twice) and “gender equality work” (mention three times) are used in relation to gaming. The author writes that "... *game companies have a responsibility to work for gender equality...*" and "*Game companies are young and they want to see themselves as a part of a modern and gender equal work life, but they do not always understand that they have to act in order to make a change*". The first quotation puts emphasis on the responsibility game companies has to achieve gender equality. The second quotation implies that game companies take gender equality for granted, but that companies have to act in order to accomplish it. Furthermore, gender equality is put in correlation to a “modern work life” which implies that gender equality is something that is normal in new companies. What is necessary to reach gender equality is not clear.

“Gender equality work” is explained as taking care of issues concerning the skewed gender balance in order to recruit more women. The gender equality expert explains that conscious work and action is needed from the game companies if they want to achieve this. In a quote with gender equality expert, a parable to how another male-dominated industry (the forest industry) worked with gender equality is mentioned. The gender equality expert mentions that Game companies do not like to be compared to this industry. Implicitly, the reason for this might be that the game industry does not want to be compared with a traditional industry like forestry, as they want to be seen as a new and innovative.

Erlandsson (2015) and Karabuda (2014) do not mention the word “gender equality” but they describe the game environment as hostile towards women. They describe the game community as a club for guys. Karabuda (2014) claims that the industry has to stop excluding women from the industry. She gives many examples of how women are excluded from the game space. For example, how Pewdiepie makes fun of women by “... *sculpturing Nicki Minajs buttom in a 3D program with the bros*” or when he “... *dances in a bra when watching dancing with the stars*”. And how Pewdiepie addresses his followers with “the bros”. She argues that the game culture has a stamp on it as a club for guys. Erlandsson (2015) argue that the game environment is sexist, and controlled by a patriarchal culture. She calls for action, and brings up the initiative Diversi as a good example.

**Concluding comments:** Linguistic elements are present in all the articles, but not all of the different elements are present in all of the texts. How words are used and how sentences are structured constitute meaning, truths and an understanding of how women are perceived in gaming.

### 6.3 Identity and meaning construction

Ideologies can affect the creation of relationship, subjects and object that exist in the social world. The concept of “women” and “man” and what meaning they have for the gaming community and our society, are created by ideological processes. Karabuda (2014) constitute the male gamer “Pewdiepie” in a power position in the way she

describes him as a person with a safe position in the top of the hierarchy. She also places women in contrary position when she describe that they are fighting every day with verbal harassment and serious assaults. Erlandsson (2015) constitute the man as the offender when she brings up her own experience with misogyny: *“As a female gamer, I have been questioned, and I have received plenty of hatred, unfortunately only from guys...”* She describes that there exist a patriarchal structure in the gaming world and that the sexist language towards women has become normality.

The text by Frank et al. (2014) is actively contributing in constructing the institution “Dataspelsbranschens” identity. The author writes that the industry is characterized by successful export and it is a fast growing market. More and more people are looking for jobs in the industry. Gender equality and diversity are given, and the industry distances itself from sexism and harassment. The industry is described as male dominated by both Frank et al. (2014) and Holm (2014) with only 16 percent female employers. This identity construction affects those operating in it. The institution requires employers to develop games that are entertaining, awakens emotions and makes people happy (Frank et al 2014). Holm (2014) describes the industry as young and in need of more female employees.

Karabuda (2014) do not contribute in the constitution of the industry rather she focuses on those operating in it. She constructs the identity of women in the game industry as in an exposed situation, suffering from threats and harassment. She constitutes her own identity by describing herself with personal qualities such as a “female gamer”, “female subscriber” and “female fan”. She also expresses that *“As a women I am seldom the target for a game or part of the community around it”*. Erlandsson (2015) constructs a similar category of women in the gaming space. She also identifies herself as a female gamer and brings up examples of how female gamers are treated in gaming communities. For example, how the pro gamer Madeline “maddelisk” Leander have endured hatred and threats when joining a competition. Also, how the author herself experienced commentaries about not being good enough or that she plays for her boyfriend or to get laid. In the text by Frank et al. (2014) woman and what is female is described as a group

that are exposed to harassment and threats. The groups of women are portrayed as a weak and vulnerable. Women are identified as being something different than the male norm, a subject in need of protection. The text also highlights that only 16 percent of women work in the gaming industry. Which implies that women are not the norm in the gaming world. They create a truth about women; women are placed in a position as victims that may affect how women behave and gets threaten in the gaming world.

The text by Karabuda (2014) is involved in giving qualities to the male gamer Pewdiepie as the “the world’s largest YouTuber ”, “white heterosexual man at the top of the hierarchy”. The author claims that Pewdiepie excludes women in the way he addresses his followers. Pewdiepie addresses his followers with the expression “the bros”. Karabuda implies that Pewdiepie have a responsibility for the exclusion of women and that he has an obligation to do something about it. Erlandsson (2015) indicates that male gamers are offenders. While Holm (2014) and Frank et al. (2014) do not mention what role men have in the game space, except for being the norm in the workplace.

In these identity constructions we can find built in values of what is feminine and masculine, which creates an unequal relationship between men and women. An interesting aspect is that neither of the authors put any responsibility on women in the industry. If we view this from Hirdman’s (1990) perspective we are all integrated in a system on how it should be, where women accept being the weaker sex. Invisible rules control how women should act and think. The female authors Karabuda (2014) and Erlandsson (2015) define the women as undermined, harassed and weak and they place themselves in that category. Holm (2014) and Frank et al. (2014) also identity women in a similar matter, but they do not place themselves there. They are all participating in the continuation of the gender system (Hirdman 1988), which creates new segregation and hierarchy between the sexes. Erlandsson (2015) writes that “*It exist a patriarchal structure in the gaming world where it seems to be okay with a sexist language where girls are undermined and female gamers are threaten* “ This citation makes her view on the gaming world pretty clear.

The different texts take for granted that women and feminine behavior is the same. The use of language sets the values in what is feminine and what is masculine. There is no distinction between the cultural gender and the biological sex. Women belong to just one category of women, some examples that demonstrate it: “Women are underrepresented at the job market”, “Women suffer from threats, hatred and harassment”, “women does not belong in the world of games”, and “it only exist a few female employers in the gaming industry”. There exist some invisible notions of how to be a woman and how to be a man. Women have found themselves in being subordinated by men. Butler (1990) argues that representations have normative function in our language that could either reveal or distort what is true about women. The texts assume a hegemonic structure where men dominate. Women are placed in contrary position of the man, as a powerless subject in a vulnerable situation. Fairclough believe that we are influenced by discourses and that they construct how we live our lives. Discourses have a major impact in how we gain knowledge, how we understand truths and how subjects are given identities (Fairclough 2010).

### **6.3.1 Images and facts boxes that complement the text**

The images that complement the articles are also part of constructing what identity and meaning different subjects have. The articles by Karabuda (2014) and Erlandsson present self- portraits of the authors. The images reveal that they are young women. This is not presented in the other two articles that are a bit more distanced. In the article by Frank et al. (2014) an image of three young individuals are sitting with an IPAD in their knees, playing a computer game. It is not possible to see the individuals' faces since the head is cut off, but based on feminine attributes (long hair, nail polish, “girly clothes”) one can conclude that they are girls. This is converted from a traditional view that is incorporated in discourses. The girls are a group of bodies that constitute gendered subjects (Butler 1990), they image represents what we are used to identify as feminine. Together with the text the image awakes an emotion that sexism in the gaming space is a problem that concern the female gender. The male gender is not visible in the text or in the picture. Karabuda (2014) and Holm (2014) have images of both sexes; their images show who is responsible for changing the societal issue of sexism. In the text by Holm (2014) two

images are present, one of them illustrate the CEO of the game company Massive Entertainment and the other illustrate the gender equality expert that is hired to change the gender structure. Both of them have self claimed that they are responsible to take on action. In the picture the CEO uses a typical male pose with his arms crossed, one leg over the other and he is looking straight into the camera. The picture is taken in an office space. The picture of the gender equality expert is a flattering self- portrait; she is smiling and wears make- up. Both of these images are representing the conceptions of what are typical feminine and masculine, norms that are embedded in our society today. Similar to this, Karabuda presents two actors that are affected by the discourse, the male gamer and youtuber Pewdiepie and the female youtuber Anita Sarkeesian, one of the main characters in the global discourse of gaming and sexism. The two pictures of Sarkeesian are familiar for those who follow the discourse; they have been reproduced in many articles and websites. One of the pictures on is taken in a game hall, and the other is a facial portrait. The two pictures of Pewdiepie are from what seems to be his natural environment, inside in a room with a computer and headphones. The images have the function of strengthen the texts, since they convey Pewdiepie as the one who is responsible for making a change, and Sarkeesian as a victim. It is easier to picture something with an image. Which may be the reason why the author also received a lot of commentaries on her opinion piece.

The majority of the articles also have fact boxes that create a deeper meaning for the texts. The fact box in Holm's (2014) article provides information concerning the proportion of women that are present in the industry and what the company "Add Gender" is doing. Add Gender is the company that the gender equality expert works for. The fact box in the text by Frank et al. (2014) provides statistical information about the growth and turnover that the business has but also how many employees they have, and the percentage of women that works in the industry. The fact box also defines what they consider is a computer game. These facts boxes tell us that women employers are something abnormal in the industry. The fact box in the text by Karabuda (2014) present what games she is playing at the moment, this imply that she is a gamer herself and that she has an understanding of the gaming culture.

**Concluding comments:** Identities are constructed both by images and texts. Ideologies are parts of the construction and so are norms and peoples preconceptions of gender. In these identity constructions we can find built in values of what is feminine and masculine, which creates an unequal relationship between men and women. Neither of the authors put any responsibility on women in the industry.

#### 6.6. The relationship between social practice and discourse

News articles about gaming and sexism are parts of a wider social practice than the magazines they are published in. The articles are produced in Sweden, and the texts reaches out to the Swedish population. However, they are part of a bigger global discourse than the Swedish one. The discourse has been influenced by the global event GamerGate and international discourse about sexism and gaming. Karabuda (2014) and Erlandsson (2015) reproduce the content about GamerGate. The other two articles do not write about GamerGate but it is noticeable that they have been influenced by the event. This is noticeable since they published their articles shortly after GamerGate reached its peak, and because of how they relate words to each other. The term women is related to words like hate, threats, sexism and harassment, which is very similar to the international discourse. Holm (2014) focuses on how women are underrepresented on the job market, and that there is a need for change and equality. While Frank et al (2014) focuses on distancing the game industry from the ongoing misogyny, and that there is a need for change. Some of the articles have been reproduced in international media. The debate article by Frank et al. (2014) have been translated to English and discussed on international newspapers and social media sites. The article presented by Holm (2014) has also been produced in international media. Ideas in the texts are converted to other texts, which means that texts are contextualized (Fairclough 2010). The article by Frank et al. (2014) and Erlandsson (2015) mention the initiative Diversi. Frank et al (2014) brings up statistics on how many women and men that are working in the industry. Karabuda (2014) and Erlandsson (2015) bring up international events where female gamers have been harassed and threatened.

The different texts are all parts of social practices of culture, political and legal context and socio- economics. Cultural practice because online games are considered being a hobby for men and women, young and old. Political practice because gender equality and diversity at the work place and in gaming communities are discussed (Holm 2014; Frank et al. 2014). The legal context is brought up because companies are legally responsible to work for gender equality (Holm 2014). Instances of socio- economical practice are found in the discussion about the industry's success and the growing demands for Swedish games (Frank et al. 2014). The discourse is influenced by these social factors but the producer of the article also influences the discourse. Those who read the article can be influenced of the discourse but they may also have influenced the producer of the text. The articles that are being studied in this paper are parts of an **intertextual chain** of events, social practices and other texts. That means that texts are parts of a flow where they are influenced by and influences other texts, social events and social practices. Discourses contribute with constituting identities, knowledge and truths in these chains (Fairclough 2010). The identity construction of women in gaming are constructed as weak and harassed while men are considered as the norm. The discourse constructs a truth about the gender balance and hegemonic order in the gaming space. The discourse contributes in constituting knowledge about the gender balance in the industry. Butler (1990) argues that political and juridical practices influences and constrains the discourses about gender and gender structures in society. She argues that **representations** have a normative function in the language that can either reveal or distort what is true about women. Fairclough also argue that discourses are controlled by norms, but also societal events and history. The historical background to sexism in gaming is based in how IT and gaming industry historically have been characterized by under-representation of women. Women are not the norm in the IT industry and neither in the gaming industry.

### **6.6.1 Reactions among readers and other (international) media**

The different articles have received different reactions; this depends on the producer of the article, the content and use of language. Some of the commentaries contextualize the meaning of the articles, some show another meaning and others produce a new meaning.

They express a meaning of what is feminine and masculine. Some of them seem to have strong opinions that are not only founded in the discourse in the articles. The article by Erlandssons (2015) received two comments:

2 Kommentarer   Fria Tidningar 1 Logga in ▾

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♥ Recommend    Dela Sortera efter Bästa ▾

 **SpeLinnea** · för 3 månader sedan  
Håller helt klart med dig och tyvärr är det igenkännande på flera plan. Jag är med och stöttar och supportar en bättre spelkultur för tjejer!  
5 ^ | ▾ · Dela ›

 **DeColonise** · för 3 månader sedan  
Det är bedrövligt med spelkulturen, dessvärre reflekterar den samhället i stort och det är bra att man på allvar börjat titta under huden på (video)spelskulturen då den gått ganska obemärkt förbi under många år. Det är en misogyn kultur.  
Har hört av många kvinnliga gamers att de ofta fejkar att de är pojkar/män som spelar när de kör online enbart för att för att slippa trakasserier av pojkar/män.  
Men även om man gör det så kommer man inte alltid helt undan många av de extremt kvinnofientliga kommentarer som hävs ur från män online. Tar man populära spel som ex GTA V eller CoD och går online blir man mörkrädd i hur många resonerar.  
Det ska våldtas och det ska förnedras oftast med extrema homofobiska och kvinnofientliga kommentarer för att "få mer tyngd" i sina meningar.  
Det är bedrövligt minst sagt.  
  
Och inte blir det bättre av att många av de stora populära spelen idag ser ned på kvinnor. Där kvinnliga karaktärer inte är något annat än "ögongodis" för den manliga spelaren, där kvinnliga karaktärer inte fyller någon annan funktion än att vara något sorts bihang och vara den manliga protagonisten till lags. Alla är givetvis inte sådana, men det är på tok för vanligt.  
^ | ▾ · Dela ›

The first comment: *“I agree with everything that you write, and unfortunately I recognize this in many levels. I support a better game culture for girls!”* This person agrees but also takes the meaning a bit further. She or he confirms that the game culture consist of patriarchal meaning. The second comment (a summarized summary): *“The game culture reflect society, the game world is characterized by a culture of misogyny. A culture that has past by unnoticed for many years. Many female gamers pretend to be men when they play, so that they can avoid harassment from male gamers. It is difficult to avoid misogynistic comments in some games. It is a terrible phenomenon, but frequent”*. The commentator seems to be a gamer and he/ she have knowledge about the industry. Moreover, this person accepts the fact that women are treated in a demeaning way in the gaming space but also in society. She or he speaks out about his or hers own experiences with female gamers that pretend to be male. It is possible to not be present with a

physical body when playing games online. It is easier to pretend being someone else. This makes it possible for females to act in a masculine way and “playing games like boys”. Viewing this from Butler’s (1990) perspective, a female body can be categorized as masculine.

The article by Karabuda (2014) is just like Erlandsson (2015) written from one persons perspective, the author is visible and she writes about what is feminine and what is masculine. It is written from a female game journalist and gamer that is critical of the game culture. It triggers the reader to react in a different way than the other articles. The article by Karabuda has been shared 27 000 times on Facebook, tweeted 315 times and it got 860 comments. The comment section on Aftonbladet and the tweets about it consist of hatred. The article is also reproduced in other articles (Larsson 2014; Ahlström 2014) that write about how Karabuda is suffering from threats and harassment on the net. Why Karabuda suffers from hatred is difficult to say. Karbuda may be interpreted an easy target because she is a lonely, identifiable woman. It is much more difficult to criticize the article by Frank et al (2014) or Holm (2014) since they appear more abstract, the authors are not visible in the same way. Karabuda claims that the situation in the game culture is marked by sexism and hatred. She brings up examples from Pewdiepie’s videos that create a feeling of recognition among the readers who follows him. This is noticeable in the article's comment section. Many of the readers have a different understanding of Pewdiepies videos and how the game culture is, which they expresses in their comments.



**Josefine Koca** · Spetsa öronen: Radiopratare



Haha kan inte annat än skratta åt denna artikel... Som många andra nämmt, han gör lika många (om inte mer) skämt som förlöjligar män... Jag har varit med sedan starten och har aldrig känt mig "ovälkommen" :) Den här jävla feministdebatten måste få ett slut!

Svar · Gilla · 👍 752 · Följ inlägget · den 12 oktober 2014 kl. 20:06

*"Haha this article makes me laugh... As other people have mentioned, he does as many (or more) mocking jokes of men. I have never felt "unwelcome" in the gaming world. ☺ This fucking feminist debate has to come to an end! (Translated by the author).*

The person that comments on the article does not recognize herself in Karabudas message. She believes that Pewdiepie jokes about men in the same way as he jokes about women. She expresses that she never have felt left out in the gaming world. She categorizes the discourse of Karabuda as a feminist debate. She is not the only one who disagrees with Karabuda, the comment below is also a girl that does not agree on what Karabuda writes.



**Jasmine Axelsson** · Storstockholms Lokaltrafik: Handläggare

Jag förstår faktiskt inget av denna artikel. Jag skulle inte ens kunna känna igen mig i en mening om jag så fick pengar för det. Tvärtom, han lägger upp alla typer av videos, från det mest blodiga och läskiga till gulliga djur som skjuter hjärtan i ett typ godisland. Han dansar, svär, gråter och skrattar. Han skämtar om allt och inget på denna jord. Inte i en enda video eller ens rubrik har jag känt mig utanför, blivit stött eller upprörd.

Nu är jag också en tjej som inte kunde bry mig mindre om det finns 2 spel för tjejer men miljoner för killar. Jag spelar det jag vill spela oavsett. Och vad kan egentligen kallas för ett spel för tjejer eller ett spel för killar? Jag är tjej men det betyder inte att jag vill spela spel där Kim Kardashian medverkar eller ett spel med lättklädda killar. Blir bara trött på att feminismen ska ta sig in i exakt varje ämne. Den här killen gör så många miljoner människor glada, han har också vettiga budskap (ex ALS-videon) och som det nämns en mängd insamligar . Måste han vara den som tar ansvaret i feministfrågan? Måste frågan finnas?

Svar · Gilla · 👍 193 · Följ inlägget · den 13 oktober 2014 kl. 09:41

*"I do not understand anything in this article. I could not understand a word of it. He puts up all kinds of videos, everything from scary things to cute little animals. He dances, cries and laughs. He makes jokes of everything on this earth. Not a single video has made me upset, or made me feel excluded. I'm also a girl who couldn't care less of the fact*

*that it exists 2 games for girls but millions for boys. I play the game I want no matter what. And what is a game for girls or a game for boys? I'm a girl but that doesn't mean that I want to play games with Kim Kardashian or a game with sexualized boys. I'm tired to hear about feminism. This guy makes millions of people happy, and his videos contain important messages (like the ALS- video) and a number of charity collections. Does he have to be the one responsible for the feminist question? Does the question have to exist at all?"* (Translated by the author).

This commentator uses many concrete examples in her argumentation. She argues that Pewdiepie puts up all kinds of videos, and makes fun of men in the same way as women. She claims that Pewdiepie do not excludes women, and that she has never been upset due to his videos. She also categorizes this debate as a feminist debate. She questions why Karabuda blame Pewdiepie, and why sexism must exist at all. She has another understanding of the game culture than Karabuda. She argues that there exist masculine and feminine games, and that stereotypical characters exist in games. But she distances herself from playing girly games and from being affected by stereotypical notions in games. This creates a mixed message: she recognizes that there exist a gender imbalance but she claims that it does not affect her.

Men are also present in this debate:



**Tomas Hadrys** · ★ Toppkommentator · Malmö University

"Pewdiepie har en trygg position högst upp i näringskedjan som vit heterosexuell man. Kvinnorna i spelbranschen kämpar däremot dagligen med sexuella trakasserier och grova hot"

Javisst, för Felix har ALDRIG någonsin blivit hotad och verbalt trakasserad va? Vidare så gör han aldrig narr av män heller va? Tycker det luktar lite väl mycket offerkofta här Effie.

In before jag blir anklagad för att vara "fientligt inställd till feminism".

Svar · Gilla · 👍 37 · Följ inlägget · Har redigerats · den 13 oktober

*"Pewdiepie has a secure position at the top of the hierarchy as a white heterosexual man. Women on the other hand, struggles with sexual harassment and severe hatred on a daily basis" Sure, because Felix has NEVER suffered from hatred or verbal harassment? And doesn't he make fun of men too? You take it a bit too far here, Effie.  
...Before I'm called for being "hostile to feminism".*

This comment reproduces parts of the content of the article in order to make his point. He writes sarcastically that Felix has never suffered from hatred or harassment, but he means the opposite. He finishes his post with a preventive sentence, hoping to avoid accusations of being hostile to feminism. That indicate that being accused of being hostile to feminist is something that you are when criticizing the game culture as a man.



**Kevin Hansson** · ★ Toppkomentator · BTH

Fenjima Manrique Haha va? Manliga spelutvecklare och journalister får minst lika mycket mordhot. Varför skulle kvinnliga ha det svårare? En av de största kvinnliga spelutvecklarna Amy Hennig säger att hon aldrig någonsin stött på sexism som spelutvecklare. Vilka tänker du på när du säger att dem får utså kränkningar pga kön? Ge mig ett konkret exempel.

Svar · Gilla · 👍 52 · den 13 oktober 2014 kl. 16:17

*"Fenjima Manrique Hahah what? Male game developers and journalists gets as many deaths threats. Why would this be an issue for women? One of the biggest game developer Amy Henning says that she never ever got a sexist comment when working as a game developer. Who are you thinking about when you say that people are oppressed because of their sex? Give me one concrete example" (translation by the author).*

This guy is not the only one who expresses this kind of meaning. Many commentators argue that men are exposed to threats to the same extent as women. They do not give as many examples but this debate clearly upsets people.

Women and men present similar messages in their posts, with some exceptions. The debate about sexism in the gaming world has gained a feminist label from the commentators. Those who comments might not read the whole article when they comment. It seems like they have strong opinions from the start.

The article by Frank et al. (2014) is signed by 50 representatives from the industry. It has not gained as much attention as Karabuda, but the article has been shared 1500 times on Facebook and 189 people have tweeted about it. The tweets are mostly written in a positive matter, only a few negative comments can be found. The author does not put the responsibility with misogyny in the industry on someone else, rather he claim that the industry takes the responsibility to solve it. Maybe this also influences how people react.

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**Billy Winn** @Jatwaa · 29 okt 🌐  
Across the world voices of unity for all speak up. Women and Men, together for equality. [svd.se/opinion/brannp...](#)

**SvD SvD Brännpunkt**

**Sexism hör inte hemma i spelvärlden**  
Sexism, hat och hot har ingen plats i vårt samhälle, inte heller i spelvärlden. På senare tid har flera kvinnor i spelbranschen och spelmedier drabbats av hot, trakasserier och angrepp. Vi tar...

[Visa på nätet](#)

👤 ↻ ⭐ + 👤 ⋮

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**Fredrick med ck** @fredrick\_med\_ck · 24 okt  
Underbart att svenska spelföretag säger nej till trakasserier! Hurra :) Bra jobbat [@zoinkgames](#) [@magnus\\_alm](#) mfl

[svd.se/opinion/brannp...](#)

👤 ↻ 6 ⭐ 8 + 👤 ⋮

[Visa sammanfattning](#)

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”It is wonderful that Swedish game companies says no to harassment! Hurray 😊 good job” (translated by the author).



This comment praises the initiative by the industry and look positively on how the computer game industry acts. It also calls others to sign the petition that the article links to.

Some negative reactions are also present:



This comment does not contain a negative or positive meaning per se, but it could be interpreted as negative if he means that people should boycott the companies that signed the article.



This comment argues that the article is a stupid anti- gamergate article. He thereby connects the article to the international event. He does not find the Swedish companies as relevant except from one of them.

An interesting aspect is that many of the commentaries are written in English that implies that the article has been spread globally. On the website Polygon, that writes about games, Swedish initiatives has gained a lot of attention (Savage 2014; Farokhmanesh 2014). A new meaning that is not conveyed in these Swedish articles, is that the amount of money that the industry got to develop initiatives in order to create changes. *“Dataspelsbranschen has been awarded 272,000 kronor (roughly \$36,672) by the Swedish government to explore ways of supporting video games that offer diverse gender choices, including the creation of labels that could be placed on the package of games at launch” (Emilygera 2014).*

Polygon also interviewed CEO: s of game companies that signed the Swedish petition. For example, Image & Form CEO Brjánn Sigurgeirsson that speaks about the Gamergate movement: *"We find it baffling and unacceptable that women are targeted in this way, but maybe we're being very Swedish and naive. Swedes can't abide by this behavior, and had it been in Sweden, this would have caused a massive shit storm much faster."* (Farokhmanesh 2014). Another meaning of the discourse is presented internationally than what the Swedish press expresses.

The article by Holm (2014) has not created any viral attention or discussion on twitter. But it has gained attention in international and national media (Malmö TT 2014; Farokmanesh 2014) A spokesperson from Massive Entertainments speaks out in international media: *Harassment, bullying and threats are wrong and have to stop”, the Massive Entertainment’s spokesperson comments. "There should be no place in the video game community for personal attacks of any kind."* (Farokhmanesh 2014). The spokesperson from Massive Entertainment speaks up about what he thinks about sexism. That meaning is not converted in the article by Holm.

**Concluding comments:** The media articles are part of a wider social discourse; they can be viewed from a global, economical, political and cultural perspective. They are all parts of an intertextual chain. The commentary sections are also parts of this chain, the posts are influenced by the Swedish and international discourse, and the commentators affect

each other with their reflections and opinions. The commentaries open up another meaning of the discourse. The different texts participate in placing women as victims when they contextualize the meaning of women as subordinated. The notions presented in the texts show what women have in common; they categorize women as a group. This has to do with the preconception people have of what is feminine and masculine (Hirdman 1990; Butler 1988).

## 7. Concluding chapter

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This qualitative study consists of a small sample of articles and can therefore not be seen as valid of giving a generic insight of the social issue with misogyny in the world of gaming. The purpose of this study has not been to present a generalizable finding, but rather to highlight how media reports represent women in gaming.

### 7.1 Final Discussion

This paper addressed one research question: *How is the perception of women as victims constructed in the gaming space?* And a hypothesis: *The media discourse has influenced society to view women in gaming as a homogeneous group. Women in the gaming world are portrayed as victims; threatened and harassed.* The findings confirm that the hypothesis is true; women are represented as the victims in the media discourses about gaming. The perception of women as victims is not only constructed by wider social practice than the news articles establish. It is parts of a global discourse that is affected by societal events like politics and culture. The articles provide one side of the debate: that women are oppressed in the gaming world. They constitute identities, norms and contribute to legitimize and maintaining a social order of hegemony. The discourse presented in these articles creates a contrary approach between men and women in gaming. Men are considered being the norm in the workplace and women are a minority. Moreover, women are constituted as weak and exposed to threats and harassment. The discourse indicate that men are dominant and in control in the social order of hegemony. Women are not considered being responsible for this social order, but men are.

In the commentaries another view on the issue is presented. Parts of the audience are positive that media highlight the issue of sexism in gaming, and that they call for

a change. While others do not agree on what is presented in the media. Some people have got upset with how the different authors stresses the issue. For example, commentators argue that the image of women as oppressed is exaggerative and that they are tiered of this “feminist debate”. The article by Karabuda (2014) awakes strong emotions among the audience, it generate net hatred towards the author. The discussions in the articles are contextualized in an international discourse.

I have chosen to highlight how women are represented in media because I believe that there is a need of change in how media reports about gaming and gender structures. To repeatedly designate the women as victims and men as the norm in gaming just legitimize the constructed identities even more. Although, it is difficult to change these norms since they are rooted in our traditional understanding of what is female and male behavior.

## 7.2 Reflections and ideas for further research

During the writing of this thesis I have reflected a lot about different kinds of texts to analyze and what result it could have generated. For example I could have analyzed texts with the same format, instead of analyzing text with different formats. I also reflected over the meaning of Public Relations and the distinction between media research and PR research. PR is closely connected to media research, and PR professionals work with influencing people through texts (and speech). Texts are a part of shaping peoples truths and knowledge, it helps people to make sense of things and understands events going on in society. PR is also about building and sustaining good relationships with people and organizations, depending on where you work (Fill 2006). My reflective conclusions are that it is difficult to draw the lines, since PR is an interdisciplinary field that borrows concepts from other fields. But this thesis is relevant for the PR field since PR professionals work with changing the representation of women in games.

Further research is required to demonstrate a generalizable result of how women in gaming are perceived in the media. This thesis can be extended with interviews,

which may create other reactions than the written commentaries. In writing, people tend to express themselves differently than when they speak. It would also be interesting to extend this research with thematic studies of gaming forums, to see how gamers interact. Furthermore, quantitative research could generate another finding; coding of words in texts could generate a pattern of how often the word “women” is related to the word “victim”. Maybe it is possible to find a strong pattern from all articles in Swedish media that are published about how women are represented in articles about sexism and gaming.

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