Gender, Age, and Digital Games in the Domestic Context

Alison Harvey

ROUTLEDGE

Gender, Age, and Digital Games in the Domestic Context

"Harvey's book takes an uncompromising look at the role family plays in the construction, negotiation, and resistance to norms of appropriate pleasures. In doing so it reveals the complexity of the task ahead for those of us interested in ensuring girls and women are full and equal participants in the culture and practice of computer games."

—Helen Kennedy, School of Art, Design and Media, University of Brighton, UK

Western digital game play has shifted in important ways over the last decade, with a plethora of personal devices affording a range of increasingly diverse play experiences. Despite the celebration of a more inclusive environment of digital game play, very little grounded research has been devoted to the examination of familial play and the domestication of digital games, as opposed to evolving public and educational contexts. This book is the first study to provide a situated investigation of the site of family play – the shared spaces and private places of game play within the domestic sphere. It carries out an empirically grounded and critical analysis of what marketing and sales discourses about shifts in the digital games audience actually look like in the space of the home, as well as the social and cultural role these ludic technologies take in the everyday practices of the family in the domestic context. It examines the material realities of video game technologies in the home, including time management and spatial organization as well as the discursive role these devices play in discussions of technological competence and its complex relationship to age, generational differences, and gender performance. Harvey's interdisciplinary approach and innovative methodology will hold great critical appeal for those studying digital culture, children's media, and feminist studies of new media, as well as critical theories of technology and leisure and sport theory.

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To Hilary Chan, my ultimate cheerleader.

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Foreword

Celia Pearce

It seems counterintuitive that a study of domestic gaming habits *in situ* would be groundbreaking. But surprisingly, this in-depth and highly engaging analysis of family dynamics around digital play provides long overdue insight as to what is happening in the dens and living rooms of North America. Part of the reason for the paucity of research in this area is that it is an exceedingly difficult task to find ones way, unobtrusively, into the most intimate of settings: the family home. The breach of this seemingly impermeable membrane is one of the major contributions of this study.

Why is this important?

Much of the foundational research into games and gender has brought forward the conclusion that the highly gendered roles gaming are socially constructed. For instance, we know that, while girls are weaker at 3D rotation-based games such as first-person shooter, once they have repeated exposure to such games, their skills will equal those of their male counterparts. We also know that in public settings, such as mixed-gender clubs, boys tend to dominate, often monopolizing game consoles and controllers or computers. Although these patterns are well-established, what we have not had until now is a more nuanced understanding of how all of these complex gender constructions play out in *the very place where they originate*: the home.

As Harvey points out, in spite of the fact that it continues to persist as a stereotype, the typical "gamer" is no longer a teenage boy. Indeed, current research shows that the gender distribution of video game players has evened out to close to 50%, and adults make up the majority of game players. Nonetheless both the mainstream industry and a small minority of their "core gamers" continue to trivialize games with strong female participation. Women and girls will often refrain from identifying themselves as "gamers," even if they spend the same amount of time as men and boys playing games. This situation has been compounded by recent events surrounding the "#gamergate" controversy, in which a small but very vocal minority is virulently defending a status quo which, while it still holds prevailing wisdom among video game marketing executives, no longer exists in practice.

If we wish to better understand the gendering of gamer identity, we need look no further than the living room, the precise location where this study is situated. The tension between reality and prevailing stereotypes comes into start relief as we become privy to the ways that identity and gender are constructed and negotiated in the domestic sphere around game-playing and technological competencies. This is particularly crucial at an important historical moment in which game culture is undergoing a tectonic shift, moving away from the traditional stereotype of the gamer as a teenage boy.

When we say "game culture," of course we typically think of *video* game culture; however, it's important to remember that video games are subset of a much larger set of social practices. Seen through a broader lens, game culture encompasses both folk games such as mancala, and mass-produced games such as Monopoly, as well as street games. Video games can also be seen as part of a wider media landscape, often framed as "screen time," another nuance which Harvey captures in her study.

Perhaps one of the most interesting takeaways of this study is the fact that even single player games are social enterprises. While it's true that only one player is manipulating the controller at a time, the larger context, including who gets to play when, and who gets the controller when playtime is sanctioned, puts the entire gaming enterprise in a new light. This should be of particular interest to game developers, who may imagine their relationships to players as a one-on-one scenario, when, in truth, it is only one component in a larger domestic system.

Unpacking this system is at the heart of this study. In intimate detail, Harvey describes how families distribute "game labor," both in terms of who polices and dominates the playground, and how these relationships play into notions of technical competency. We begin to understand the ways in which parents manage game time, as well as contribute to the construction of identities around both gaming and technology. We also get a very nuanced picture of the complex dynamics *between children* in a household, as well as among children outside of a household, such as friends and family members, and how girls and boys negotiate their own game time and expertise independently of parental oversight. These complex family dynamics are details to which, up until now, we have not been not privy, but they are crucial in understanding the substrate on which gamer culture and identity is built.

This is where qualitative research methods have a great deal to offer, and Harvey's robust methodology provides rare insight into video games within the domestic sphere. The material-discursive approach utilizes the objects of the study – digital games themselves – as the centerpiece for discussion. Furthermore, it does so "in situ" on the living, breathing stage of the home, precisely where these dynamics are enacted. Rather than isolating subjects in a lab, or conducting out-of-context interviews, Harvey enters the homes of her research participants, allowing their own interactions and perceptions of their relations to digital play and its artifacts to emerge in its native context.

By observing families "in the wild," and conversing with them about their experiences in real time, she gets to deep-rooted understandings, assumptions, and practices of which the subjects themselves might not be aware.

One of the most important contributions of this work is its open and frank discussion of methodology. Games research can be something of a "black box" in this regard. We read findings, but we don't know much about the epistemological underpinnings of the research, or data collection and analysis procedures. Because of this, as well as our bias towards "hard" sciences (physics, chemistry, etc.), we tend to misconstrue research as a systematic and linear process that begins with a research question and ends in a finding. Harvey does a great service to both scholars and students by revealing the messy and iterative underbelly of research. In particular, she provides us with insight into how her research question evolved as the investigation was underway. In my own work, I have experienced this time and time again. In fact, in social sciences, it is just as often the case that once a study is underway, the research question evolves iteratively, sometimes taking on a life of its own. Furthermore, findings often lead to new questions. In my own work, my investigation into emergent behavior in online games led me to discover game refugees; and my finding that the particular community I studied comprised primarily "Baby Boomers" precipitated entirely new research aimed at getting a grasp of this previously ignored audience.

Although it takes place in a contemporary setting, Harvey's study provides us with some valuable insight into how we arrived at the current historical moment, some thirty years in the making. These intimate micro-studies show how games are used to construct gender norms, to frame gaming as a domain of masculinity, and computers as a site of masculine expertise. If we extrapolate out these intimate family moments into the larger fabric of society, it should be no surprise that we have seen a steady decline in female participation in IT over the past two decades. Far from the strides women have made in other fields, in IT, women have backslid. Much of this backsliding can be attributed to the inextricable connection that has been made between video gaming and both interest and competency in computing. If the notion that they lack competency with objects of digital play is continually reinforced to girls as they grow into women, it is no wonder they lack the self-efficacy in this area to pursue careers in computing. This combined with direct and repeated discrimination and gate-keeping means we continue to perpetuate the status quo of a male-dominated computing industry. Perhaps understanding this at its root will help us develop better strategies for changing it.
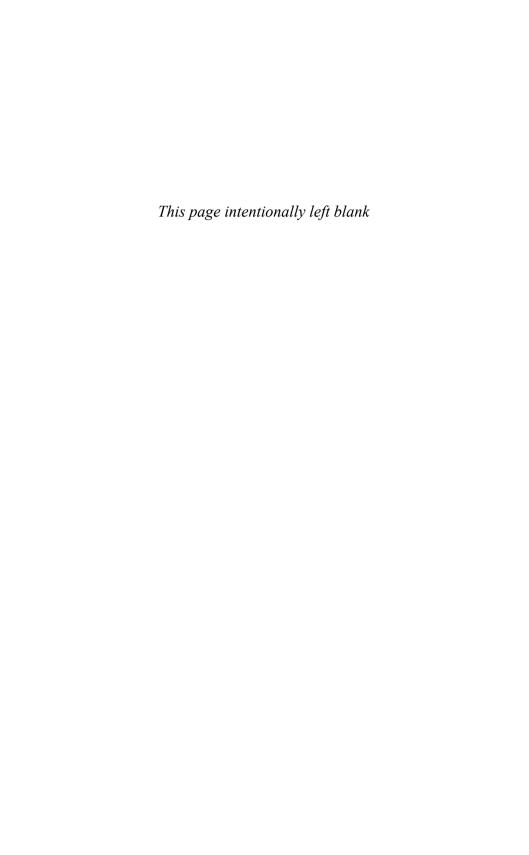
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1 Introducing Domestic Play

PLAY AT HOME: THE DOMESTICATION OF DIGITAL GAMES

What comes to mind when I ask you to imagine the typical video game player? If you are anything like the students I have taught, the researchers I have met at conferences, or the range of other people I chat with at social outings, it is the enduring image of the socially inept, nerdy, teenaged boy, sequestered in a darkened room, yelling angrily into a headset. Certainly, this stereotype continues to hold sway in many quarters, not least of which being the mainstream commercial digital games industry. But the contemporary context of digital game play is in fact a great deal more complex and diverse. In the Western world, digital game play practices and spaces have shifted in important ways over the last decade, moving from the boys' club of arcades to a plethora of personal devices affording a range of increasingly varied play experiences, including shared game play, both online and with co-located players, and the use of traditional controllers, motion-based interfaces, and a range of portable single- and multi-use technologies. With this broadening of the types of games and ways to play has come a commensurate expansion in the audiences for digital games, with industry statistics indicating the stereotype about who plays games – young boys – is no longer even close to the reality. Instead, depending on the genre and the platform (be it console, computer, handheld, or mobile device), the gender and age of the average player ranges widely. According to the most recent statistics from the Entertainment Software Association (2014), 48 percent of American game players are female and the average age of the game player is thirty-one, with the majority of video game players over thirty-six years of age.

The recent diversification of the game-playing audience indicated by industry figures is often accompanied by statistics indicating an emerging set of practices related to how people play video games. Specifically, as digital games have become a major area of leisure as well as a multi-generational interest, digital game play across age groups has become an area of focus in both industry studies as well as marketing materials. Advertisements for a range of games, often classified under the genre "casual games", highlight intergenerational, family, physical, and mobile play as well as a growing audience of older and female players. Some have heralded this shift as a

"casual revolution", but instead of understanding this as an unprecedented industrial shift or expansion of gaming audiences, the mainstreaming of digital games echoes earlier histories of both digital and analogue games, which were designed and marketed with broad markets and style of engagement in mind, including youth, adult, and family play within the domestic realm (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007; Juul 2009; Flanagan 2009).

Despite the celebration of a more inclusive digital game play scene in the contemporary context, little recent grounded research has been devoted to the examination of familial play and the domestication of digital games, which seems particularly warranted in light of the massive growth of mobile and casual play and the return to family play. The main objective of this analysis is to provide a situated investigation of the site of family play: the shared spaces and private places of game play within the domestic sphere. It undertakes an empirically grounded and critical analysis of what marketing and sales discourses about shifts in the digital games audience actually look like in the space of the home, and the social and cultural role these ludic technologies take in the everyday practices of the family in a domestic context. In particular, this book provides an account of what happens in the relationships between parents and children when the technologies of video games become another feature in the set of networked media that parents must moderate and regulate in the contemporary digital communications landscape. It examines the material realities of digital game technologies in the home, including time management and spatial organization, as well as the discursive role these ludic devices play in discussions of technological competence and its complex relationship in particular to age, generational differences, and gender performance and normative subject-positions.

Drawing on interviews and observations of play conducted with ten Canadian families and a total of twenty-five family members in the period following the release of Nintendo's Wii[1] console, this analysis considers the context of how and where people learn how to become players (or not), and the crucial role played by access to game technologies once they have been adopted. Critical social and cultural studies of game players, and in particular the identity work entailed in relation to the game player subject-position, have indicated the centrality of a particularly hypermasculine, misogynistic, and exclusionary culture of digital play (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007; Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell 2009; Alloway & Gilbert 1998). Examinations of how this boundary policing is perpetuated, leading to a lack of diversity within the broader culture and industry of digital games, often conclude with the need to consider not the design of digital games but instead the situated spaces where games are played and communities of players are formed (Jenson & de Castell 2008, 2010; Bryce, Rutter, & Sullivan 2006). This book constitutes such a contribution as a situated analysis in the context of the home rather than specialized educational contexts including camp-based initiatives (Carr 2005, 2006; Ito 2009; Jenson & Fisher 2010; Lin 2008; Sanford & Madill 2006; Taylor 2007; Taylor, Jenson, & de

Castell 2007) or game play-specific venues including LAN cafés and game conventions (Beavis & Charles 2007; Lin 2008; Taylor 2006).

While it would seem the widening of audiences, play styles, and representations of game players would herald the end of the framing of digital game play as a masculine pastime and the constructions of the game player along the stereotypical lines I opened with, quite the opposite is actually true. In what follows I will discuss the path that led to this study and the contradictions present within digital games culture, research in the area, and the constitution of game-playing subject-positions in these contexts.

A PERSONAL HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

When I was seven years old, I was passionate about the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). I have incredibly vivid memories of my younger brother and I wrestling for the NES Zapper, the dark grey, plastic, gun-shaped controller we would aim at the television screen to shoot at the pixelated fowl in *Duck Hunt*.[2] My paternal grandparents were the first people I knew who owned a game console, the Sega Genesis[3], which they purchased for their six grandchildren to enjoy when they visited. My brother was better at *Sonic the Hedgehog* than I was and would dominate the system. I was more excited to visit my cousin's house, eager to play her copy of *Super Mario World*, which had graphics I found more appealing. While we never owned a console as children, my love of digital games was reinvigorated when we acquired our first home computer. Ours was a single-parent household without a great deal of disposable money to spend on gaming gadgets, and I got my kicks from shareware games (I remember in particular my joy in mastering the first twelve levels of *Lemmings*) and the CD-ROM educational games my mother brought home as gifts. I was especially entranced by *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* and I liked to write short stories that starred the equally elusive and fabulous world-travelling thief.

For the first sixteen years of my life, digital games were a pleasure I shared with my brother and my female and male cousins. My memory fades, though, when it comes to the moment or reason I stopped playing digital games on a regular basis. This is notable as my brother never lost interest. He would continue to play on PC, console, and eventually portable devices as they were released, participating in a sharing economy of games and technologies with his male peers. Perhaps it was because of this divergence that my initial interest in game studies as a graduate student was inspired by the fact that digital games and their technologies seemed to be exclusively the domain of my male friends and family members. Not a single one of my female peers played video games; nor did they talk about them. My brother and male friends, on the other hand, were frequent players and were also visibly invested in game culture, as evinced by their collections of games and gaming magazines as well as their enthusiastic conversations about

their favourite titles and forthcoming releases. When I took a course on new technologies and education, the persistent focus of the exclusively female student body of that class was the potential risks video games posed for creating a generation of disconnected, anti-social, violent boys, a positioning that was especially important given these students were all elementary and secondary-school educators. Video games were, in my experience, a site of boy culture, a new media form providing what appeared to be a homosocial space for the performance of nerdy or geeky and often problematized masculinities. I wondered why game play was so male-dominated, what play culture offered its participants that it did not seem to offer girls and women, and whether this was related to the enduring discourse of media effects that posits a linear relationship between violent content and delinquent youth (for reviews of this discourse, see Buckingham 2000; Consalvo 2003).

In many ways this work is a culmination of the research inspired by those questions many years ago. The findings I report on here are developed from an analysis of the practices of ten Canadian families, including twenty-five parents and children, I interviewed about digital games in their homes and about their thoughts on gender, online play, and hope and anxiety about children's digital gaming. This empirically grounded approach investigates children's digital play practices as well as adult reactions to and regulation of contemporary youth media activities with a focus on digital games. My intention was to explore the practices of young technology users and their parents in order to understand the enactment and performance of gendered subject-positions in and through digital play.

GENDER AND NEOLIBERALISM IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

As this indicates, I take a feminist perspective in my understanding of play spaces as unique sites for the enactment of gender relations. Constrained/ing and enabled/ing play spaces implicate players in different ways and impact on their access to the technologies of digital play. I found these relations are shaped by concepts of what normative gender performance looks like in a given household, as well as by constructs of age and generationality. I will demonstrate that the monitoring of technologies enabling engagement with digital games plays an important role in the maintenance of normative performances of gender identity (Butler 1990) within the domestic sphere. These performances are contingent upon a socially and culturally shaped set of intelligible activities linked to discursively delineated ideas of embodied difference between the sexes, often articulated through arguments about biological divergence and natural, innate, and fixed distinctions between men and women. These not only order human activities through references to inherent difference but entrench and reify the idea that oppression and systemic exclusion are by-products of a natural order rather than a socially

and culturally constructed structure privileging the voices and interests of some over others. I showcase these power relations through a consideration of how the family enacts gender and gendered interests, activities, and subject-positions via a range of performative practices in the household. The domestic sphere is a powerful locale in shaping identity performances and is a significant space for examining the construction of a legitimized norm of gender that is dependent on regulated sets of acts performed both cognitively and in embodied ways. More pragmatically, in Canada it is the home where the majority of digital play and its regulation take place.

In light of this, I demonstrate how, within the domestic realm, the practices of youth and adult participants, as well as a range of material constraints and discourses about digital games, together mutually constitute the relationship between gender and technological competencies. I also delineate the key ways in which these practices and discourses are informed for my participants by a neoliberal ethos, a dominant political and economic order including practices and processes wherein a market logic is seen as an ethic that can guide all human activity (Harvey 2005). According to Harvey, what is central within neoliberal thought is its appeal to human freedom, which is ideologically located within the protection and promotion of unfettered, open markets, entrenching the power of an elite group. At the same time, neoliberalism is "usually presented not as a particular set of interests and political interventions, but as a kind of nonpolitics – a way of being reasonable, and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe" (Duggan 2003, 10). This ethos is often discussed in terms of macro-level policy decisions related to deregulation, privatization, and globalization, but has also been examined at the micro scale of everyday life (Braedley & Luxton 2010) and in relationship to the perpetuation of the dominant gender order (Gill 2007). This is particularly relevant to studies of the domestic sphere, as families are a key category within neoliberal discourse alongside the state, the economy, and civil society, and this discourse has reshaped relations within the domestic realm through the perpetuation of new configurations and understandings of personal responsibility (Duggan 2003). Such notions of responsibility for managing risk become especially potent in the realm of parenting in North America, wherein parents are posited as the arbiters of their children's socially appropriate educational and developmental outcomes (Hoffman 2010). Throughout my analysis, I consider how a dominant neoliberal rhetoric informs the practices of everyday life, particularly parenting activities and discourses, in relationship to the domestication of gendered digital play technologies.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND ITS RATIONALE

It is important to note at the outset that I mobilize several terms to refer to slightly varied technologies, devices, interfaces, games, and activities.

Most broadly, I am considering the discourses and practices of digital play. This term encompasses playing with a wide range of interactive entertainment formats, not limited to any one device or a specific platform, format, or genre. Digital play thus refers to playing *The Sims 3* on the PC, *Need for Speed: Nitro* on the Nintendo DS[4], *Angry Birds* on the iPhone, *FarmVille* on Facebook, *Rock Band 3* on the PlayStation 3[5], and *Halo: Reach* on the Xbox 360[6] (to use examples from the play of my participants). It is not specific to any interface, game, or play site. Ludic technologies is an equally inclusive term, describing devices that support digital play, including multi-functional technologies such as mobile phones. Video games also indicate a broad array of genres and modes of play, as I use the term to refer to the entire play medium. When I want to specify particular technologies or interfaces, I refer to them explicitly, such as console games, computer games, mobile games, social networking games, and portable games. As the impetus for this study is in large part the expansion of avenues for game play, it is fitting to include a range of play and game devices through the use of terms such as digital play, ludic technologies, and video games and to specify particular games and play objects when necessary (as in the case when that is what participants referred to directly).

This flexible approach to language is inspired by the ways the participants in this study talked about digital games and play. My original intention in this project was not to study the gendering of digital games in the home per se. Instead, I was interested in exploring the question of how young people enact gender through their play in the virtual worlds marketed to their demographic, such as *Club Penguin*, *Whyville*, *Neopets*, *Webkinz, Poptropica,* and *Teen Second Life*. However, when I interviewed parents and children, I found they spoke about a wide range of domestic practices that regulate how young people play, practices that were entangled in the enactment of gender as well as conceptualizations of generational difference and prevalent questions of risk and hope. Rather than speaking about participation in online worlds as distinct from console gaming or mobile game play, participants reflected simultaneously on online and offline play practices and how these activities were shaped through rules they implemented and that extended across the use of many screens, from televisions to computers to smartphones. In other words, there was a slippery nature to the ways participants discussed game play, and at the same time an overwhelmingly powerful set of discourses related to parenting that shaped parental understanding of and young people's engagement with digital games. In many ways this is not surprising, as children's virtual worlds are the design by-product of the cultural impetus to provide "safe spaces" for the peer group interaction and play of children in a climate where free, outdoor play is severely curtailed by safety concerns and a dearth of outdoor play spaces in the infrastructure of urban environments (Jenkins 1998; Fields & Kafai 2010).

DIGITAL GAMES AS MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS

In this study, I explore the gendered nature of digital play through a consideration of two co-constitutive dimensions in order to understand them as material-discursive formations. The first dimension relates to the material spaces of and localized practices regarding regulation of video game play in the domestic sphere. The second is how scholarly research and news media depict digital play, using discursive frames related to gender, age, generational difference, risk, hope, and fear, particularly moral panics related to video game violence. Specifically, I focus on access to digital play in the home, a still largely under-examined site in scholarly research on game culture (for a few notable examples of studies considering aspects of domestic play in American, European, and Asian contexts see De Schutter, Brown, & Vanden Abeele 2014; Facer, Furlong, Furlong, & Sutherland 2003; Flynn 2003; Haddon 1993; Helle-Velle & Storm-Mathisen 2008; Kerr, 2003; Lin 2008; Schott & Horrell 2000; Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy 2008; Thornham 2011). Through this approach, I consider how the play of digital games specifically, and proficiency with digital technologies generally, are materially and discursively gendered in the domestic realm and within familial interactions. In order to get a sense of how video games were domesticated in the period of the so-called casual revolution of 2006–2007, I spent time in the homes of ten Canadian families. I interviewed mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons about their play practices and asked the children and teenagers to show me their favourite games and ludic technologies, observing their play and how they talked about it.

To better understand the discursive dimension of a material-discursive analysis, I turn to the distinction made by linguist James Paul Gee (1999) between "small-d" discourse and "big-D" Discourse. Discourse can be understood as language-in-use (small-d discourse) that works only in tandem with discourse as "stuff" – gestures, bodies, interactions, values, and emotions – to enact particular identities and practices. Gee calls this non-language stuff big-D Discourse, socially and culturally shaped means of talking about and interacting with people and objects, circulated and maintained through images, texts, interactions, practices, and institutions, to create a shared cultural understanding of what is normal and what is suspect or marginal. Everyday identities are the product of using "language and 'other stuff' – ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools, and technologies – to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways" (Gee 1999, 7).

While the distinctions Gee makes indicate the relationship between language-in-use and objects and practices, I find it powerful to mobilize Karen Barad's (1999) conceptualization of material-discursive frameworks, which elegantly encapsulates the inextricable "inter-actions"[7] of objects and subjects, allowing for an account of how discourse is co-constituted in

and through material reality. This perspective acknowledges and provides the grounds for reflection on the productive components of discourse while underscoring the need for "the simultaneous recognition of the material and the discursive" (Barad 1999, 2). In taking a material-discursive approach in my analysis, I focus on how everyday practices are productive and constrained – but not determined – by discourses, objects, and activities, particularly those related to digital play and ludic technologies as well as parenting, adolescence, and childhood.

Within this study, taking a material-discursive perspective entails examining how gendered notions of play are shaped through material and social practices of digital game play as well as through the engagement of players and families with dominant discourses about the use of ludic technologies. Banal interactions – the lived reality of everyday subjects – underpin these discourses. The household is a key site for the concrete enactment of material-discursive formations related to gender and technology (Wajcman 1991) in addition to the culturally constructed categories of childhood and adulthood. The home is a significant space not only because it is a site wherein the dominant gender order is performed at the personal level every day but also because it is a crucial location that significantly impacts and can even determine quality of access and use of new technologies (Haddon 2004). Furthermore, discourses that articulate specific visions about contemporary childhood, ludic technologies, and normative gender relations enable and constrain particular activities, subjectivities, and performances, and this can be clearly observed within the spaces of domestic play, as I will foreground throughout the analysis. I argue it is through concrete negotiations of rules related to play, informed by the dominant rhetoric regarding these playful activities and identities, that the associations between masculinity and technological competencies are reified and challenged, in particular through the technologies, identities, and practices associated with digital games.

UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATION OF GENDER AND PLAY

As I will demonstrate, it was precisely through the regulation of digital play in the home that adults, teenagers, and children enacted gender. Discursively, in our discussions about video games in their everyday spaces, parents and children emphasized the topic of setting rules about where video game technologies are located in the home and what days and times parents permitted their children to access technologies of play. Parents referred to the tools they employed to mediate content they deemed problematic and how they divided the labour of legislating play in the home. Young people, on the other hand, revealed how they in turn followed or broke these rules, to play when, where, how, and with the games and systems they wanted. Finally, family members reflected on what they thought about the stories of hope and fear in the

media regarding digital play, including the rhetoric that ludic technologies provide the training grounds for the development of a digital citizenry of young people and the moral panics related to violent video games and their effects on young players. These discourses characterize, inform, and shape the regulatory practices that discipline games in ways that constrain and enable play differently for boys and girls in the Canadian context.

Through an investigation of digital play and its regulation and representation by the families in this study, I illustrate how the domestic sphere is a significant location for the production of gendered meanings related to video games. This network of meaning includes regulation of what intelligible gender performance looks like in association with the use of technologies, and is further informed by discourses of age and generationality, all of which impact on access, use, and the potential development of technological fluency, comfort, competency, and expertise. I argue that despite a proliferation of images referencing domestic play in popular media and academic research through a number of domestic practices, technological proficiency continues to be primarily (though not exclusively) attributed to male subjects in relation to ludic technologies amongst my participants. This occurs through the entanglement of rhetorical strategies, such as statements that reaffirm a natural masculine proclivity for technology, and regulatory tactics, such as time-limiting when it comes to how long children can play games on consoles, computers, and mobile devices. As I will demonstrate, gendered associations with technologies are reinscribed differently in each family's practices, in tandem with the local gender regulatory system that works at the micro level of everyday life to maintain the larger symbolic connection between digital games and masculinity.[8]

Parents and children engage with technologies of play in a complex discursive context that I will delineate throughout this book, one in which discussions of ludic technologies are described in terms of two parallel and oppositional lines of rhetoric. The first is fear, articulated most often through moral panics about mediated violence, in which video games are responsible for shaping deviant, violent male children (Consalvo 2003). The second is hope, wherein new media are seen as holding utopian or emancipatory potential in how they offer children boundless access to information, educational materials, and opportunities for creative production and sharing (Buckingham 2000). For instance, a great deal of education literature focuses on the potential for children to produce and share their prose, poetry, and art work through online forums and communities, remix media texts using amateur editing software, design and launch their own websites, engage in programming, and contribute to the fan cultures that spring up around their favourite media texts (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison 2006). This includes work looking at the game design practices of boys and girls (Kafai 1996), the textual appropriation involved in game design and what this can say about media literacy (Pelletier, Burn, & Buckingham 2010), and second-level digital divides in relationship to the

media-creation activities of young people (Kafai & Peppler 2011). In many cases, this research shows the ways in which these discourses are bound up with gender regulatory practices, an order that requires some identities to be rejected or repudiated in order to sustain intelligible gender identity (Butler 1990) and thereby serve to contribute to the repetition of norms of gender intelligibility in relation to technology. This is the case for both the young people who are spoken for in these dichotomous discourses as well as for their parents, who are always implicated as the primary gatekeepers to technology in a neoliberal environment emphasizing the responsibility of individuals to maintain the social order. To understand the relationship of youth to the rhetoric of both hope and fear and the iteration of normative performances of gender in association with technology, I conducted a material-discursive analysis exploring the links between identity formation and material practices. I also considered everyday practices of regulation in which digital play and technological subjects are co-constituted within the domestic sphere. These regulatory practices include tangibly restrictive activities such as rule-setting, time-limiting, and content controls as well as linguistic practices that constrain and enable particular gender performances (Butler 1993).

In what follows I will review recent statistics on Canadian and American digital game play, indicating the increasing frequency of video game use amongst people of varying ages. These will then be set in contrast with the dominant discourse framing ludic technologies as the domain of men and boys in order to highlight a key contradiction about digital games and the normative subject-position of the gamer.

A LUDIC INVASION: PLAYERS, PLAYERS EVERYWHERE

In 2005, video game culture struck me as a masculine domain, and around this time academic research on digital play and gender focused on games as technological artefacts and sites for the production of a contemporary hegemonic masculinity or hypermasculinity, characterized by aggressive competition, the oppression of femininity, and violence (Sanford & Madill 2006; Walkerdine 2007; Burrill 2008). Yet recent statistics about digital game play in English-speaking countries indicate it is not the stereotype of the teenaged white male constituting today's typical player. Instead, these statistics portray a very different profile of the audience for digital games, a shift Jesper Juul (2009) locates in 2006–2007, when video games became, within a fairly privileged Western context, a component of everyday leisure time, as players were no longer expected to find ways to shift their pre-existing schedule to find time to play. With the expansion of titles and devices for the play of short, less time-intensive games, particularly on mobile devices, digital games have entered into the everyday leisure activities of many segments of the population. Indeed, the scope and scale of game play have become so

significant that, Juul argues, digital play has become mainstream and "we realize that everybody can be a video-game player" (2). This mainstreaming of play is in evidence in the reports issued by the not-for-profit trade association Entertainment Software Association of Canada (ESAC 2013), which holds that "58% of Canadians are gamers" (15). This has been previously defined as a person who has played a digital game in the four-week period preceding the survey (ESAC's 2011). Its 2013 report provides further details about Canadian game players and their habits:

- 95 percent of Canadians own a computer and 61 percent of Canadian households possess a minimum of one game console.
- The average age of the Canadian gamer is thirty-one years of age but play is an activity that extends across a wide age range, from six to over fifty-five.
- Of the 58 percent of Canadians who play digital games, 90 percent of children aged six to seventeen have played in the past four weeks, a frequency that decreases with age (59 percent of adults aged eighteen to thirty-four have played in the past four weeks, 50 percent of adults aged thirty-five to fifty-four, and 37 percent of adults over the age of fifty-five).
- The largest proportion of Canadian game players play on handheld game systems (44 percent), with 33 percent playing on consoles, 36 percent on computers, and 12 percent on mobile devices, which represents a large shift away from the patterns of computer gaming in 2011 when only 10 percent played on handheld gaming devices (ESAC 2011).

The ESAC (2013) report also indicates some trends in terms of the profile of players. Fifty-four percent of gamers are male, while 46 percent are female (this is another notable shift from 2011's report, where the divide was 62 percent male and 38 percent female). Female gamers between thirteen and seventeen play games most often on their cell phone or mobile device (42 percent), and those between eighteen and thirty-four enjoy playing games that challenge their mental abilities, such as puzzle games (40 percent). Male players from the age of six to the age of thirty-four play games on dedicated consoles most frequently, but their preferred games differ, from action and adventure games for boys six to twelve (56 percent), shooter games for teen boys aged thirteen to seventeen (53 percent), and role-playing games for adult men between eighteen and thirty-four (42 percent). In Canada, then, digital game play has become an activity that men, women, boys, and girls participate in, though technologies, interfaces, and genres of play differ amongst male and female players and across age groups.

According to the Entertainment Software Association's statistics on the American context (2014), the majority of parents responding (58 percent) reported playing games with their children on a monthly basis, with 42 percent playing either computer or console games with their kids weekly.

Furthermore, 56 percent of parents reported they believed video games were a positive dimension of their child's life. The regulation of video game use by parents is a key focus within the ESA's reporting, and it notes 87 percent of parents find the parental controls that are available on new game consoles helpful. This report also indicates parents impose strict time limitations on game play, with 83 percent limiting game play time whereas only 70 percent limit movie-viewing time. Children and their parents play together because parents believe game play provides a good opportunity for familial socializing (55 percent). Even more parents perceive video game play as educationally or mentally challenging for their children (68 percent).

In Canada, 87 percent of parents said they sometimes or always check the ratings provided by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) when buying or renting games for their child[9], with a full 93 percent of adult gamers appreciating the ESRB rating system as a useful guide for parental purchase and rental of games. Sales distribution broken down by rating reflects high incidence of family and youth play; games rated E for Everyone amounted to 45 percent of games sold in 2012.

Finally, the American context indicates the centrality of family play is not the most significant shift in the digital game play context but the growing numbers of adult female players, including the mature women demographic aged fifty and older, whose play increased by 32 percent between 2012 and 2013. Overall, "women age 18 or older represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (36%) than boys age 18 or younger (17%)" (Entertainment Software Association 2014, 3), a comparative figure that would seem to dispel the stereotype that digital game play is solely the purview of teenaged boys.

As these broader play populations indicate and as Juul (2009) has argued, games have now moved into mainstream culture and digital game play has become a widespread practice within North American popular culture. According to Juul, this is a move back into mainstream culture, as there were a large number of casual games appealing to broad audiences of players in the 1980s and 1990s, including *Pac-Man*, *Tetris*, *Myst*, and *Solitaire*. Certainly this is but one wave of domestication, following those that have occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, and is perhaps better understood as a re-domestication. To wit, if we consider the family-oriented marketing of the Nintendo in the 1980s, as well as the multiple games that have historically drawn wide audiences of female players, including Victorian board games, which were a form of familial entertainment managed by women in the home (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007), it becomes clear the framing of game play as a masculine pastime is a recent development and one that was only briefly accurate to boot. From an academic standpoint, it also highlights the ways in which academic research focusing exclusively on a narrow range of games, play practices, and player types (what tends to be characterized as hardcore) serves to marginalize and erase all other players and their practices, particularly girls, women, older people, and

people of colour, as well as new and less experienced players (Taylor 2008; Shaw 2013).

The increased mainstreaming of game play prompts the question of how young people and parents interact with video games in the domestic sphere and in what ways parental regulation shapes how members of the household play. As I will argue, the popularity of digital play in some instances can lead to parental angst, as parents feel the onus is placed on them to harness the potential or mitigate the risks of new ludic technologies. The pressures placed on parents to manage the benefits and pitfalls of digital media in their children's lives are entangled with the stories told about boys, girls, and what they do (or do not do, in the case of girls) with ludic technologies. To better understand this, I examine how the mainstreaming of video game play is experienced at the micro level in ten Canadian homes. Does the play of games across broader swaths of the population and across demographics mean digital play technologies are now equitably accessible? Has the hegemony of play, which was theorized in 2007 as exclusionary to those that are not white males (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007), shifted? In what follows, I introduce some of the work that addresses how access to digital games is limited based on notions of gender difference in order to begin to indicate the complex entanglements of the material-discursive network related to gaming and gender.

MAINSTREAM GAMING: UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS?

Despite the move to more mainstream gaming evinced by the above statistics, researchers examining questions of youth, gaming, and gender are still fairly prolific, producing work that is critical of the gendered nature of game play. The sustained interest in differential access to games along lines of age and gender suggests that despite a shift in game activity to incorporate a broader range of players, digital game play is not an activity shared across all members of the population in an equitable fashion but one still constrained in particular ways that may not be adequately captured in the question "Do you play games?", particularly as research has shown girls and women will answer "Yes" when they are spectators to the play of their male friends (Taylor 2005). For this reason, I examine how the mainstreaming of play is unfolding amongst the participating families in this research through an empirical analysis of both their play and the practices through which this play is regulated.

Empirical considerations of everyday play are necessitated by the observation that barriers to entry for female players are often misunderstood by researchers and in the broader culture of game players as an absence of desire to play games (Carr 2005). As Jenson and de Castell (2010) argue, research on games and gender fails to account for the everyday realities of play. This includes who gets to have access to what games in what spaces,

what past play experiences may shape engagement with games (Hayes 2007), and who has access to the leisure time required to play (Winn & Heeter 2009). Research into game culture and gender is led by an uneasy and unstable alliance of critical feminist thinkers and industry leaders with different objectives – the former to de-gender and queer technologies of play, the latter to foster new markets for their products (de Castell & Bryson 1998). For some researchers, disparities in digital play participation are problematic because of the potential game technologies hold as both educational tools in the classroom and beyond (Aldrich 2005; de Castell & Jenson 2003; Gee 2007; Kafai 2006; Prensky 2001) and the opportunities they may offer for the development of technological proficiencies (Gee 2003; Squire 2011; Steinkuehler 2006), media literacies (Peppler, Warschaeuer, & Diazgranados 2010; Pelletier, Burn, & Buckingham 2010), and participatory competencies (Kafai & Peppler 2011). Despite the industry statistics and promises for learning and education, video game play is generally framed, in both media discourses and scholarly studies, as a site for the enactment and performance of hegemonic masculinities (Alloway & Gilbert 1998; Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007; N.T. Taylor 2005, 2007; Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell 2009; Walkerdine, 2007). Gee (2003) asserts this is problematic because video games act as semiotic domains that provide important pedagogical tools, including critical thinking and analysis, which young people need to advance into other technological domains such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). According to Kolko & Putnam (2009), video games can act as gateways to technology use and the development of technological skills and expertise as well as more advanced tools (Hayes 2005). If the play of digital games provides the skills required to progress into higher learning and careers in computer sciences and engineering, then the exclusion of female players, in particular girls, must be addressed and rectified. This is particularly important considering that girls begin to exhibit a loss of interest in the sciences and technology at the middle-school level (Hughes 2008). Women constitute less than 30 percent of the student body in engineering and computer sciences (National Science Foundation 2013), a figure that has held steady despite the fact that female participation has risen in the majority of fields in the period between 1991 and 2010. This disparity raises wider concerns about the participation of women in technological fields. "Women's participation in science and engineering occupations is about half of what it is in the U.S. workforce as a whole and varies greatly by occupation: higher among psychologists and lower among mathematical/computer scientists and engineers" (p. 8), with female workers populating roles and occupations that are understood as traditionally feminine, such as nursing (National Science Foundation 2011).

In Canada, the problem is specifically tied to a lack of transfer between education and the workforce, as research on the workforce demographics within STEM fields indicates women have higher rates of unemployment after a STEM degree than both their male counterparts and their peers in

non-STEM fields (Hango 2013). Furthermore, while the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (2011) reports nearly equal growth in enrolment in the life sciences, mathematics, and physical sciences, the number of women in engineering and computer science degrees has actually decreased since 1999. Despite largely commensurate growth, the numbers across the board in the sciences show much lower levels of enrolment for female students than male students in Canada. In sum, women and girls are often framed as reluctant, reticent, and under-enthusiastic users of technology (Carr 2005; Shade 2002), motivating qualitative and quantitative research into the underrepresentation of female-identified persons in computing as well as policy and educational initiatives at the national and international levels to address this gap (Vigdor 2011).

This research emphasizes the expectation that children should engage in type of play that would allow them to grow into productive adults (Narine & Grimes 2009). Play is expected to serve a higher purpose and have value, leading to creative, educational, and personal development. With these rationalized objectives at the fore, the earliest studies of video games and gender focused on gendered content and play preferences to promote the design of educational games. A key development here was the growth of an industrial interest in designing games and educational software for girls, known as the Girls' Games Movement, which refers to designers and companies making games for female audiences in the 1990s, often characterized by a tense relationship between social justice and capitalism (Laurel 2001). This would comprise Theresa Duncan's adventure games, including *Chop Suey*, the Nancy Drew series, and, most notably, Brenda Laurel and her company Purple Moon, which produced the Rockett series. Other companies that entered into the business of producing girl games included Girl Tech, Girl Games, and CyberGrrl (de Castell & Bryson 1998).

Embedded within the mission of this initiative is the understanding that in order to court girls into technological fields of study and work, designers need to counter the inherently masculine character of video game play to provide girls with the same opportunities to cultivate an interest in technology (Jenkins & Cassell 2008). The agendas of each game differed. While Purple Moon's approach was explicitly feminist, the Nancy Drew series was intended to cultivate audiences of girls through a popular and well-known character. In both cases, however, game designers developed games to appeal to feminine subjects who were otherwise perceived as improbable players (Buckingham & Sefton-Green 2003; Carr 2005). As de Castell and Bryson (1998) highlight, such an approach frames computing and technology as an inherently masculine domain and necessitates the creation of products that appeal to what are seen as essentially different interests, desires, and preferences on the part of girls.

As this would indicate, many of the titles that fell under the heading of girl games were designed based on essentialized notions of what girls like (expressed through largely ultrafeminine values), as exemplified by

pink games such as those in the *Barbie* series (Jenkins & Cassell 2008). The problem with creating games that perceive the interests of girls in terms of traditional conventions of femininity – with an emphasis on clothing, makeup, friendship, romance, popularity, as well as cute and pretty aesthetics – is that such games may disenfranchise young girls by relegating them to narrow spaces of identification with hegemonic values (Kafai, Heeter, Denner, & Sun 2008) and perpetuate notions of their playful desires and ludic preferences as inherently linked to their sex. Taylor (2007) argues the advocacy of girl games as a response to a masculinized video game culture serves to re-entrench a notion of the innate needs of girls and in turn reaffirms a sense of the natural proclivities of boys for video games. So in this case, fashion, animals, makeup, and nurturing constitute most of the content targeted at girls, whereas competition, adventure, sports, and speed are framed as the rightful interests of boys. Through these constructions, these projects served to essentialize gender preferences, targeting girls with the orthodox design of ultrafeminine pink and purple games, characterized by slow-paced, gentle, collaborative play (Jenkins & Cassell 2008). As with pre-digital toys for girls, these software products "have had very little to do with what a woman wants, and everything to do with what is wanted from a woman" (de Castell & Bryson 1998, 238). At the same time, however, that these games often perpetuate a hegemonic notion of femininity (becoming a prime example of design and technology being imbued with cultural values and beliefs), outright refusal of any interest in them is equally problematic as "typically female genres are too easily dismissed as being trivial, when the act of participating in female culture could be considered in itself a resistive act against patriarchal culture" (Dickey 2006, 788). As this tense contradiction would indicate, consideration of the context and space of game play – what Jenson and de Castell (2011) refer to as the "conditions" of girls' play – can inform our understanding of games as gendered technologies in important ways.

In sum, the frequent essentialization embedded within work on design and preferences is problematic, as it understands play equity as based on stereotyped premises of gender and stable play preferences, ignoring how girls play competitively and entrenching a set of design constructs and notions of gender performance that can only result in "re-citation and re-inscription: boys necessarily always already perform masculinity and girls perform and practice femininity" (Jenson & de Castell 2008, 18). Focusing exclusively on content and stereotypically masculine and feminine preferences means attention is not devoted to other powerful forces that impact on the way play is patterned, such as the context of play and how and where players develop ludic knowledge, proficiency, and expertise. It also elides the ways in which a range of mainstream games have appealed to a wide range of players and thus been tremendously successful, including *Pac-Man*, *Myst,* and *The Sims*, which were not part of the girl games movement – though the latter was designed with women in mind (Purchese 2010) – but through

innovative design that appealed to a broader audience, a tactic that indicates it is not gendered design choices but interesting design choices that can lead to larger market share (Hayes 2007).

Furthermore, experience and milieus of play shape the performance of gender, and yet too often competency is misread as an attribute of sex, an innate proclivity for game technologies rather than a product of the how, when, and where young people gain access to these technological opportunities. For this reason, Jenson and de Castell (2008) argue for scholarly work that challenges the stereotypical conceptualizations of gender on which this kind of girl-centric design is premised and that focuses instead on the situation and context of game play. Such new game play studies emphasize the importance of context and demonstrate "that much that has been written on what girls/women 'prefer' to play is seriously disrupted by attending closely to the lived practices and daily choices of women/girls as they play games" (Jenson & de Castell 2010, 61), an argument that calls for a focus on the contingency of gender identity in digital gaming in particular and in relation to technology use more broadly.

This research responds to that call. The increase in gaming amongst girls and adult females might be presumed to indicate that early concerns about female disinterest are moot and put issues of equality of access to rest. My research considers the conditions under which people play, specifically within the domestic sphere, and what the broader populations of players indicated in the statistics are doing with and saying about game play in everyday practice. The mainstreaming of game play, indicated by statistics of sales and use, prompts further study of game players and the social practices and stratifications that might arise in and through domestic play. Does the array of game play options, from social games online to puzzle games on mobile phones to kinetic play in the living room, allow for equitable access for all members of the household? Furthermore, is simple access truly the solution to inequalities? Some have argued that supporting opportunities for girls and women to become more proficient in game play has a significant impact on the development of their comfort level with and expertise in the practices of digital culture more generally. Does access to ludic technology actually translate to meaningful use of the sort that leads to the development of skills, competency, and expertise for either girls or boys? The statistics imply that access is a matter of declining concern, at least in North America, but researchers have yet to investigate this in more complex terms, including exploring how access is not simply a matter of having a technology but a question of quality of use, such as how often and under what conditions one can play these games and how relations within the domestic context can serve to stratify play. Without examining the quality of this contact with games, it becomes especially spurious to assume that owning a technology automatically equates to active participation in digital culture that in turn translates to the development of skills.

This study considers the complexity of access within an under-examined context of play: the domestic sphere. Domestication studies provide needed insight into the quality of use as well as the social dynamics that underpin adoption of and participation in media and new technologies. However, research into the domestication of video games is severely lacking in comparison to examinations of play in schools, a gap that becomes particularly glaring in consideration of the prevalence of the rhetoric of hope and fear that shapes discussions of digital play, discourses that directly address parental responsibilities. I will argue these dichotomous discourses interpellate particular subjectivities for parents and children and mystify the complexities of their everyday life practices in relation to games, ludic technologies, and cultures of play. This study aims to heed Livingstone's (2003) call for scholarly work that provides an analysis of how the lived contexts and values of family life can impact on participation in digital culture, particularly given the hyperbolic claims made for the emancipatory character of ICTs and other new media. In responding, I also indicate some of the ways in which unequal participation in digital game play continues to be perpetuated by parents and children alike in ways that reaffirm notions of digital play as a practice that is inherently different between male and female users.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

I examine the domestication of the video game in light of the material-discursive context of game play, arguing that through play practices and regulatory activities such as content-limiting and rule-setting, both parents and children reinscribe and challenge gendered notions of ludic and technological proficiency in contradictory ways. Digital media is not a singular object; it encompasses a range of practices and literacies related to interactive media, including video games, personalized online networks, and already existing media forms. The regulation of technology use in the home, the division of labour regarding surveillance and monitoring, the play of particular games, the use of certain software and hardware, and the description of male and female roles in relation to the technologies of the home are shaped by the discourses that structure these activities and interpellate subjectivities in the domestic sphere. In turn, however, participants challenge, reify, and negotiate discourses of fear and hope as they relate to the intelligible subject-positions available in the gender order and through uses of technologies. These negotiations highlight the dynamic nature of the regulatory system of gender performance as well as the enduring difficulties that lie in reshaping how scholars and policy-makers might understand questions of access as well as broader notions of gender, technological expertise, and childhood and youth culture.

In order to understand these negotiations, I will first delineate the theoretical intersections that inform this project and the methodological

commitments that underpin it. While the marketing of video games and the spread of game play mechanics in a variety of new contexts implies a change in the relationship between girls, women, and technology, there is a shortage of research into the material context of this mainstreaming of play and the participation of both young people and their parents. In Chapter 2, "Girls, Boys, Gender, and Games", I provide a narrative account of how the research unfolded, discussing the epistemological framework, both theoretical and methodological, shaping the analysis. I focus in particular on research in the areas of gender in games culture, domestication studies, and the poststructural approach I took to studying youth, gender, and games in the situated context of the domestic sphere.

After considering theory and method, I turn to an analysis of the interviews and observations of play I undertook. In Chapter 3, "Adopting Digital Games", I engage with the empirical findings of the study forming the basis for the book, introducing the participants and their overarching approaches to purchasing and integrating video games in the home. This chapter also explores a centrally important concept, one that shapes a great deal of how both parents and children interact with digital game technologies: their sense of tech savvy, a shifting and powerful notion that pervades a great deal of gender- and age-based engagements with not only video games but other new media in the home.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyze the ways in which these themes are entangled with how young people and their parents regulate both digital play and technological subjectivities through their discussions and performances of gender, hope, and anxiety, which are revealed by their accounts of practices of surveillance, regulation, technological expertise, and the gendering of leisure time. In Chapter 4, "Regulating Digital Play", I examine the multiple ways in which parents and children negotiate with each other and their ludic technologies. I introduce the concept of domestic policy as a means of understanding the multiple ways in which different members of the family are disciplined according to broader discourses, including in particular the impetus for parents to act as gatekeepers to technology. Balancing the dangers and promises afforded by new technologies becomes a key priority in relation to networked technologies, and video games occupy a site of tension in terms of the degree to which parents and children see these as valuable and/or problematic. I argue that practices of domestic policy, including children's self-regulation and peer monitoring, align with a neoliberal imperative to individually manage risk and harness opportunities. I conclude by considering the role of age, generational discourse, and gender in the constitution and policing of domestic policy, and the ways in which this shapes the development of a sense of tech-savvy.

Chapter 5, "Regulating Technological Subjects", showcases how gender and proficiency are linked through domestic practices, as well as the language participants use to talk about their own activities and those of their family members, serving to challenge and reaffirm the associations

made between technological mastery and gendered identity. In this chapter, I deepen the analysis of how domestic practices contribute to the construction of the game player subject-position, considering the ways in which particular identities are constituted in parent and child discussions of digital game play. I provide a review of the theories of gender, identity, and subjectivity that inform this analysis. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which domestic practices can serve to perpetuate notions of gender differences related to technology use, with video games playing a central role as a masculinized technology. At the same time, however, age can provide a challenge to these understandings, as adoption of first-generation video games means some mothers identify as gamers, leading to a loosening of the correlation of gaming with masculinity. Age and gender are also linked to the degree of leisure time one has in the domestic sphere, and I consider the relationship of gendered leisure time to the personally-held perceptions of possessing technological proficiency.

Finally, Chapter 6, "The Politics of Play at Home", links the regulatory practices of domestic policy with the disciplining of technological subjects through digital games in the home to understand the possibilities for shifting the still-exclusionary culture of gaming. I discuss the notion of gaming capital as a way of understanding the relevance of the findings of the micro-context for the broader ecosystem of digital game-playing subjectivities. Using the example of recent industry developments and controversies, I conclude by linking the context of play and use to the sites of production to provide suggestions for how to intervene in the still-pervasive understanding of games as toys for boys and tech-savvy as an attribute of masculine subjects.

NOTES

1. The Nintendo Wii was released in North America in 2006. It follows a long line of Nintendo consoles, including the Color TV-Game, released only in Japan in 1977, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), released in North America in 1985, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) in 1991, the Nintendo 64 (N64), released in 1996, and the Nintendo GameCube in 2001. Nintendo's follow-up to the Wii was the Wii U, released in 2012.
2. As this research was partly motivated by the spread of digital play into mainstream culture, I aim for its findings to be accessible to those unfamiliar with the terms, concepts, and priorities within the field of digital game studies. To that end, I have provided information about game consoles to delineate their histories. I have also included a Glossary of Games as end matter, wherein I provide a description of each game mentioned as well as a link to its website or, where this is not available, a website where one can play the game or read more about it.
3. The Sega Genesis is the North American version of what was known as the Mega Drive elsewhere and was released in 1989. It was preceded by the SG-1000 in 1983 and the Master System in 1986. It was followed by the Sega Saturn in

1995 and the Dreamcast in 1999. Sega ceased manufacturing consoles after this, the sixth generation of games consoles.

4. The Nintendo DS, released in North America in 2004, is a portable game device that derives its name from the dual screens it boasts, the lower of which is a touch screen. This handheld console allows for networked play via Nintendo's own Wi-Fi. The Nintendo DS series followed the Game Boy series of portable game consoles.

5. The PlayStation 3 is part of Sony's game consoles offerings and was released in North America in 2006, following the PlayStation in 1995 and the PlayStation 2 in 2000. Its successor, the PlayStation 4, was released in 2013.

6. The Xbox 360 is a Microsoft game console released in North American in 2005. It followed the previous generation's offering, the Xbox, which was released in 2001 and which represented Microsoft's first console to come to market. Its most recent gambit was the Xbox One, released in 2013.

7. Barad has explored the difference between intra-action and interaction in the development of her theory of agential realism. Interaction assumes we can make ontological distinctions between entities as they are understood as possessing an inherent reality outside their relationships with each other, while intra-action understands objects and subjects as inseparable and always entwined (Barad 2000).

8. The connection between computer games and boys is a mythologized relationship that Connell (2009) identifies as a way of understanding gender as a social structure expressed through bodily difference. This embodied difference is then discursively positioned in particular to relations to objects and technologies ranging from maternity clothes to employment practices to the technologies of digital play that are seen as evidence of difference as opposed to technologies that are premised on and maintain a notion of gender difference.

9. The report does not differentiate between "sometimes" and "always" in discussions of parents and their use of ESRB ratings.

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2 Girls, Boys, Gender, and Games

CULTIVATING AND ACCOUNTING FOR SURPRISE IN RESEARCH

The origins of this study did not lie in the examination of domestic practices and how gendered player subjectivities are constituted through the monitoring and surveillance of young people's digital play activities. Instead, my original project intended to examine the gendered play practices of young people in virtual communities designed for child and teen audiences, including *Club Penguin*, *Neopets*, and *Webkinz*. In this chapter, I provide details of the epistemological framework underpinning this study, from the theoretical background to the research design to the iterative process of data analysis it entailed. Through this account, I showcase how the project developed in the pursuit of troubling common performances of research as a linear process by showcasing the original focus of the study and how it shifted as the research progressed. From the outset, the approach towards research I selected was poststructuralist, which meant it was characterised by a politics of revealing and accounting for researcher responsibility and positioning. It was for this reason that I was open to the unexpected directions my participants took me towards during my fieldwork rather than committing to a set of pre-determined hypotheses or research questions. In other words, I was oriented towards being led by the unexpected in my fieldwork rather than unsettled by it. In this chapter, I delineate how I went about exploring the views, attitudes, and practices of children and parents in relation to technological play, highlighting my mistakes, redirections, and revelations, while keeping in mind Suzanne de Castell's (2011) suggestion that scholars strive to cultivate surprise in their research. In this way I aim to showcase how my participants shaped the research while also accounting for the undeniably powerful role played by the researcher, which is often rendered invisible in the writing up of methods, a gap that is still most glaring in the still nascent field of game studies (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor 2012). To this end, this chapter provides a narrative account of the doing of this research study through a review of the literature and the methods selected (in the first phase of the study and in the redesign). If the reader is not interested in reading about the practicalities of conducting this research, they may skip directly to the analysis in Chapter 3.

GENDER, DIGITAL GAMES, AND YOUTH
MEDIA CULTURE

As noted, this project started with a set of research interests related to the performance of gendered identity in virtual worlds designed for young people and how the design of these sites shaped such performances. While this did not end up being the focus of my interviews or analysis, the greatest thread of continuity in this research project, from conceptualization all the way through to writing up, is the centrality of the gender-focused research in game studies and children's media culture. These fields constituted the inspiration for my original research interest in gender and virtual worlds for young people and continued to inform how I understood what my participants told me and showed me when I conducted the study.

Youth media studies is a broad, interdisciplinary field, considering both material and discursive dimensions of youth and their engagements with media. As a social construction, childhood as we understand it today emerged institutionally, alongside a range of discourses, specific sets of practices and activities, and other developments in the shift to industrialized society (Kline 1998). The periods or phases of youth, including childhood and adolescence, are neither uniform nor fixed but what is characteristic in contemporary times is how adults actively guard this phase of life, understanding it as sacred, in need of protection, and yet also requiring spaces of free play (Jenkins 1998b). As this would indicate, childhood is not a stable category with innate meaning but a constructed space wherein power is negotiated and maintained (Jenkins 1998a). For this reason, I designed my project with the understanding that children are subjects within dominant discourse that consistently frames young people as in need of protection from adult concerns and pleasures rather than as blank slates on which culture may be imprinted (Ariès 1998).

Youth media and culture are indicative of and inflected with larger cultural trends, discourses, institutions, and social values, beliefs, and practices (Kline 1998). Still, the discursive frameworks that shape the activities of children and young people are not wholly determining, and their play, interactions, and language constitute significant moments of self-expression worthy of study (Thomas 2007). Childhood and youth are understood to be zones of turbulent meaning-making and, of particular relevance to media studies, periods of life that tend to involve a wide range of engagements with texts, technologies, and social environments. Participation within media culture is always subject to regulation, however, due to the ways in which youth is a constructed category loaded with the expectations, anxieties, and assumptions of adults. This is further segmented through notions of boyhood and girlhood, meaning children are also subject to gendering and gender-based policing, in addition to practices and discourses of racialized and class-based interpellation (Sefton-Green 1998).

One way to understand the dynamic, active, and contingent nature of childhood is through an analysis of the material-discursive frameworks that

shape the constitution of childhood and youth. For my project, this included a focus on both the bounded nature of youth and the practices of actual young people reinforcing or challenging particular ideas of this delimited period of life (Buckingham & Sefton-Green 2003). Often, the making (Hacking 1999) of categories such as boyhood and girlhood can tell us more about adults than children; adult culture mediates youth culture. For this reason, I planned to interview parents in addition to my interviews with and observations of young people. Adulthood is a category of identity that is set in direct relation to categorizations of youth and for this reason, both categories must be understood as creating meaning through their constructions as oppositions, often through a discourse of generational difference.

In this manner, the myths of technology and childhood are intimately linked, even co-constituted. The anxieties related to increased technological use rely on a vision of childhood as a special space that should be characterized by innocence and exploration. Video games in particular have been the focus of inflammatory and panicked rhetoric in the media, often mobilizing the language of addiction and desensitization with concerns related to aggression and isolation (Jenkins 2004), the propagation of hyperviolent and hypersexual masculinities (Alloway & Gilbert 1998), puerile, kitschy, objectifying play (Stallabras 1993), idleness and lower-class culture (Narine & Grimes 2009), and too much time spent on empty leisure (Ito 2009). These discussions tend to portray digital gaming primarily or exclusively through the genre of first-person shooters (FPS), isolating and decontextualizing the goriest and most violent imagery from these games and ignoring the wide array of game play options available.

Pessimistic discourses of fear and anxiety related to both technologies and media content for young people circulate in tension with those of hope and opportunity, a utopian rhetoric that celebrates the supposed alchemy between digital technologies and childhood. In discussions of the promises of new media, the Electronic Generation made up of today's children is one offered boundless access to information and educational tools, leading to a childhood rich in opportunities for social, civic, creative, and intellectual engagement (Montgomery 2007). This construction of contemporary childhood uses the racially fraught and technologically determinist discourse of "digital natives" to refer to young people's supposedly innate inclination towards harnessing the advantages of a better digital future. Academic and policy work in both North America and the UK, largely in critique of this progress myth, have moved beyond the cynical rhetoric of childhood in decline to consider actual rather than assumed youth media practices in relation to new media, ranging from mobile phone use to Internet surfing to video game play. This work considers how young people reshape and fuel new social networks, develop a sense of global citizenship, and engage in creative practices, civic engagement, and most importantly for this research, identity performance (Buckingham 2007b; Ito et. al. 2008; Kafai & Fields 2009; Livingstone & Haddon 2009; Salen 2007). Through these kinds of situated, contextual analyses we can

better understand how children's play is framed as both trivial entertainment and as significant political, social, and cultural engagement in practices of identity formation (Ito 2009). This applies to the rhetoric of hope in relation to youth media. In the same way that video games have been the bogeyman in anxiety discourse, their possibilities have also been lauded, particularly in educational contexts, as they are seen as a child-friendly and playful form of multimedia that may best allow for the development of programming-based literacies (Kafai, Ching, & Marshall 1997). However, concerns related to gender-based divides pervade even the earliest literature in this area, as without equal access to computers and the ability to reap the benefits of computing, such as programming and procedural thinking, girls will fall behind and become "second-class citizens in the computer-intensive world of tomorrow" (Kiesler, Sproull, & Eccles 1985, 452).

Whether in hope or fear or in the tension between these (Montgomery 2007), digital games are one major example illustrating how childhood and technology are mutually informed and mutually sustaining constructions. Despite the widening place of this activity in everyday life, digital gaming tends to be largely understood through these two purposive frames (Narine & Grimes 2009), leaving out play, creativity, leisure, entertainment, and socializing for its own sake from discussions of youth and games. In addition, the gender-based distinctions within games and computing indicates that considerations of gender performance in relationship to youth play needs to be central within these studies because aside from the monolithic mythology of childhood youth studies grapples with, constructed categories of girlhood and boyhood also circulate. Whereas once the focus of studies of children was implicitly that of boy culture, practices, and interests (McRobbie 1994), with the term "youth" actually referring to boys' culture and girls' activities seen as incidental, increasingly there is a move towards understanding children as gendered subjects. In many ways, video games are an exemplary case study for such an analysis, particularly given the assumed subjectivity of the video game player in many quarters and a historical tradition of framing game play as deviant (Consalvo 2003). Discursively, the imagined ideal player continues to be a white, middle-class, heterosexual, technologically competent, socially isolated, and violence-oriented masculine subject with the production of most games presuming a male end-user (Carr 2005; Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007). A masculinist gender bias is perpetuated in the ways in which men are historically and economically constructed as "the default gender" of the video game player, a construction that is enacted through a "series of inventions, trends, practices, and commercial decisions that have settled into a particular pattern" (Carr 2005, 467). This expected subject is in no way fixed but has been the status quo within game culture for some time, a result of power structures that reify certain norms about game play while subordinating other players and styles of play, resulting in the gamer becoming a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007, 7).

A great deal of attention in games and gender research has been focused on masculinist representational practices in games, including both within games and in their marketing paratexts (Consalvo 2007). From the earliest days of research on video games, the representation of girls and women in less powerful positions within play narratives has predominated, in the cases where women aren't simply erased or rendered invisible (Huntemann 2010). This is vitally important if games act as the entryway for children in computing, as girls face sex stereotyping that can discourage them from participating and "in this process, not only is the existing cultural hegemony maintained – one that discriminates significantly against women – but the domain of computers becomes increasingly male-dominated" (Provenzo 1991, 117). This is of particular concern to those using digital games in learning environments (Carr & Pelletier 2009), as the majority of games persistently serve to "marginalize and inferiorize those associated with the feminine or with non-violent masculinities and position them as 'other' to hegemonic male characters" (Alloway & Gilbert 1998, 103). The objectification of women in video games is one way of boundary policing against the intrusion of femininity in a male-dominated domain (Walkerdine 2007). This may explain the persistent sexualization of Lara Croft, since an iconic powerful female character within what are understood as spaces for the performance of hypermasculinity can result in ambivalent reactions on the part of male gamers (Kennedy 2002). In general, the representation of both men and women in games tends be stereotypical at best, hypersexualized and hyperbolically violent at worst, though there are signs this may be shifting (Huntemann 2012) with a range of more nuanced female leads visible in recent major releases.

Fron, Fullerton, Morie, and Pearce (2007) argue representations within game culture are symptomatic of a broader issue. Digital games as both a technology and a culture are structured in a manner that is unwelcoming to those who do not fit the profile of the ideal gamer subject. "In many respects the digital playground is shut off to minority players entirely, whether in terms of game creation, game technologies, or game play, whether merely in terms of creating domains that are exclusively male, or through discriminating or alienating practices of players themselves" (8). Representation is but one element of a network of gendered meanings that serve to discursively welcome some players and exclude others, which can also include content, mechanics, production, marketing, and culture, each of which serve to separately or mutually constitute the regulation of intelligible technological subject-positions in digital play.

For instance, and most significant to the discussion of the mainstreaming of digital games in everyday life, one of the ways in which gender-based exclusion occurs in digital games is through the discursive gendering of generic design conventions via distinctions between casual and hardcore games. Generally, games with content and mechanics premised on competition, adventure, and violence are associated with male players while

games emphasizing sociality are linked to female players (Buckingham & Sefton-Green 2003). This is particularly problematic given that in the study of digital games, the genre of first-person shooter (FPS) is too often used more broadly as a metonym for the form, emphasizing a particular set of play preferences and styles that are already privileged within game culture (Dovey & Kennedy 2006) and reifying the status quo of masculine game design as a normative basis on which to judge the quality of games (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007). The gendered identity of the technologically adept subject is discursively fixed in game culture overall, as "the powerful association of masculine subjects as gamers and game designers as well as the presumption (through technologies generally) of (male) competence and ability have positioned women and girls unerringly as 'less able', 'less competent', and as 'casual' gameplayers" (Jenson & de Castell 2010, 54).The imagined male player is not only reflected in the discourses and design of dominant forms of gaming but in the implicitly gendered division of genres of casual and hardcore gaming where new categories are established for old patterns linking gender to preference (Carr 2005).

The terms "casual" and "hardcore" are not limited to the categorization of game genres or mechanics but are used to describe a range of play practices, games, and platforms, as well as two stereotypical kinds of players (Juul 2009). According to these stereotypes, Juul says, the hardcore player typically prefers the generic conventions of science fiction and fantasy, has played a broad spectrum of games, commits large amounts of time and resources to game play, and revels in legendarily difficult mechanics.The stereotypical casual player is the polar opposite, and is characterized as taking pleasure in positive fictions, playing very few games, committing little time and few resources to game play, and spurning difficult titles. Juul troubles this dichotomy, however, as casual players often do not play in a casual manner. Is someone who plays *FarmVille* on multiple accounts for several hours a day truly a casual player? More than simple categorizations based on practices, however, the division between casual and hardcore represents an important articulation of the gamer persona and the understood core market of video games, "characterized by an adolescent male sensibility that transcends physical age and embraces highly stylized graphical violence, male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualized, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination" (Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce 2007, 7). While there is no evidence to support the presumption that all hardcore gamers are male or all casual gamers are female – and indeed a growing body of research destabilizes the linkages of genres to play patterns through examinations of players beyond the delimited hardcore player subject (de Schutter 2011) – this stereotypical conceptualization still reigns.

Linked as it is to other kinds of players (women, girls, people of colour, and older people), casual gaming is consistently the object of derision within

digital play paratexts such as game magazines, websites, and advertising (Consalvo 2007), framing this type of play as inferior. This is significant when considering increasingly pervasive and popular venues of play such as the games available on the Nintendo Wii, rhythm and dance games, virtual worlds, iPhone apps, Facebook mini-games, and puzzle games. These genres, platforms, and games have all opened up spaces and contexts of play to more diverse audiences, which is why the derision of casual versus hardcore is seen as a way of demeaning or diminishing feminine game play in particular. The structure of casual games attracts different kinds of players because they are quick to pick up and learn, they do not require hundreds of hours of assiduous play, they can be played when mobile, and they allow players to log off quickly if work, childcare, or household tasks interfere. In this way, they address the issues of time competition observed in domestication studies and the gendering of leisure time in the home (Madden 2009; Winn & Heeter 2009), potentially opening up games to new players and types of play.

Consequently, hierarchies of play, particularly in terms of casual and hardcore games, can reinforce the understanding of video games as predominantly masculine tools and threaten the cultural intelligibility of feminine players when women and girls do play. This can be observed in the backlash related to the popularity of the Wii with the meme of the Wii Fit girl, wherein a young man films his girlfriend doing a hula-hoop movement in her underwear from behind for the viewing pleasure of the voyeuristic male gaze (*Daily Mail* 2008). This is part of a range of practices that sexualize the public practices of women in gaming and gaming culture, from booth babes to professional female gaming leagues (Taylor, Jenson & de Castell 2009).

These kinds of constructions and positionings are indicative of a culture of exclusion, but some have argued play provides opportunities for subversion and experimentation. For instance, Sanford and Madill (2006) explore whether games can offer a space to challenge hegemonic masculinity by allowing players to perform alternative identities that may not be safe in offline spaces. However, as Nakamura (2000) indicates, other participants in digital spaces often challenge the performance of non-hegemonic identities. Indeed, many considerations of digital play contexts demonstrate how these provide a space for players to enact particularly aggressive masculinities. Online game play, for instance, tends to be characterized by trash talking about the achievements and failures of others, and a terrible failure is tellingly referred to as getting "raped." Female players are framed as rare (the use of the term "unicorn" to describe them may indicate just how elusive they are perceived as being) and are the object of attention, disbelief, and discrimination when they do appear, "exposed" by their voices in chat (Gray 2012). The incredulity male players exhibit at these moments signals how the masculine player is implicitly anticipated as the norm in digital game spaces and how female participants are othered in gaming

publics (Salter & Blodgett 2012). Such othering serves to never allow a female player of networked games to forget her trespass on what are imagined to be male spaces (Yee 2008). This marginalization supports the notion that interactions in male peer groups and their homosocial spaces, including many sites of digital play, are mechanisms of control that perpetuate the gender order of hegemonic masculinity (Burrill 2008), the expression of masculinity holding a dominant position in everyday life (Connell 2005). The emotional detachment, competitiveness, and objectification of women observed in many forms of digital play are three of the ways in which Bird (1996) finds homosocial activities to link the meanings of hegemonic masculinity to individual boys and men, and hence allow them to internalize the ideologies of normative masculinity through the pressures of the peer group in that space. Sexist activities and performances allow individuals to regulate the boundaries of appropriate gender behaviour, projecting a gender ideal and maintaining heterosexual hierarchies (Kehily 2001). In this way, the contexts of game play's seemingly limitless digital realms can socialize hegemonic masculinity, resulting in the implied and overt exclusion, alienation, and oppression of female players. Despite their interest in subversion, Sanford and Madill (2006) came to a similar conclusion, as they did not find evidence of young players critically reflecting on the cultural models or values embedded within game worlds. Instead, they posit, "the resistances made possible by videogame play serve only to reify the traditional stereotypes and cement them firmly in place" (301). As this demonstrates, the potential for challenging stereotypical gender tropes within games themselves is contested.

Rather than focusing on games in isolation and the possibilities for resistance in the representations, spaces, and interactions within play worlds, gender and games scholars have increasingly come to focus on the offline spaces in which young people play games and perform gender through bodily performances (Jenson & Fisher 2010). Modifications to game content or mechanics are not adequate means of engaging female participation. Video games are imbued with a masculine cultural capital, and this is linked to how hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity is deeply tied to performances of technological mastery. In this way, games are technologies requiring all players, both male and female, to perform aspects of hegemonic masculinity in order to gain legitimacy (Taylor 2005). Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) very clearly sum up this relationship: "If, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) suggest, sexual subjectivities, rather than being naturally given, emerge in a process of 'becoming' that combines not only bodies and social codes but also technologies, the game console has been very much part of the apparatus of 'becoming man,' and not of 'becoming woman'." (18). Focusing on the relationship between social roles and ludic technologies – the sociotechnical character of games – allows for a fuller consideration of their complexity (Bogost 2009). Such an approach lays the grounds for an examination of the

gendered subject-positions made available to young players in the spaces where digital play is materially and discursively regulated.

One key method by which to consider the sociotechnical aspects of digital play is through the exploration of questions of access and experience. Dovey and Kennedy (2006) argue that in gaming, it is not gender, race, or age that determines inclusion but what they term "technicity", a network of technological competence that is typically but not fixedly associated with white, male, heterosexual subjectivities exemplified by hackers and hardcore gamers. Thus, they argue, those who are able to access venues that allow video game play, be they domestic, school-based, or social, are those who are more likely to develop comfort with the tools, practices, and cultures of digital play. Those with access are then more likely to form personal preferences for certain games or genres. The problem here is that access tends to be constrained and enabled differently based on gender. Bryce, Rutter, and Sullivan (2006) argue game technologies are seen as hostile to women, partly because of women's leisure constraints, where household tasks impinge on leisure time. McGinnis, Chun, and McQuillan (2003) find constraints in leisure time are a significant factor in the gendering of activities, as both men and women believe females have less time to devote to gaming and play. Digital games are often seen as belonging to the males of the household, where they claim expertise and dominion that in turn may undermine feminine ability. As Downey (2012) notes, the "focus on the public space of male coded game play getting absorbed into the private realm of female coded domestic space has long been understood as a defining tension in the rise of home gaming" (237). The extensive range of this relationship between space, digital games, and gender is supported by Lin's (2008) study of Taiwanese youth, which finds strong gender-specific differences in access. Parents discourage girls from wasting time on the computer and/or console in the home, peers socially ostracize girl game players in dormitories, and young women are repelled by the moral panics over cybercafés and reject play in those spaces. Thus not only do game players mark virtual spaces as masculine and render these realms unfriendly through their chat but the organization and structuring of physical spaces like homes, schools, Internet cafés, and arcades, as shown in Lin's study, reinforce the understanding of games as masculine tools and threaten the intelligibility of the female gamer subject-position.

Access to new games is enough to generate changes in preference (Carr 2005), so being able to engage with games technologies should be understood as deeply interconnected with the choices players and non-players make. Girls do not necessarily select pink games because they are innately attracted to the characteristics of these games, such as collaboration, nurturing activities, pretty aesthetics, or a slow, introspective pace (Jenkins & Cassell 2008). Instead, girls often play games marketed to them because they are most likely to have access to these games as family members are more apt to purchase them, which can reinforce

stereotypical understandings of gender and both masculine and feminine tastes. Sometimes what are seen as girl games do not come in pink packages. *The Sims*, for instance, was lauded for embodying many of the cornerstones of the Girls' Games Movement, including everyday characters, variable potential outcomes, everyday settings, and goals achieved socially rather than through violence (Jenkins & Cassell 2008). However, others have noted that games like *The Sims* are still legitimized for female players as they are premised on innate feminine desires for non-competitive play (T.L. Taylor 2008), even if it is not colour-coded as such. However, marketing games based on the association of gender with certain preferences does not determine interest. For instance, cross-media texts such as *Harry Potter* and *Pokémon* have broad audiences of players, both male and female, demonstrating interests often do not align with perceived gender-based preferences in any way (Ito 2008).

Indeed, recent research has shown many male-identified genres are played by a variety of people. Jenson & de Castell (2010) point to all-female *Counter-Strike* communities as well as *World of Warcraft*'s large female player base, noting "while girls and women do play, what and how they play is always negotiable, context dependent, and usually not necessarily in the company of other girls or female players" (56). What players are able to play, through material gateways to access as well as through social legitimation, popular culture familiarity, and recognition of this play, often shapes future consumption habits. Hence context, familiarity, experience, and access are important considerations to studies of games and gender. Carr's (2005) empirical research shows participants did not substantiate stereotypical categorizations of game preference in practice, with both boys and girls enjoying competition and aggression as well as sociability. It was primarily girls without direct access to consoles at home who said game play was a masculine activity (Carr 2005). Jenson and de Castell (2010) note there is a dearth of reliable data on female gamers, partly because of the small number of participants in studies on their play and partly because these studies seem to conclude girls are playing, but not which games, for how long and in what relation to their male counterparts. This means there is no accurate portrait of what female players have access to in their own spaces. As Jenson and de Castell ask, are they playing *Dance Dance Revolution* or *Halo 3* in their bedroom? The question of bedroom access is significant because, in the domestic context, female players tend to have to wait behind their male relatives for access to both game technologies and the time required to play and are subject to greater parental regulation (Jenson & de Castell, 2010).

Questions of taste and preference are important because they demonstrate the role of gender in shaping access and thus understanding the formation of gaming dispositions (Carr 2005). As Yee (2008) so nicely phrases it, conflating physical and social barriers to entry for female players as a lack of desire to play games mistakes "the how for the why" (88). In response, games and gender scholars advocate for considerations of everyday practices and

the multiple factors shaping use as well as different degrees of access when examining gender in game studies (Jenson & de Castell 2010).

As this review of the gendered nature of youth media culture and in particular digital game play highlights, there are particular understandings of femininity and masculinity that shape the study, design, marketing, understanding, and regulation of children's digital play toys and technologies. While game play occurs across genders as well as age groups, from preschoolers to older adults (Pearce 2008), the expected subjectivity of the ideal gamer still reigns in discussions of digital play. Within gaming culture and beyond, the subject-position of gamer is more socially acceptable for boys than girls (Taylor 2007). It was precisely this essentialization of gender expectations and performances in conceptualizations of digital gaming subjects and spaces[1] that inspired my desire to contribute to the work engaging in poststructuralist gender theorization.

PILOTING AND REDESIGNING THE STUDY OF YOUTH, GENDER, AND DIGITAL GAMES

In order to learn more about access to and experience with digital games, I planned to interview and observe youth and then ask their parents a few contextualizing questions. To this end, I launched a pilot study with two families in the hopes of having participants indicate the most popular and frequented virtual game communities for young people. I approached the study of play and regulatory practices through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, methods I employed in order to explore the complexities of discussions of gender performance and digital play by families. I designed a questionnaire with a short list of open-ended questions. These were broad, exploratory questions I hoped would prompt young people and their parents to provide a narrative account of their activities and thoughts rather than very specific answers to targeted "yes" or "no" questions.

For the pilot study, I recruited the two participating families via snowball sampling within my own social network, focusing on getting access to one child from each end of my proposed age spectrum (eight to fifteen)[2] and in each of my target Canadian cities (Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec)[3]. During the course of the pilot study, I spent forty-five to sixty minutes interviewing each participant (which included two mothers, one father, and two sons) and then an additional thirty- to forty-five minutes having the youth show me what they did online and where in particular they played games in virtual worlds. This mirrors a common method often mobilized in software usability testing whereby participants describe their actions and thoughts for an observer (Lewis 1982). This "think aloud protocol" is linked to testing games and user experience but is also useful as a tool in a sociological analysis as it places the study participant in the

position of being an expert and, in the case of children, having an object with which to demonstrate and explain their thoughts. In the interviews with young people, the first part of the interview consisted of a few basic questions on the interviewees' preferred websites and regular online play habits. The second part of the interview involved participant observation as they engaged with the sites and communities they mentioned. The third part of the interview consisted of more specific questions oriented towards the observed play, including youth practices, social interactions, and their avatars and online representations of themselves, particularly those related to gender. The last two parts formed a combination of observation and play that Schott and Horrell (2000) call a "gaming interview", which in their project was intended "to facilitate a more 'play like' atmosphere and generate questions about female playing experiences as they occurred" (40), as well as to foster greater rapport with research subjects. While girl gamers were not the exclusive focus of my project, I found interviewing during play a fruitful venue for discussion, particularly with younger participants.

In interviews with adult guardians, I asked questions about the technologies the young person talked about using (both online and offline, such as game consoles, MP3 players, portable game devices, computers, the television, MSN, Facebook, Google, and email), exploring the general parental sentiment about youth, technology, and gender as it has been framed as a moral panic and/or social anxiety and their own understanding of their child's preferred technologies and their cultures. In particular, I questioned them about their purchase and co-use of educational games.

While I had imagined interviewing children and parents separately, this was not always how the interviews unfolded. In the first set of interviews, I spoke to both the parents while they sat together, with each parent chiming in on the other's answers. I then interviewed and observed the play of their fifteen-year-old son separately. The second set of interviews included a mother and her eight-year-old son, and here it was more comfortable for the child to have his mother present and helping with the interview. With this support, he was more talkative when it came to him giving me a tour of his favourite websites. In this case, I interviewed the mother second.

During the pilot, I recorded both the interviews and the observations of play with a tape recorder and a video camera, and took some notes during, and then detailed fieldnotes after, each interview. On completion of the pilot, I had each audio file transcribed in order to better assess the themes I was developing, a process that allowed me to develop the focus of the study from the words, interests, and activities of participants rather than determining the key areas of emphasis a priori. This is a component of the grounded theory approach as articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1997), which I will explore in more detail below. After the pilot, I also reviewed the video files in order to assess my interviewing style. Visual methods such as still and video cameras are increasingly mobilized in qualitative research to allow for the analysis of participants' visual and verbal narratives (Pink 2004),

to consider nonverbal communications that are nearly impossible to record textually (Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell 2007), and to allow the researcher to reflexively consider the spatial contexts informing their objects of study (Downing 2008). Using the video camera was a valuable exercise for me as a junior researcher conducting interviews by myself, as it allowed me to consider how at moments I was too assertive in guiding the conversation while at other times I was dominated by very emphatic participants.

This small-scale pilot study was valuable beyond my original intentions, which were to test my interview questionnaire and style and to base my analysis on the kinds of sites my participants used and referred to rather than to assume use of the most popular sites. I was wary of premising a study on *Club Penguin*, for instance, if it was in fact no longer popular or current with those I interviewed. But the results of the pilot were even more informative for me. Interviewing the five participants and in particular engaging in observations of play alerted me to the fact that none of my participants referred to participation in virtual worlds exclusively. To put this another way, when I asked about the virtual worlds or communities of play they frequented, I would never be told simply about activities within *Neopets* or *Teen Second Life*, for instance. Instead, when asked about online play, all participants in the pilot referred to a range of play activities, both online and offline. The rule-setting that parents engaged in regarding their children's participation in online play was inextricably entangled with regulations for use of screens in general: televisions, computers, mobile phones, and portable game devices. Similarly, both of the young people I spoke to referred to "play" across a range of contexts and platforms and they never seemed to confine their discussions of play to games, even when most broadly defined. Instead, both the eight-year-old and the fifteen-year-old told me about a range of practices from socializing on Facebook, playing networked games on portable game devices, frequenting DIY craft sites, and sharing consoles and console games with siblings and parents. It was based on the constant shifting character of the object of the digital game in these conversations, as well as the key role of parental regulation, that I recognized it would be more interesting to expand the scope of my study to consider the relationship of gender regulation to parental regulation than to try to focus on the performance of gender in virtual play spaces exclusively.

After the pilot, I continued using a tape recorder to capture both youth and adult interviews and a notepad in order to record very sparing fieldnotes on the observations of play. I found in the pilot study that the notebook tended to make some participants uneasy so I only used it to record URLs and website names for further examination. Instead, I would schedule in time after each interview or set of interviews to record elements that struck me as significant during the discussion that I could not record without disrupting the narrative flow of the conversation. This reinforced the importance of writing fieldnotes as soon as possible after each interview and observation of play. Often participants would jump to new sites without saying aloud the URL

of the next site they were visiting, which is how I learned I needed to audibly reflect more often on what they were doing on the computer. Furthermore, I learned I needed to refine my interview questions for different ages of youth participants. For instance, my first eight-year-old participant had no idea what I was referring to when I asked about his avatar, even though this is a familiar term for older participants. In sum, I realized that talking to young people who are not comfortable with you is essentially fruitless; they answer monosyllabically or not at all. For this reason, I was flexible about the order of interviews, about talking to children with their parents, taking some time with the younger participants to play with their toys or favourite games, and to ease slowly into the interview questions.

I also discontinued the use of the video camera as I found it was cumbersome to manage two recording devices. While this tool afforded me the ability to observe body language and the material context of the interviews and observations of play, I felt at the end of the pilot study that the distraction of the handheld video camera overpowered the opportunities offered by having a visual record of the interviews. This was particularly true given I did not intend to code or analyze the videos, only the transcripts of the audio.

In the end, I retained the original semi-structured interview scripts for both young people and their parents but rather than emphasize questions related to virtual worlds, I spent more time following the participants' lines of thought. For example, if a young person wanted to tell me about a scandal around Facebook at school, I would not change the subject. With these lessons learned and changes to the study design in place, I then launched into full-scale recruiting.

THE CHALLENGES AND OUTCOMES OF DOMESTIC RECRUITMENT

Recruiting and undertaking research for the project was challenging on a number of counts. Prior to the pilot, I intended to distribute project business cards to potential participants to snowball my sample. I also developed a simple, easily maintained website that contained study information from my approved ethics package, including sample questions and consent documents for different groups. I hoped that by directing potential participants to the full details of the study, they would be able to understand the project before contacting me. However, my hopes of snowballing through the website and the business cards were fairly quickly dashed. I did not recruit a single participant in this way. I would assert this is because recruiting in such a passive fashion does not appeal to parents. It is more effective to develop trust and explain the research on a one-on-one, personal basis. Another challenge I faced was I was not recruiting through a pre-existing or new relationship with an institution such as a school and as someone without children, I also lacked an immediate social network with parents

and children. Without these connections, I did not have an easy group to snowball from. Part of the issue here is simply that recruiting for domestic research on children's media practices is not as frequently discussed or reviewed as recruiting within schools, a method often discussed in the education technology literature, and thus I had no models to follow in my research process.

Given these challenges, my study sample ultimately stemmed from academic peers who had or knew children, as well as youth I knew personally. I was able to recruit twenty-five participants when I began to contact friends and acquaintances in suburban regions. With this geographic flexibility, more participants arose in the larger suburban regions around Toronto and Montreal. Thus, there was a two-pronged and interestingly divergent nature to the biases of my participants: highly educated relations of academics as well as children in working-class families in some way related to my own.

I interviewed ten families with a total of twenty-five family members, fourteen of whom were children and eleven of whom were parents. The participants were equally divided between the central, suburban, and outlying areas of Toronto and Montreal. From the outset, I was aware of the limitations of my pool of respondents, including the fact they would likely be skewed to the middle class as I was focusing on those with access to ludic technologies in the home. For this reason, the findings of this project were not intended to be generalized across populations and nothing I indicate in this exploratory and qualitative study should be understood as broadly applicable across all children or all parents. The limited random sample of Canadian participants I interviewed and observed was sufficient, however, for the purposes of gaining an intimate audience with children and their parents to see how these boys and girls and their fathers and mothers differently regulate gender and ludic technologies in the domestic sphere. I found after even a few interviews that the time in each interview was spent more on discussion and conversation than on observation, as short sessions of observations of play did not reveal a great deal of information about the participants and their gendered approaches to online spaces or video games. Rather, it was the performance of gender and technological competence in familial relations and practices related to digital play that began to emerge as a key consideration.

As I saw in my pilot study, the structure of each set of interviews and observations of play differed with each family. In some, I interviewed the children and the parents in the same room, especially with younger children, and in others parents would give their child space to show me what they do online in privacy. In some observations of play, I would be shown a wide range of sites and activities while in others, I would receive a detailed tour of a child's favourite game or website. Instead of seeing these differences as a cause for concern and trying to redirect the interviews or play sessions, I took these opportunities to better understand what the divergences and distinctions indicated and what kinds of complexities I could explore in

my analysis. The breakdown of participant ages and family constitutions is detailed in Table 2.1 below. As per ethics protocols, all interviewees were provided with pseudonyms and coded documents were used to protect all identifying information.

Table 2.1 Breakdown of study participants

Family A		*Family F*	
Father	58	Son	14
Mother	52	Daughter	8
Son	14	Mother	45
Family B		*Family G*	
Mother	42	Daughter	15
Son	9	Daughter	13
Family C		Mother	45
Daughter	13	*Family H*	
Mother	40	Son	15
Family D		Mother	56
Son	8	*Family I*	
Mother	33	Son	15
Family E		Son	8
Father	41	Father	46
Daughter	8	*Family J*	
Son	12	Father	39
		Son	13

Though in total I interviewed twenty-five subjects, including those who participated in the pilot study, I found that even with this relatively small number of participants, I was able to identify some important sites of complexity and nuance as well as moments of accord between participants. The term "theoretical saturation" is often used to describe the gold standard in qualitative research, which is "the point in analysis when all categories are well developed in terms of properties, dimensions, and variations. Further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization, though variations can always be discovered" (Corbin & Strauss 2008, 263). However, what constitutes the evidence for theoretical saturation is contested and what constitutes an adequate sample in qualitative research depends on a number of considerations, including how heterogeneous the group

being studied is, how broad the selection criteria were, and the budget, time, and other resources the research can access (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam 2003). Rather than claiming theoretical saturation, then, I will suggest that in the case of a small study with a limited purview such as this one, wherein the objective is to provide some complexity to questions of gendered access to digital play in the domestic sphere, a commensurately small sample is adequate (Charmaz 2006). This study makes no generalizable claims about the nature of digital play in the home but indicates some of the nuances to consider in depictions of use of ludic technologies.

CODING, ANALYSIS, AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Through the process of interviewing, coding, and analysis, I was informed by the methodological approach of grounded theory wherein the researcher builds theory based on the analysis of qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin 1997). Though my study design was not informed by grounded theory, in my approach to my interview transcripts and fieldnotes I was inspired by Strauss and Corbin's method of coding and analyzing qualitative research. In their work, they emphasize the development of theory and concepts based on observations and interviews through an iterative process of testing theories. Grounded theory is the qualitative method that most resonated with a poststructural attunement to complexity and multiplicity, as it specifically describes the practice of qualitative research as one that involves holding in tension the ordering process of theory generation and the complex relationships discussed by participants (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Grounded theory encourages reflexivity in the practices of recording memos of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, and future directions, all of which I followed in the process of coding and analyzing my transcripts. Within this approach it is understood that "theory does not just 'emerge' from data: rather, data itself is constructed from many events observed or read about or heard about, constructed in a highly selective series of actions, and interpreted all along the course of the research project" (Clarke 1997, 64). Grounded theory thus provides a rich set of tools by which to address and engage with empirical findings and researcher reflexivity. Following Corbin and Strauss's methods for developing grounded theory, I attempted to remain reflexive about my presence and perspective during data collection, considering interpersonal dynamics, continually evaluating the research process, and scrutinizing my approach through a research journal I kept throughout.

The tools for remaining reflexive also include a process of developing conceptual categories and then returning to the data to test their validity, followed by a refinement of the theories being developed. In the case of my research project, this entailed a move from focusing on gender performance in games to considering the interactions and interplay between regulatory

systems disciplining gender and regulatory practices structuring digital games access and engagement. Whereas my first set of codes were related to gender, representation, and online spaces, subsequent coding schemas were widely expanded to include codes for regulation, discipline, surveillance, parenting, danger, and hope, among others. Coding in my research project was therefore a continual and iterative process.

In order to assess common themes and ways to analyze the data, I coded my interviews and observations of play by hand. I used this to record observations of very basic themes (such as "violence", "gender", "rules", and "skills"). When themes appeared multiple times, I broke them down into smaller sub-themes ("rules", for instance, included sub-themes such as "time rules", "breaking rules", "monitoring", and "logic for rules"). I began to group these themes under two major categories, which became the dual systems of regulation that organize the analysis: domestic policy and gender regulation.

I then returned to the digital copies of the transcripts and began to comb through them in order to highlight instances of each major theme and its sub-themes. I also pulled out key quotes and stories from each interview that acted as representative of each system of regulation. The important part of this process was that I returned to early interviews throughout my field-work and on completion of the interviews and observations, I compared the previously coded transcripts with the new transcripts, allowing for iterative code development.

This was followed by developing memos, short, detailed briefs used to identify concepts that in turn allow for the comparison of data, the development of questions and a story, and the construction of a theoretic paradigm. Through these activities, the focus of my research was refined from considerations of gender online to conceptualizations of gender regulation through digital play in the home. In this way, the data acted as a guide rather than the original research questions and memoing allowed for the redesign of the study to follow the surprises I encountered in the pilot study. Indeed, it was through these processes that I began to realize the domestication of digital play was the most appropriate framework of analysis to think about how gender is regulated in relationship to ludic technologies.

DOMESTICATION RESEARCH AS THEORETICAL FRAME

As it became clear the domestic context for game play was a vitally important component of the analysis, I turned to the tradition of domestic studies to understand my data. Leslie Haddon (2004), one of the foremost scholars in the field of domestication studies, notes its origins lie in the academic interest in everyday life, the parts of life taking place outside formal spheres such as the workplace and educational institutions (see for instance de Certeau 1984; Goffman 1959; Lefebvre 2014). Rather than dismissing everyday life

and activities as mundane, banal, or apolitical, these analyses consider daily practices as important instances of potential resistance, emancipation, and struggle, as well as a site for the micro-level enactment of oppressive relations. In this vein, the domestication framework focuses particularly on the social processes at play when new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are adopted in the context of the home (Haddon 2004). Looking at everyday life entails a focus on the people living it, allowing for a distinctive approach to the study of technology. As Bakardjieva and Smith (2001) note, the home is often the focus for considerations of technology in everyday life as it is frequently the entry point for use of new technologies and ICTs ranging from the microwave to the Internet (see also Cockburn & Ormrod 1993; Cockburn & Fürst-Dilic 1994; Cockburn 1997; Holloway & Valentine 2001; MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985).

Domestication research provides a way of looking at technologies that for too long were unacknowledged in the field of technology studies (MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985), overshadowed by large-scale industrial technological revolutions (Cowan 1985). As MacKenzie and Wajcman (1985) show, this is a gendered distinction as studies of domestic technology address how the home was made separate from the public world of the workforce, allocating men to the public sphere while segregating women to the private domain, in concert with the onset of industrialization. The domestic technologies that accompany this division are economically significant as they influence household expenditures, distribution of industrial employment, and division of labour, particularly in terms of the distinction between men's paid and women's unpaid work. This difference in paid labour and free work in turn shapes the ways in which people in the household may use and consume entertainment and leisure technologies as they are increasingly privatised and rendered domestic (MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985). As this indicates, a key strength of domestication research is the insights it can provide into intersecting identities and the relationship between new technologies and factors such as class, education, race, and gender (Horst 2010; Kennedy 2005).

Domestication frameworks examine ICTs beyond questions of adoption, uses, gratifications, and benefits by considering how people make meaning and negotiate identity in and through technologies and technological services, as well as how individuals experience technologies and how technologies play specific roles in their lives (Haddon 2006). This approach entails the consideration of meaning-making and identity-formation in relationship to the symbolic power of new ICTs. In its focus on the everyday and identity, domestication research provides the historical, theoretical, and methodological background for a study of how leisure technologies and new media forms such as video game platforms are adopted and regulated by parents and children.

Regulation is a key consideration in this field, as domestication research emphasizes examinations of the concerns of adopters related to the potential threats and opportunities of technologies in the home. Domestic studies

highlight how ICT acquisition and adoption were not inevitable but part of a complex set of decisions and considerations (Haddon 2004). Thus a key area of focus in this research is the social relationships orbiting domesticated technologies, including negotiations between members of the household, rules established around ICT use, and the varying sorts of tensions and conflicts that may arise due to these negotiations (Haddon 2004). Domestication research's primary contribution is the consideration of how changes in technology use are part of a gradual evolution, rather than a revolutionary turn, and grounded in people's everyday interests, which Haddon argues is a needed observation in light of the ahistorical rhetoric around digital media. To respond to this, scepticism of techno-utopianism has become characteristic of the domestication framework (Haddon 2006).

This scepticism and emphasis on everyday use are important for a study of digital play practices as it provides needed nuance to questions of adoption of and then access to new ICTs in the home. To better understand this, the domestication framework asks what we consider to be actual access and use in the integration of ICTs into everyday life (Haddon 2004), challenging the binary classification of haves and have-nots (Hargittai 2002) and of access as a goal in and of itself (Clement & Shade 2000) in order to account for the broader processes of social stratification and differentiation that shape the domestication of new technologies such as digital games. Haddon (2004) shows that within the domestication framework, social exclusion and adopters with limited or no access are also important subjects to consider. The differences between possession and access must be carefully drawn out as ownership may not be necessary for use of a technology or service, as is highlighted in the sharing and exchange networks of children for games and game technologies (Williamson & Facer 2004). On the other hand, the purchase of an ICT does not guarantee meaningful access as it involves negotiation of constraints on use, including parental rules and limits on leisure time. When looking at statistics on the presence of ICTs in households, we have to remain attuned to how "social interaction in the home shapes how that 'access' is experienced in practice" (Haddon 2004, 15). Domestication researchers seek to provide nuance in discussions of adoption by examining experiences of use, including how people take up ICTs for different purposes with more or less sophisticated use, heavier or lighter use, and more or less socially meaningful use. Studies of the everyday use of technologies emphasize the development of skills and comfort levels, as social exclusion is not always tied to economic or other resources but can also be influenced by one's awareness of what can be achieved with the adoption of novel ICTs and the possession of the ease, competence, skill sets, or knowledge of how to reach those goals (Haddon 2004), a needed analysis given the focus on video games in educational contexts and the notion their play can allow for the transfer or development of computing competencies (Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy 2008).

In addition to technological and economic factors, Haddon (2004) shows a person's social networks – their peer groups, broader circles of friends, family, and colleagues – are often influential in determining whether they will acquire and then use an ICT. One's social networks are also key sites in which information about technology is shared. Some people take on a key role, acting as warm experts within social networks (Bakardjieva & Smith 2001), helping novices or less experienced users with new technologies. Indeed, it is important to consider how advising, providing support, and performances of expertise are a constitutive part of people's experiences with technologies. In his domestication study of digital games, Haddon (1993) highlights the central role of expertise, asserting that when electronic games migrated from the homosocially masculine space of the arcade to the home in the early 1990s, it brought with it a pre-existing culture of male youth playing together, wherein an important activity was the articulation of expertise through discussions of tips, tricks, and strategies (see also Stevens, Satwicz, and McCarthy (2008) on the resources marshalled in the home for the play of digital games). Haddon argues it is these social networks and demonstrations of expertise rather than the play of games that was missing in girls' lives, which he posits as an explanation for gender differences in the popularity of games at that time.

The development of expertise is related to one's access to disposable time and safe spaces for use. This access is influenced by domestic commitments, routines, values, and the hopes and concerns of household members, particularly parents. It is also shaped by interpersonal interactions, as some family members can act as gatekeepers to technologies and can therefore impact on patterns of usage (Haddon 2004). Space and time also constrain and enable engagement with technologies in the home, and these are often linked to gendered divisions of labour related to childcare and housework and access to leisure in the domestic realm. According to Dholakia (2006), the fragmentation of women's leisure time may be attributed to different domestic responsibilities and how distinct expectations and roles for men and women can lead to time competition with other activities. Haddon (2004) notes women's leisure time tends to be disrupted by secondary activities such as monitoring children while men experience what is termed "pure leisure", referring to leisure time uninterrupted by domestic duties. This results in women spending less time online even when their abilities or experiences are evenly matched with the men of the household (Haddon 2004). In this way, time competition and the association of women with domestic labour shape female engagement with ICTs, including new media. This is also impacted by space, as how ICTs are placed or moved around the home can shape their use. This echoes Jenson and de Castell's (2010) observation of the important distinctions to be drawn between young people with access to digital games in their bedroom and those who have to share ludic technologies. How people talk about, position, and display their technologies is also important to explore in order to

better understand the symbolic dimensions of technologies, including how they are gendered (Haddon 2006).

Domestication research suggests access and use are often tied to identity norms, providing a unique perspective on the gendering process "in terms of both people's gendered identities and the gender connotations of technologies" (Haddon 2006, 198). When males first monopolize technologies in the home women tend to be wary of them, even when they have a certain degree of competency. Often, female members of the household lose interest in new ICTs because they are wary of being novices relative to male experts (Haddon 2004). As MacKenzie and Wajcman (1985) showed some time ago, too often women have not been the chief beneficiaries of newly domesticated technologies as they tend to embody and reify entrenched traditional roles for female family members, serving to diminish domestic labour for men rather than women[4]. Overall, domestication research as an area of study remains focused on drawing attention to how use may be constrained or limited, particularly by tensions related to normative gender roles and the interpersonal relations of the family (Haddon 2004).

Haddon (2004) notes that due to the significance of the impact of social relations on the adoption and use of ICTs, domestication studies also often include a consideration of the relationships between parents and children. As explored in greater detail below, childhood, adolescence, and parenthood are social constructions. Haddon argues domestication research works best when researchers address the contingency of these subject-positions in the study of familial experiences with technologies, including notions of what young people and their parents can and should do with ICTs, the historical trajectory of their circumstances, and the institutional frameworks in which they operate. Significantly for this study, domestication research emphasizes the importance of considering how parents control and monitor their children's use and children's strategies for resisting this control. ICTs are implicated in the constant (re)production of the "good" parent and child as expectations for and actual use of new technologies in the home influence the behaviour of children and adults (Livingstone 1997). Some of the pressures placed on adults in terms of the adoption and use of ICTs include expectations of quality time spent with their children, the need to ensure their children are not left behind in the changing technological landscape, and guilt about providing the right kinds of access and guidelines for use. The provision of an array of ludic devices tends to be used as a strategy to keep children safely off the street, though parents may also have mixed feelings about their use (Jenkins 1998b). On the other hand, parents are tasked with managing screen time, socializing with friends, and other activities, which are often discussed in the rhetoric of a "balanced 'media diet'" (Byron 2008, 17). According to Livingstone (2009), these pressures, as well as concerns about dangerous content, contact with strangers, and exposure to commercialized culture, are the primary reasons for regulating children's ICT use.

In sum, domestication research goes beyond use as an instrumental concept and reflects on how users of ICTs fulfill their roles influenced by broader discourses and representations related to the technology and its perceived users, as well as constraints imposed by familial, institutional, and financial factors (Haddon 2004, 2006). Domestication research recognizes the impact of familial tensions over who has the perceived or actual competencies within the home to regulate technological practices including digital play. It points to the complexity of questions of access and highlights in particular the ways in which examinations of adoption and use entail consideration of "the negotiation between household members and the politics of the home that lie behind conflict and tension on the one hand and the formation of areas of consensus on the other" (Haddon 2006, 197).

While domestication research provides a concrete basis for the examination of the context of the home and how access is shaped, it takes on a more critical tone when it is placed in dialogue with insights from other fields, such as the theoretical rigor of poststructural gender studies, which is important given the relationship between gendered identity performance and technology is particularly central to questions of gendered access to digital play. A further complication is presented by how stereotypical, hegemonic, and orthodox premises of gendered identity (both masculine and feminine) continue to characterize theorizations of familial roles in domestication research and young people in youth media studies. As a response, this study considers the social dimensions implicated by domestication research at the same time as understanding parenting as deeply informed by neoliberalism's devolution of responsibility for the social order onto parents, as will be reviewed in Chapter 4, and gender as part of a disciplinary system regulating expected behaviours for men, women, boys, and girls, as will be reviewed in Chapter 5.

MAKING THE LINKS: INTERSECTIONS OF THEORY

The ways in which intelligible gendered subject-positions are conceptualized in theories of gender and identity, as constituted in their repetition, are implicated in digital games, youth media, and domestic sphere. Normative masculine and feminine identities are hailed in the adoption of newly domesticated ludic technologies, the mythologies of parenthood and childhood, and the creation, production, and marketing of consumer products for youth, especially digital games. The conceptualization of gendered identities is also implicated in discourses referring to young people, parents, and their media practices and in the research projects of scholars who study these areas. Normative expectations about intelligible gender performances are in turn translated and reified in the production of media and technologies such as the objects of digital play. Complex and dynamic material-discursive formations transform and (re)form notions of gender, youth, and technology

in conjunction with each other, as demonstrated in the sustained conceptu-alization of an essential relationship between young masculinity and digi-tal play. The domestic sphere, as the locus of the family unit, is the site of intersectional micro-politics around gender performance and technology use, and a domestication studies approach allows insights into how these performances are enacted in and through adoption and use, while gender studies draws attention to how subject-positions are regulated in relation to this usage.

In terms of digital play, there has been some consideration of the gendered networks circulating through play, including the expectations and perfor-mances of hegemonic masculinity. Despite some poststructuralist gender studies, however, the study of digital games and of technological play more broadly requires a greater sense of the dynamic and iterative processes that go into the construction and reproduction of both masculinity and feminin-ity in everyday practices within the home. One way this kind of complexity can be achieved is through a sense of the interrelatedness of content, cul-ture, play, interaction, context, experience, and access marked by dominant norms about what it means to be a masculine and feminine subject. Taking a domestication approach with an eye towards the ways in which childhood is constructed in relationship to these ludic technologies provides this needed grounding in a manner that understands gender as relational. Femininity and masculinity are notions undertaken in dialogue with one another, and studying everyday practices demonstrates a more nuanced picture of gender than seen in dichotomous stories of women's innate preferences for social games or men's natural interests in first-person shooters (Taylor 2011).

A domestication approach, in its focus on everyday experiences, access, and abilities, can allow for the kind of examination that is still often miss-ing in digital game studies when gender scholars simply reinscribe in their findings the performance of masculinity by boys and femininity by girls (Jenson & de Castell 2008). Examining representations of gender in games to understand the gendered culture of digital play means losing out on the more complex question of how gender is produced by players, through and in everyday play as well as in their contributions to gaming culture. Carr (2006), for instance, notes communities of players making game mods have undermined some of the masculinist narratives of games (for example, there are machinima films premised on subverting the homoso-cial order of game characters by rewriting hegemonic masculine characters as gay lovers). Furthermore, the growing array of play contexts, including mobile phone applications, party games, and virtual worlds, complicates understanding technological play simply from the perspective of the newest first-person shooter. Taking up the study of digital play from the perspective of domestic studies and with an attunement to the production of available subject-positions related to parenthood, children, and femininity and mas-culinity entails a better understanding of how participation and interactions within gendered spaces can change or reinscribe the dynamics of digital play.

For those who study children and new media, narrow constructions of game-playing subjects and game play options undermine the accuracy of portrayals of gaming as boys' culture. While there are many popular games that glorify violence, there are also a whole set of games that are violent by dint of their explorations of the workings of war, current affairs, and dystopic political systems. There are also other games that are quite popular and generally non-violent and of course, there are novel game spaces that combine play with other activities. The paucity of discussion of the entire spectrum of digital play culture is indicative of the lack of breadth in the study of youth, gender, and technology and highlights the need for a closer, more nuanced examination of the situated context of play. It would seem the first step towards gaining a more thorough understanding of girls, boys, and technology is to try to understand their play as a negotiation rather than a reification of stereotypical gender roles. The only way to gain a more complex understanding of modern young masculinity and femininity is with research that focuses on the material, lived realities of human subjects and their interactions with these technologies. Until this material-discursive formation is deconstructed, discussions of gendered play continue to mirror popular media accounts and remain stuck in a loop informed by media effects, technological determinism, and stereotypical gender norms that erase the agency, subjectivity, and identity of boys and girls as well as their parents.

Consequently, it is pivotal that studies of gender in relation to digital play explore the range of game play contexts and the active nature of play and identity performance, two elements this study of digital play in the home offers. An analysis of play within the domestic sphere allows a consideration of the situated nature of technological practices, adding complexity to accounts of digital play. Examining diverse forms of engagement with digital games to explore discourses of hope and anxiety allows a better understanding of, for instance, why some forms of play (such as boys playing first-person shooters) are so central to discourses of youth, technology, and play, rather than the array of play spaces available to young people and families (such as families playing together, boys and girls playing in virtual worlds with the same characters), which in the coming chapters I will show to be common.

An approach that understands the way in which technological play is constituted through discursive and material constraints is necessary, given how the research review above indicates a complex set of interactions and a tension between design architectures, cultural conventions, gender norms, and actual practices. The projects of domestication research, youth media studies, and critical gender and game studies charge researchers with imploding binaristic visions, ranging from have/have nots to masculinity/femininity, accounting for the mutually constitutive nature of power, structures, and subjects and examining "the complexities and situated ways in which technologies are taken up in context, and to the diversity of ways

in which young people weave them into other aspects of their interactions with the world" (Beavis & Charles 2007, 704). These arguments for future directions in research on gendered technological play inform this study of ludic practices in the home. Exploring the visions, behaviours, and activities of children and adults in relationship with technological play allows an understanding of the contexts of play as contingent spaces that rely on conventional cultural norms and practices. It also allows insight into how youth and adults challenge these elements and how they might reshape notions of girl-like practices and boy-like activities in their own contexts. In sum, the objective of this work is to contribute complexity to discussions of practice, discourse, and context in gendered identity performance in digital play. Its intervention is to showcase the voices of participants as a response to the dominant paradigm that flattens the complexity of masculinity and femininity and discounts the complex ways in which gender is shaped through technological practices.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

An important methodological limitation of this study is the question of how the heteronormative, relatively middle-class, and mostly white demographics of the participants, as well as the specificities of Canadian culture, impact the findings. Though there was some divergence in socio-economic status, lifestyle, and race, for the most part the twenty-five study participants were economically secure, heterosexual, white, and structured in line with the typical vision of the nuclear family. That said, there was some diversity in terms of single-parent households, limited disposable income, and unemployment. The relative narrowness of the participant pool does not invalidate the sample in terms of the ability of the researcher to analyse the interviews but by necessity, it took the forefront in interpretation. The limitations of the sample also indicate future directions for research, which I review in Chapter 6.

Another dimension that must be considered throughout the analysis is the question of what can be called "addressivity". As Jenson and Fisher (2010) note, who asks the question always has a significant impact on the process of empirical research and thus on the research outcomes. They found in their study of gendered play in school computer labs that the role of an outgoing female interviewer led to a marked increase in feminine participation in play. One important and unknowable element in my study was how my gender, my demeanour, and my relationships with the parents and the children may have shaped the findings. Though we cannot be sure how a male interviewer, a more subdued interviewer, an interviewer who was not a gamer themselves, or an interviewer saturated in game culture would have informed the results of the study, it is important to keep in mind the significant role of addressivity. It is to this end I foreground myself as an actor

in the coming chapters, as drawing attention to the subject-position of the researcher reveals the extent to which I, like all other researchers, am a key influence on the outcomes of my data collection and analysis.

NOTES

1. This broader lack of recognition of the constitutive character of gender is in spite of an important history of research in this area that has destabilized essentialist notions of gender and their relationship to technology, indicated the dangers of conflating girls and women, and highlighted the need for intersectional research on race, sexuality, ability, and class. See most recently Feminists in Games (http://www.feministsingames.com).
2. This age spectrum was selected because I wanted to examine a wide range of virtual playgrounds from those targeted at elementary school-aged children to those oriented to teenage players.
3. These two Canadian cities were selected opportunistically as I had pre-existing channels for recruitment in each location. Each city also afforded me the ability to interview urban city dwellers and suburban families alike, as well as English and French-speaking participants, resulting in a more diverse group of participants.
4. This is the case even with technologies marketed to women such as labour-saving household appliances, which serve to rationalize domestic labour (Riccini 2003) and to increase expectations about the efficiency and efficacy of women's household work.

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3   Adopting Digital Games

THE MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE NETWORKS SHAPING ADOPTION AND DIGITAL GAME PLAY IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

This chapter introduces the twenty-five Canadians who form the participant pool for the study and the rationale they provided for their adoption of digital games and ludic technologies in the domestic realm. While my initial interest in the subject of games and gender was in how femininity and masculinity were enacted by young people playing online games in virtual communities, what my observations of play and interviews with children and parents revealed was the gendering of digital games happens in a number of ways in everyday practices and discourses related to children's play, media, and technologies. For the remainder of this text, I will introduce the material-discursive networks related to digital games that serve to constrain and enable digital play in ways that are distinctly stratified along both gender and age divisions in the domestic sphere. As I will demonstrate, the purchasing and incorporation decisions made in relation to the domestication of digital games were shaped by one overwhelmingly significant characteristic, a conceptualization that in turn impacted on both parent and child interactions with their household play technologies. This attribute is the perceived sense of their own tech savvy, as well as that of others in their family, which in turn informs understanding of the relationship between gender, age, and the use of new media in the home, including but not limited to digital games.

In particular, the domestication of ludic technologies among my participants led to a set of activities around these devices that were distinctly associated with the norms of particular subject-positions: mother, father, son, daughter, female, male, and ideal and problem gamer. These subject-positions were premised on gender as well as on age, notions of generational difference, and familial dynamics. They were not fixed in each home or family but, as I will show, were influenced by broader discourses about digital play, gender, parenting, youth culture, and social mobility related to the roles and uses of digital technology for the development of one's child into a productive adult, informed or shaped by neoliberal aspirations related to the parenting of a child with good outcomes, often through

intensive micromanagement of children's activities, emotions, and behaviours (Hoffman 2010).

With their increasing popularity and significance within educational discourses in particular, digital games have become a flashpoint for these discussions, alongside social media and online technologies. Consider for example the news media coverage of a recent report by Oxford University researchers on the beneficial role played by digital game play in the lives of children aged ten to fifteen. The language characterizing this reporting – child happiness, satisfaction, social and emotional well-being, adjustment, and health (Gosden 2014) – would seem to be a far cry from older rhetoric related to children's game play, which was rife with the language of risk, harm, danger, delinquency, and desensitization. However, these are two complementary veins of the same neoliberal ethos operating to place the responsibility for managing the social order via children's well-being in the hands of parents.

This entanglement of hope and fear, technological boosterism and new media anxiety has a long history. Discourses about the adoption of new media have operated through a dual emphasis on family harmony and generational difference from as early as the domestication of the television in North American households. Advertising in that era framed the TV as a family medium, mobilizing images of the nuclear family huddled in domestic bliss around the screen (Spigel 1992). At the same time, however, TV posed a threat as it made mature content available to children, raising parental ire and concerns over the locus of responsibility for the regulation of threats to youthful innocence (Spigel 1998). The articulation of these fears and hopes highlights how childhood is understood to be an unstable construct requiring continual parental policing of its permeable boundaries. The protectionist sentiment regarding the special time of childhood entails in particular surveillance and governance of children's media, as they are seen as potentially corrupting influences (Buckingham 2000). As Spigel (1998) argues, parents of so-called problem children were framed as derelict in their duty, which was to be ever vigilant in mediating between the screen and the child.

This indicates that the tangled rhetorics of hope (media will bring the family together) and harm (media will corrupt the child) are nothing new. As early as the 1950s there were tense and tenuous relationships between media and youth, family bliss and social breakdown, and child well-being and parental responsibility. A generation gap between the pleasures of young people and the suppression of these interests and desires by parents is particularly pronounced in the marketing and content of digital games (Ito 2009) but the ways this rhetoric emphasizes the lack of familiarity that emerges from generation gaps is nothing novel. Instead, anxieties of this sort have always been associated with emergent forms and their cultures, observable in the moral panics that seem to characterize the rising popularity of texts for and spaces of youth (McRobbie & Thornton 1995), from rock music (Cohen 1987) to punk culture (Clark 2003) to the Internet (Kline 1993; Mazzarella 2003).

The recurrence of moral panics of this sort indicates the politicized nature of children's culture and highlights how media in particular serve as a space for discussions of social breakdown and maintenance (Drotner 1992). At the same time, parents are consistently implicated as the gatekeepers, regulators, and managers of these media and their threats, often in contradictory injunctions to either empower or protect their children (see for example Collier 2003).

Moral panics and their complementary technological utopian stories about new media are as much about parenting and families as they are about young people and their interests. These discourses serve to bolster the status quo by supporting conservative value systems, often through visions of how childhood is supposed to be experienced (Livingstone 2009). McRobbie (1994) argues "moral panics remain one of the most effective strategies of the right for securing popular support for its values and its policies" (198), though they are always contested. Moral panics provide the context for regulation and disciplining of young people by instilling the fear of failure in their parents and guardians, often by presenting visions of traditional family life that no longer exist in the face of transforming social norms, including gender relations, and therefore "panics are no longer about social control but rather about the fear of being out of control" (McRobbie 1994, 199).

According to McRobbie (1994), the fixation on young people's activities and media use emphasizes the dangers of an absence of parental regulation and the threat of social harm inherent in too much unsupervised free time. In this focus on social relations and everyday regulation, moral panics seek ideological cohesion and public consensus on behalf of the dominant social order through highly emotive language and heavy-handed rhetoric. In this way, moral panics highlight how ideology is a "suffusive social process ... not a simple question of the distortion of truth, but rather that ideology is a force which works continuously through the mobilization of popular common sense" (McRobbie 1994, 207), particularly at the level of everyday practice. As Weeks (1985) has argued, moral panics serve as observable moments of public attention focusing on and gaining entry into the private realm, placing responsibility on the family as the regulator of potentially dangerous young subjects. Moral panics around youth and their media use operate by "catalyzing society's perennial anxieties about childhood and triggering media headlines, public anxieties and official inquiries" (Livingstone 2009, 29), multiplying discourse around the proper activities of parents and children through the regulation of these technologies and texts. It is simply through a positive rather than negative frame that news reports about the beneficial potential of digital games and other media serve a similar purpose. The pressure becomes to manage well-being through healthy use rather than to fend off harm through restricted use. In practice these seemingly oppositional discourses serve the same purpose and add to the flurry of discourse parents must manage when domesticating digital games.

Indeed, this is simply a recent iteration of a particular vision of necessary usefulness of children's leisure and play that has always circulated alongside moral panics about youth, parents, and new media. Seiter (2004) reviews the tensions between children's play and parental regulation, arguing "attempts to harness children's fascination with computers for instruction epitomized adult efforts to recruit play for progress, for the future" (1). Rather than seeking to eliminate new media and digital games from the lives of children, the impetus is to harness their content for productive purposes. Meaningful, healthy, and developmentally beneficial play is the rationale underlying the design of educational games, just as the development of educational television programming before it. This tends to lead to a rationalization of children's play as a means to achieve learning outcomes and training for future occupations (Narine & Grimes 2009), a discourse echoing those who envision video games acting as a gateway to education and careers in technology and the sciences, as reviewed in Chapter 1.

In sum, these visions operate on the notion of entrenched generational differences between adults and young people, which is then linked to the relegation of responsibility to parents for the surveillance and disciplining of potentially risky cultural objects in their children's lives: the media and technologies to which youth are seen as being irresistibly attracted. As Ito (2009) argues, this can be understood in Foucauldian terms. Adults maintain a repressive regime that aims to silence the darker themes of children's play but that also acts as an "incitement to discourse" (Foucault 1990), giving voice to perverse play in opposition to natural, innocent, and productive play. The discursive terrain of childhood constitutes visions of innocent and productive play as well as an array of discussions about deviance, regulation, and the commercialization of violent, grotesque, and antisocial forms of play. This is evident in public debates about children's media and violence continuing this historical trend of problematizing childhood pleasures and play, and demonstrates how the rhetoric of hope about productive play is implicated in discourses of fear regarding deviant childhood interests, both serving to download responsibility for management to the family in the home.

Analysis of observations and interviews will show this material-discursive network and its accompanying injunctions about parenting are often a site of tension and dilemma in everyday practices of parenting, and they can serve to perpetuate gendered distinctions between parents, for instance when the mother is cast as gatekeeper to media, entertainment, and play technologies and the father as playmate (Horst 2010). Indeed, as the locus of assessment and control shifts from the father as authoritarian to different configurations of power in the changing contemporary family (Livingstone 2009), it is the mother who is often responsible for the disciplining of these healthy, productive children (Luke 1994) and protection against myriad potential risks to the family.

In addition to the increasing devolution of risk management to families in the neoliberal context, the family is already ideological. It is a key component

of a system of power that that persistently watches, regulates, restricts, and disciplines reproductive bodies, coded according to a dualistic notion of what it means to be male and what it means to be female (Balsamo 1999). The construction of womanhood in particular through the act of reproduction is a component of the compulsory heterosexuality Rich (1983) identifies as a key tool of women's repression within the patriarchy. Here, marriage and reproduction are required to maintain disempowering hegemonic institutions such as the nuclear family and capitalism. Rich's argument indicates the prevalence of family and kinship structures enabled by heterosexual reproduction as justifications and explanatory tools in theories of sex and gender. Weeks (1985) notes that politically and socially, the family is increasingly mythologized and becomes the moral standard by which to make statements about innate sex roles and political tumult, including in the backlash against the feminist movement. In this ideological construction, when the family is evoked, it is a particular type of family: white, middle-class, and hierarchically structured with the father at the helm (Weeks 1985). In short, the family in this construction is a microcosm of the patriarchy, mobilized to express moralistic concerns over risk, danger, what needs protection, and who is responsible for this, and this is readily apparent in normative discussions of what is good and bad for children in their media and technology use (Buckingham & Sefton-Green 2003).

It is based on this material-discursive context I argue that rather than offering equitable access and use, the mainstream adoption of game technologies is stratified within the home through a set of material practices and disciplinary discourses that are informed by and serve to reaffirm larger normative rhetorical constructs about youth, parents, families, gender, and technology. The interaction of these practices and discourses in turn produces intelligible gendered subject-positions for members of the participating Canadian families when it comes to their practices and enactments of technological competency in relation to digital games.

In order to explore how this happens, I will introduce the themes structuring my analysis of the interviews in the forthcoming chapters by considering two key factors shaping engagement with digital games in each home. These organizing concepts stem from the observation that while nearly every family I interviewed possessed an array of different ludic technologies (see Table 3.1), adoption and use of these were understood and influenced by two key conceptualizations: first, parental sentiments about and performances of their degree of tech savviness and second, the key role of familial beliefs and value systems regarding the role of digital games within a broader landscape of networked technologies considered to be a necessity for their child's future. These two sets of personally held perspectives, in turn, worked in tandem with two regulatory systems shaping domestic digital play: policies for policing play as well as practices of disciplining gendered subjects. It is through the interactions between these systems and beliefs that digital play continues to be stratified by gender and age in the domestic sphere.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN ADOPTION AND TECH SAVVY

Every participating family included at least one family member who played video games, though as I will show in upcoming chapters, what constituted play or a player was not the same in every site. For the most part, the families I interviewed owned a large array of devices for game play, possessing at least one dedicated gaming console as well as personal computers, mobile phones, touch-screen devices, and portable gaming systems that offered play possibilities. At a minimum, with a few notable exceptions, nearly every family owned a Nintendo Wii, a very popular North American Christmas purchase in 2006 and 2007 based on its family-oriented marketing. One such exception was Family H, which was headed by a single mother who adamantly rejected consoles and portable gaming devices and who only very reluctantly allowed a computer for her son. However, for the most part within this group of participants, game technologies were not understood as gadgets for niche interests, luxury items, or specialty devices. Consoles, portable game devices, and games were discussed as a part of the landscape of entertainment and leisure technologies in the Canadian home and thus required constant parental vigilance in order to keep their use in

Table 3.1 Game technologies owned by each family

Family A	Desktop computers, Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Xbox, Microsoft Xbox 360, iPod, Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP), and Nintendo Dual Screen (DS).
Family B	Desktop and laptop computers, Sony PlayStation 3, Nintendo Wii, and Nintendo Dsi.
Family C	Desktop and laptop computers, iPod Touch, Sony PlayStation 2, and Nintendo Wii.
Family D	Desktop and laptop computers, iPod Touch, and Nintendo Wii.
Family E	Desktop and laptop computers, 2 Microsoft Xbox consoles, Microsoft Xbox 360, iPod Touch, and one Nintendo DS per child.
Family F	Desktop computer, Microsoft Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, Sony PlayStation 2, Nintendo DS, and iPod Touch.
Family G	Desktop and laptop computers, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo DS, Nintendo DSi, and iPod Touch.
Family H	Desktop and laptop computers.
Family I	Desktop and laptop computers, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo GameCube, Microsoft Xbox 360, and Nintendo Entertainment System.
Family J	Desktop and laptop computers, iPhone, iPod Touch, Sony PlayStation 1 and 3, Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo DS, and Sony PlayStation Portable.

balance with other activities such as homework, sports, family time, and peer interaction.

Within the families in this study, patterns of ownership were not necessarily yoked to socio-economic status. The families with the largest numbers of ludic technologies in their homes sat on each end of the spectrum of economic security, as did the families with fewer consoles, computers, and mobile devices. Ownership was thus not associated with lower or higher incomes in this study. This can be seen in the examples of Family A and Family H, who shared several commonalities. In these families, the parents active in primary child-rearing were in their fifties and both of their sons were fifteen years old at the time of the interviews. Both families identified finances as a key issue in adopting new technologies, particularly those oriented to what they saw as frivolous leisure purposes rather than those for school projects, creative hobbies, or work. Within Family A, both parents framed their socio-economic status as "poor", which was a key factor in their adoption of technologies as they struggled to afford new devices and criticised the rapid obsolescence of many of these gadgets. In Family H, the son told me that not owning particular technologies such as consoles or portable music devices was a matter of choice (he said they were not "useful"), but his mother stated it was simply not feasible for her to afford the array of devices many of her son's peers took for granted. And yet despite these economic considerations, Family A owned a range of ludic devices including a Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Xbox and 360, iPod, Sony PSP[1], and Nintendo DS, whereas Family H did not own a single console or portable system for playing video games. The son in Family H gained access to digital play not by purchasing games but through a combination of pirating, sharing, and swapping activities, facilitated by his older brother and his peer group, an exchange economy of games shown to be prevalent among young people and a central means by which young boys assert expertise over them (Williamson & Facer 2004).

Another key similarity in both families was the significant part played by older male siblings working in tech-related fields as these brothers were influential in terms of the new devices each family adopted. Both of these older male siblings were central figures in familial notions of what technological expertise looks like for both the parents and the sons. In Family H, it was the older brother who brought the computer the mother was so skeptical of into the home, against her wishes. Within Family A, the older brother was a key node in the circulation of shared consoles and games, as well as a taste-maker in terms of the younger brother's areas of interest. Both older brothers were held up as paragons for having the potential for future successes afforded by high degrees of digital literacy, fulfilling the promises of purposive play (Narine & Grimes 2009).

One final similarity was the degree to which each son was afforded privacy and autonomy in their technology use. In Family A, the son was allowed to have his computer, consoles, and portable devices within his own living

space, which had a high degree of privacy, and in Family H's home, the son's computer was stationed in his bedroom. Typically the parents within this study were adamant about placing computers and game technologies in shared or common areas to enable parents to quickly check on what their children were doing. Within these two families, however, the parents (somewhat reluctantly) granted their teenaged sons the responsibility and freedom to manage their online activities based on the desire to maintain an open relationship premised on trust.

Despite these similarities, the ludic technologies each family adopted differed greatly, even though both mothers were vocally opposed to game culture and critical of the time spent on game play by their teenaged sons, enacting the moral-arbitration role Downey (2012) discusses in her reflection on feminine spaces of domestic play and how mothers are often placed in the position of locking down technology in the home. One key difference between each family was the presence of both parents in the home in Family A, whereas in Family H, the mother had full custody of her teenage son after her separation from his father. These differences in sharing the labour of child-rearing had an impact on parenting style as there was often a parent in the home in Family A while the mother in Family H had to juggle work responsibilities with child-rearing. For the mother in Family H, this led to a higher degree of strictness in terms of her viewpoints on the proper balance of media in her son's life. There are many possible reasons for why a single parent would differently rear his or her child in relationship to new technologies, but what is interesting in this case is the parent has a low level of comfort with these devices and this is not mitigated by a more or less experienced parent in the home.

This is the most significant difference that impacts on how technology is regulated in the home: the professed or perceived degrees of technological competency of the parents in each family. For example, while the father in Family A was critical of some elements of game culture, specifically its origins in the military-industrial complex, a critique that indicates a high degree of background knowledge, he was comfortable with new technologies from social networking sites to video-editing software suites. For instance, he frequently used MySpace and then Facebook to publicize his musical performances and to post videos he produced with his sons. In this way, the sympathy of the mother in Family A to the discourses of fear encircling game play was offset by the father's more philosophical acceptance of a parent's inability to control their children's practices, particularly given the rapid pace of change in terms of technology. He emphasized the importance of allowing one's children to learn the expectations, structures, and language of the digital culture that surrounds them. This perspective was deeply informed by his familiarity and comfort with technologies in his son's life.

By contrast, the mother in Family H expressed both disinterest and distaste for new media and technology outside their utility in her life, linking early adoption to mindless consumerism. She had recently become more

proficient with the computer out of necessity – she was responsible for managing her late parents' estates – but for her this was a matter of obligation rather than pleasure or leisure. The computer for her was a tool, not a toy or portal for exploration or learning. As noted, she did not support the purchase of a computer for her son as she preferred to cultivate a low-tech home environment. Her son was in turn dismissive of her technological abilities, citing instead the significance of his older brother in particular and father, other brothers, stepbrothers, and half-brothers generally in shaping his own technical abilities. The differential degrees of technological competency on the part of these parents and the amount of access to technologies in the home seemed to shape the preferred activities of the sons. In Family A, the son was an avid gamer as well as a digital artist, video producer, electronics modder, and software hacker. In Family H, the son preferred to spend his time outdoors biking, reading, and writing.

I would argue the differences and similarities between these two families indicate the central importance of what is broadly and informally understood as tech savvy. I use this term to refer to a particular relationship with a range of new media and technologies, one in which the person feels they are knowledgeable, well-informed, and comfortable with this assortment of objects and their culture. Importantly, this implies not unquestioned acceptance or appreciation of a given technology but shrewdness of use, including a critical stance that might entail recognition of the failings or limitations of some objects such as certain games or consoles. It is also a personally held sense that is not linked to a particular degree of expertise per se but a relative degree of ease and confidence in using and talking about technologies. A parent's sense of his or her own tech savvy and all this entails in terms of proficiency, use, enjoyment, and curiosity can have a considerable impact on the adoption and development of technological interests and skills on the part of the child even more than finances or formal education.

This is also demonstrated in comparisons between the single parenting in Family H and Family E, where it was the father who was the primary caregiver. Unlike the technologically wary mother in Family H, the father in this household was very interested in and proficient with new technologies and invested in their acquisition and training of his two children in their use under his supervision. He disapprovingly described the mother in this family as being "surprisingly" technologically incompetent despite her university education. He was a very active gamer, a passionate player of the networked massively multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* and the first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, and was committed to keeping up to date with the newest technologies, embodying the interests, proficiency, and knowledgeability indicated in his self-identification as tech savvy. Unlike the mother in Family H, this parent worked in the tech industry, and he was a firm believer that both of his children needed to know how to do things with computers and digital media, including video games, in order to succeed in their education and future careers. Literacy and fluency

with new networked technologies were described as a necessity. To this end, Family E had no lack of digital technologies in their lives, with three desktop computers, one for the parent and one for each child, a work laptop, 2 Xbox consoles, and an Xbox 360, as well as two Nintendo DS portable devices, but no Wii, which the father described as too childish a system, a judgement I will explore in more detail in Chapter 5. All three desktop computers in their home were networked together wirelessly and also positioned in a physically proximal configuration in the basement, allowing the father the ability to both monitor and participate in play.

The two children in this family, an eight-year-old daughter and a twelve-year-old son, were both in turn very interested and engaged in game play, virtual worlds, and social networking sites. However, though the father was positive about technology, impressed by his children's capabilities with the computer, and confident in his own abilities to stay one step ahead of their use, he also espoused firm beliefs about setting rules about game play and screen time. While both his children shared his interests, this father emphasized the need to regulate screen-based activities, particularly given the challenges of balancing risks with opportunities in a way the mother in Family H did not. For her, a relationship of trust was emphasized while for him, the rhetoric of conflict took the fore. In both cases, the assumed necessity was for regulation and the difference lay in whether it was externally imposed as parental regulation or disciplined as self-regulation.

GAMES FOR THE FUTURE: THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TECH SAVVINESS AND NOTIONS OF NECESSITY

The above examples demonstrate that similar demographics in terms of age and socio-economic status did not dictate similar adoption or parenting styles when it comes to the management of digital games. The last comparison of two single-parent families also highlights that familial structure does not indicate a particular inclination towards purchasing or monitoring ludic technologies. Instead, what becomes evident across these differences is the key role within the families in this study of two personally held perspectives: of one's own degree of tech savviness and of one's investment in the notion that adoption and use of new networked technologies, including digital games, was a necessity, whether this was understood as a positive development or more of a necessary evil.

No matter what their background, every family in this study located the roots of domestication of digital games in the adoption of games and electronic toys marketed as educational. Relatedly, they talked about adopting the Internet in order to access the research and information-seeking possibilities of networked technology. For these parents, then, digital and ludic technologies in the domestic sphere were entangled in the desire to mobilize networked devices to keep their children up to speed with the changing

technological landscape, to grant them admission to the bounty of resources online, and to gain literacy and fluency with technology. However, for some parents this initial hope for the adoption of these networked technologies was overwhelmed by the necessity of keeping up not only with the expectations for their children – articulated most often through the need for their children to submit homework in typed form rather than as a handwritten document – but also with the expanding range of content and platforms available. The ever-increasing range of technologies, in particular convergent devices such as the newest range of consoles and mobile phones, were objects of concern, along with the networked computer that acted as a gateway not only to a range of information but also potentially problematic sites beyond their control, including violent, threatening, and sexual content. This aligns with Steeves's *Young Canadians in a Wired World Phase III Report* (2012), in which parents report feeling overwhelmed by the range of dangers discussed around their children going online and how hard it is to manage all the ways their children can get access to online content, a feeling that often trumps their feeling that their children's use may have beneficial outcomes. When it comes to digital games, parents tended to be ambivalent about their educational value beyond those early titles for children, though more tech-savvy parents referred to the value of their content (such as the management skills imparted through the play of simulation games) and their form (such as the need to be fluent in cutting-edge technologies such as digital game devices).

Hence, while a parent's sense of their own tech savviness had a significant impact on adoption of game devices and on the development of their child's interests in games, no matter what the degree of fluency, competence, or interest, use within the home was always shaped by the discourses of how parents and youth must negotiate the digital landscape, laden with benefits and opportunities but also rife with potential dangers. Indeed, across all families in this study, it was the management of these devices that took the fore as a key consideration in how ludic technologies were domesticated.

What the next two chapters will highlight is that these viewpoints, of both tech savviness and the necessity of networked technologies in children's lives, are marked by notions of normative gender performance as well as understandings of the role of parents in the contemporary Canadian context. While the discourses of hope and fear were familiar to all participants, their engagement with them differed. Let us return to the example of Family A and Family H, both of whom identified as poor but had different degrees of adoption. What I observed in these families was the key role of the expertise of older male siblings, who modelled not only masculine technological expertise but also the success that may reward tech savviness. They simultaneously played two significant roles. They were both resources on which to draw on when the family had a technological challenge and examples of how seemingly unserious interests – in video games in particular – could become part of a trajectory leading to a successful future in the tech sector.

In Family E, this was modelled not by an older sibling but in the experience and expertise of the father himself, as he too saw himself as having turned an interest in ludic technologies into a marketable and employable skill set.

The differences between the families with siblings as models and the family with a father as tech expert were distinctly class-based, as the latter represented a solidly upper-middle-class lifestyle. For this father, the hopes and fears related to the adoption of ludic technologies were not abstracted concepts but ones he himself lived, and he was attuned to specific dangers, sites, and strategies for balancing them. This is very different from the parents in Family A and H for whom the successes of their older sons represented possibilities they had never entertained and therefore was something aspirational for them. The specifics of the dangers of these technologies were only vaguely articulated, the ability to successfully filter them denied. Unlike the father in Family E, who saw his role as a tech-savvy parent as engaging actively in the pursuit of maximizing technological benefits while limiting their dangers, the parents in Family A and H invested in trust-building activities. The hope was this would enable their children to negotiate the opportunities and risks themselves and hopefully follow in the steps of their siblings in a trajectory of technologically-based success.

These aspirations were related to experience and were in turn closely tied to both gender and age. The examples demonstrate that each model of tech savviness was male: fathers and brothers. Wariness related to the adoption of new ludic technologies on the part of the mother in Family A was completely trumped by the father's sense of the necessity of these devices. The mother in Family H was also overruled when her older son sold her younger son a computer without her input. This led her to loosen her regulations on networked play as she felt she could not monitor his play in the same way when the computer was his own property. Aside from socio-economic differences, the age gap between the parents in Family A and Family H (who were in their fifties) and the father in Family E (who was in his early forties) was relevant and impacted on their own experiences with games. None of the parents in their fifties spoke to playing games as children or teenagers, whereas the forty-one-year-old father referred to a lifetime of ludic engagement, contributing to his own savviness with digital games and game culture. His articulation of the importance of games was thus very specific – he noted that game technologies drive innovation – whereas for the older parents, these notions were more general. Games are part of a broader field of new technologies they did not necessarily use or know very much about but they understood were "here to stay" (in the words of the father in Family A).

I argue these interactions and practices demonstrate an interplay of gender, age, and class, related to aspirations of a specifically Canadian sense of social mobility, influencing the adoption of digital games. I demonstrate these intersect not only through perspectives on purchasing and using ludic technologies but in how access to play in the home becomes stratified within monitoring and disciplining practices. My lens for this analysis is based on

two different but mutually constitutive material-discursive sets of regulatory practices, to be explored in more detail below and in the coming chapters.

THE DUAL REGULATION OF DIGITAL PLAY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

What the above-mentioned intersections between age, gender, and class in relationship to perspectives of tech savviness and necessity of participation indicate is that the domestication of digital games is a stratified and complex matter. The analysis in the next two chapters will demonstrate the ways in which these markers are articulated, specifically through two sets of mutually informing practices I argue are best understood as regulatory. These activities serve to enable and constrain play based on the intelligibility of engaging with ludic technologies in relationship to particular subject-positions – specifically that being a gamer is a subject-position that can clash with others, particular mother, daughter, and feminine identity.

I use the term "regulation" to refer broadly to a set of rules, codes, and principles governing conduct that might stem from the authority of another person, such as parents regulating the number of hours their child spends on the computer per day, or that might be self-imposed, such as a teenager turning off his phone until he has completed his homework in order to not be distracted by text messages. Within the material-discursive frameworks related to digital play, however, all of these rules are informed by the broader disciplinary systems of gender, domestic relations, and generational difference as previously reviewed, stipulating what is normative and what is subversive, deviant, or problematic in performances of masculinity and femininity in relationship to technologies of play and within family structures. Informed by the broader rhetorical constructs that circulate notions of what a family does, what a good mother acts like, and how young people should talk about technological proficiencies and pleasures, each family creates a regulatory system shaping access to and use of these digital games technologies, impacting on how family members gain a sense of their ability, competence, and comfort, challenging or, more often, reifying masculine technological expertise. What was surprising was that though these regulatory practices differed in minor ways across each family, for the most part there were several shared patterns that contributed to the constitution of particularly gendered subjectivities in relation to digital games and play. In the coming chapters, I will delineate some of these similarities and differences and show how regulation in both senses serves to reinscribe familiar notions about femininities and masculinities in relationship to ludic technologies.

By considering how the relationships between gender, age, generationality, and technological proficiency are articulated in and through the domestication of the video game in these Canadian homes, I provide a portrait of how the practices of play specifically and technological pleasures generally are consistently

linked to a masculine subject-position and to pervasive notions of good parenting in the neoliberal context. Focusing on the two regulatory structures of actual rule-setting and systems of normative gender identity performance allows me to expose exactly how the material-discursive network of meaning associating masculinity and ludic pursuits functions in everyday spaces.

NOTE

1. Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP), a handheld game console, was originally released in 2004 and includes a number of redesigns in the line, such as the PSP-2000 (released in 2007), the PSP-3000 (released in 2008), the PSP Go (released in 2009), and the successor device, the PS Vita (released in 2011).

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4   Regulating Digital Play

REGULATING PLAYFUL SUBJECTS THROUGH DOMESTIC POLICY

The participants in this study engaged in unique ways with game technologies based on the material-discursive terrain previously outlined, which shaped their understandings of what new media symbolize, how they might pose threats and offer opportunities, and how their own identities meshed with or bumped up against these visions. In response to dominant discourses about the ludic technologies in their children's lives, parents put into place forms of domestic policy addressing such concerns and hopes. They implemented a variety of strategies in the home to deal with potential threats, harms, and risks while also attempting to harness the educational, creative, and social affordances of new media and technology. As noted, what form these strategies took depended on parents' relative level of tech savvy and their sense of the necessity of these technologies for their children's development, and as I will show in this chapter and the next, were tied to the performance of normative identities in association with the use of technology, particularly gendered subject-positions.

In this chapter I look specifically at a range of activities I group together under the rubric of "domestic policy", including parental practices of monitoring, time-limiting, and rule-setting, as well as tactics of resistance and self-regulation on the part of young people. I consider how these material practices relate to the ways parents and children talk about the discursive terrain surrounding youth culture and digital play. Discourses related to these technologies and activities, especially those of fear, vulnerability, and risk, as well as hope, technological progress, and a new cohort of digital natives, inform and exist in tension with how parents regulate digital play activities and in turn relate to normative understandings about good parenting practices and "healthy" media consumption for their children. These discourses also shape how children react to parental regulations and limitations on their digital play and technology use through subversion of, as well as conformance to and ventriloquization of, the dominant logic as it relates to household restrictions. Through a consideration of these activities and discourses, I outline the moments in which domestic policy acts as an

important site of the enactment of particular forms of gendered technological subjectivities impacting directly on each family member's experience of game play, especially in terms of the quality of their access and use. This exploration of the materiality of regulating digital play demonstrates the ways in which the family acts as a significant node in the network of factors serving to ascribe a gendered component to digital play in particular and the development of technological skills and expertise more broadly.

In particular, I consider the performances and practices of these Canadian family members in relationship to the discourses that talk about parenting and digital play and how these activities sometimes challenge but mostly reify dominant visions of good familial relationships in relation to the dangers and pleasures of digital culture. The material-discursive formations related to technology, gender, parenting, youth, hope, and fear are perpetuated through concrete practices allowing and disallowing the inhabiting of certain subject-positions linked to digital play, resulting in the sedimentation and complication of the gendered identities related to video games. In order to highlight this, I examine the domestic policies the study participants enact, follow, and challenge to examine how these practices serve to reinscribe gendered access to digital games in relation to socially and culturally constituted notions of parenting, youth culture, and generational difference. I explore these practices through four major threads I observed throughout each interview with parents: how they understand and articulate their responsibility to seek a balance between the dangers and hopes expressed about these new technologies; the ways in which an emphasis on inter-generational conflict serves to reify normative familial roles; the relationship between types of regulation and the autonomy they afford for those being regulated; and the role of the gamer subjectivity as a regulatory tool. I then examine how the children in these families conform to or challenge these activities and discourses. Throughout, I link these practices to the discourses of fear in relationship to video games in particular and I conclude by arguing it is the neoliberal risk society and its broader cultural trends and influences on everyday life that most directly shape these domestic policy activities.

BALANCING THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES
OF MAINSTREAM PLAY

With the broadening of audiences for a range of games, there has been a commensurate mainstreaming of their risks and opportunities. What this means is that concerns over digital game play are increasingly categorized with the perceived risks of other forms of new media such as mobile phones, wireless-capable portable devices, and social networking sites. This kind of regulatory conflation of devices becomes necessary with ever-greater technological convergence. The youth in this study played digital games on

consoles, computers, portable game devices, social networking sites, and mobile phones, and as a result the policies their parents enacted to monitor this broader range of technologies impacted on game play practices in particular. Parental tactics ranged from barring access to particular games and devices, the installation of censorware, the surveillance of chat logs, emails, browser histories, and Facebook walls, and the physical monitoring of screens, all of which I refer to as domestic policy. Therefore domestic policy includes a diversity of regulatory practices ranging from time-limiting to monitoring to surveillance to discipline.

These activities were the result of family members adopting video games in a climate expecting particular behaviours in relation to play and social technologies, including the management of heightened risks at the level of parental responsibility. For example, it is the parental subject who is tasked with consulting the relative appropriateness of a given game as determined by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), the non-profit, self-regulatory body that indicates the appropriateness of a given game for children and young people based on age. Implied within the implementation of a video game rating system is a specific type of responsibility focused on the parent rather than on other quarters such as governmental regulators, retailers, or educators. The parents in this study were highly attuned to these expectations and discussed the regulation of play in direct relation to the familiar rhetoric speaking to the need for parents to moderate the media diet of their children and manage the attendant risks.

Managing to strike a balance was a key theme in discussions of adopting and domesticating the video game articulated by parents in reference to the dominant social imperative of ensuring their children had the same opportunities as others. While none of the parents in this study fully embraced the most extreme expressions of the moral panics demonizing video games, they did articulate a tense relationship with them as they could not dismiss out of hand that there could be real risks to unsupervised use. As the mother in Family A said, "There's a lot of hype, there is too much hype, but the danger is, is if it's wrongly used, it's scary". While the discourses of fear were seen as tending towards the hyperbolic and excessive ("a *Law and Order* or *20/20* episode", said the mother in Family C), the parents still referenced the expectation that they were responsible for mitigating a range of dangers when they discussed their domestic policies. These dangers ranged from violent and pornographic content to inappropriate contact with strangers in online spaces to threatening encounters with peers facilitated by asynchronous communication and the cloak of fantasy-based environments.

The mother in Family C also spoke about the need for the parent to support technological proclivities partly because of the social harms implicit in too much or too strict regulation: "On the one hand I encourage my daughter to be technologically inclined to know what she's doing, and understand how things work, and to use those media. … Sometimes I feel like I'm socially harming her by restricting her Internet access because that's how

they socialize, right?" In response to a bullying incident, this mother had disciplined her teenage daughter by forbidding her use of any networked technologies, a punishment she felt was needed but in conflict with her vision of the necessity of participation in digital culture. In this way, she summarized a common sentiment amongst all parents in this study: the need for young people to participate in the cultures of new media and the challenges inherent in regulating through restriction. Through this incident, she fully embraced the conceptualization of her responsibility for negotiating the tensions between the dichotomous discourses of hope and fear and for recognizing her child's pleasures therein. This was a balancing act she performed vigilantly in order to adequately parent in a climate of networked play.

Another mother (Family D), who was particularly critical of any notion that video games held educational potential or any real benefit of any kind, echoed the feeling of social pressure placed on both parents and youth: "Because all the other kids are doing it, so you don't want them to feel like they're missing out on what everybody else is getting." What we can see in these statements about the push and the pull between limiting and allowing access is there are strong social norms about keeping up with others as a factor in the domestication of the video game. This reproduces not only an aspirational goal but also a fear of being "left behind" (in the words of the mother in Family C) or falling short in comparison to other families and their children. While a given parent may feel critical of ludic technologies, his or her choices hinge on what they see as normative practices in their children's lives and their responsibility for balancing the potential dangers and benefits.

This was particularly articulated in families of late adopters, who chose to acquire and domesticate digital games often under the pressures of being the only one without a system, as exemplified by the mother in Family F: "I remember we were at the point where it was him and one other child who didn't have a gaming system. So 'everyone has it except me'. I said I don't care, right. And then I think when he turned twelve, eleven or twelve, we got him the PlayStation. And then the big fight was over teen games, whether he could have teen games, you know, because we wouldn't allow those at first. You just get more relaxed as you give up." The father in Family A spoke to this sense of powerlessness in the face of the cultural zeitgeist in terms of the violent content of games in particular, as well as in relation to their militaristic heritage: "I do have some reservations. I mean, I don't like the violence. And I'm sure that he's played the most violent games although he denies it. At the same time, I've figured that it's not a matter of forbidding, you know, taking it away from him, that's going to stop him from doing this." Despite this father's concerns, he, like some other parents, felt a sense of defeat in the face of the growing popularity of these technologies, and the futility of trying to opt out. Good parenting in this climate entailed succumbing to the trends of adoption and then trying to moderate both the risks and opportunities in the use of a technology that may not have been familiar to them.

Some saw domestic policy as a way to not only ensure moderation but to model how to make balanced choices for their children. This was very clearly articulated by the father in Family I: "If they're playing the games to the extent where they are ignoring their homework and not doing what they have to do, then they get the games taken away for a period of time. So they learn moderation." From this we can see the attunement to balance and moderation is not only something to be regulated but to be disciplined into children as part of their development into good neoliberal subjects.

When parents voiced the impetus for families, both adults and children, to carry out the labour of balancing risks and opportunities on being pressured into adoption, they demonstrated the performance of good parenting entailed an acceptance and reification of a neoliberal value system that places the onus of this work on the individual or family. This was articulated through references to the failures of the school to adequately support this kind of training, whether because of a lack of available facilities, expert teachers, or courses, and in turn the pressures that came from this institution, such as the expectation children will already have word-processing skills when they enter elementary school. The mother in Family C also tied this into the pressures felt in relation to what other parents may be doing: "A lot of people I know don't let their kids have free time" because they were enrolling them in extracurricular early-learner courses to develop their computing skills as well as reading, writing, and musical and sports competencies. It was for this reason educational games and toys for young children were so common amongst these participants. Expectations for children's use of ludic technologies stemmed from not only the perceived failures of other institutions such as the school but from pervasive social norms about how to raise productive children through regulation hinged on moderation and balanced choices in their media consumption.

The acceptance and enactment of this particularly neoliberal parenting style in relationship to potentially risky ludic technologies were in turn marked in important ways by the sense of their degree of tech savvy, as previously reviewed. As we will see in the next section, the specific form of domestic policy parents enacted differed in terms of how measures of control impacted on the autonomy their child was afforded. As I will show, these choices are significantly shaped by tech savvy, a characteristic that is in turn limited through its associations with generation and gender.

MEASURES OF CONTROL, TECH SAVVY, AND AUTONOMY

Choosing Modes of Control

As we have seen, whether they were tech savvy or not, the parents in this study felt there was a need to grant their children access to new networked technologies, including digital games, lest they be socially stratified or educationally stunted. However, while parents were largely oriented towards

the rhetoric of the benefits of networked technologies, they were often unsure how these technologies would meet their expectations, and as a result they felt a complex relationship to the hyperbolic rhetoric of risk framing the use of ludic technologies. In response, they implemented various methods of rule-setting to mitigate risks, a set of choices that within my pool of participants largely depended on the degree of tech savvy held by the parent. Here, I will show that more tech savvy parents employed strategies that allowed their child's autonomy to a greater extent than those parents who felt uncomfortable or less proficient with video games. By referring to autonomy, I am specifically indicating the ability of a person to think for themselves beyond the spectres of externally imposed reward and punishment (Inhelder & Piaget 1958). As the ability to decide between right and wrong, truth and lies, children's autonomy is linked to the formation of a sense of self, independence, responsibility, pro-social behaviours, and critical thinking.

As Nolan, Raynes-Goldie, and McBride (2011) argue, forms of technological regulation infringe on privacy, limiting the degree of autonomous thinking granted to the child. I use the term "hard controls" to refer to these kinds of technological solutions, including software fixes like the implementation of parental filters on computers and consoles, as well as the installation of censorware, commonly known as Net Nanny programs, which block access to certain websites or games (Nolan, Raynes-Goldie, & McBride 2011). Using software fixes is a heteronomous form of control, involving governance by someone or something else rather than by one's own sense of right and wrong. As Nolan, Raynes-Goldie, & McBride (2011) note, the issue here is that "heteronomous children respond to choice as a condition of reward or punishment rather than critical thinking and evaluation" (6). One visible form of heteronomy is colloquially referred to as helicopter parenting, a practice of overparenting that has seen its share of media backlash and contributing to heated debates about the "right" way to parent in the twenty-first century. Here, I contrast heteronomy to autonomy to consider domestic policy activities such as the use of hard controls on digital play that do not allow for the development of critical thinking on the part of children and that serve to obscure from parents the functioning of these technologies.

The use of the gendered and classed figure of the Victorian nanny to brand censorware products such as Net Nanny[1] rather than, say, the image of a police officer is not a coincidence. The emphasis on parental responsibility to seek out tools to mitigate risk is as much a product of the censorware itself as it is the culture of fear related to children and new technologies stemming from their rapid and widespread diffusion, endemic media panics, and, as I will explore in greater detail below, the reverse generation gap wherein the dominant discourse asserts children's ability with technologies exceeds their parents' ability to manage them (Livingstone 2009). The marketing language advertising censorware products encourages parents to take

action through a reinforcement of moral panics and their responsibility for ensuring balance, equating spying with protecting one's children. As Steeves (2012) found in her report on youth and parental practices in conjunction with young people's use of networked communications technologies, in the face of rising risks, for many "invading children's privacy is now an imperative of good parenting" (14).

Hard Controls

Some examples of hard controls mobilized by the parents I spoke with included the use of the PlayStation parental controls, which can be set to block games rated M, for instance, safe chat settings in children's virtual worlds such as *Club Penguin*, and the installation of surveillance software on networked computers. The trend within my study was that such tools were often employed by parents who professed a lack of tech savvy and consequently had little knowledge of how these hard controls even worked, leading to some frustration when the software blocked safe game sites such as *Poptropica*. This was exemplified by the mother in Family F: "I have a block on the computer now that pretty much is so narrow it's not funny, which is accidental but it's just through, I guess, our Internet or whatever. And so pretty much, I have to put in a code to get to most sites now, which is irritating." As this mother did not identify as tech savvy, the use of a block on the computer only served to obfuscate the technology's functioning and further re-entrenched her anxiety about the risks as she placed her faith in less-than-useful software to staunch the flow of undesirable content. Nolan, Raynes-Goldie, & McBride (2011) critique the use of censorware for its potentially negative consequences for children's socio-emotional well-being and development, particularly when compared to other forms of monitoring. Inhibiting children's social interactions through censorware can limit their development as social actors, blocking the opportunity for autonomous thinking and the young person's ability to become empowered through critical decision-making. What I found was it also served to reinforce a parent's sense of their lack of ability and comfort, entrenching a low perceived degree of tech savvy and an uncomfortable relationship with the ludic technologies in their children's lives.

More tech savvy parents spoke to the importance of active measures of control. The father of Family E was particularly critical of any reliance on hard controls: "You need to be aware of what your kids are doing. Oh, 'the Nanny program will take care of it'. And then off you go and do something else, right? I think those things create a false sense of security with parents, they think the kids are safe and protected, so the parent doesn't bother looking at anything at that point. They're not monitoring any activity at all, cuz they think, 'Oh I've got this Nanny program on there'." This aligned with his concern that children will surpass their parents in terms of technological

knowledge, leading to an inability to monitor digital play and online practices effectively and opening the floodgates to the riskiest content online.

While this father was attuned to the false sense of security these programs offer, the mother in Family C problematized how reliance on software meant parents were not teaching their children decision-making skills and were reinforcing the attractiveness of forbidden materials, something akin to banning television or films with mature content: "I think that you have to teach kids how to make choices. Like how to make decisions about where they go and where they don't go, and so if it's all just blocked off then it can either become way more attractive to them, way more interesting, or they're never having to learn how to make judgement calls." The father in Family A also asserted that responsibility lies with the parent. He underlined the importance of raising a literate, sceptical, careful child in a media- and technology-saturated context that is "impossible to regulate. … You have to give them a good moral backing. … You know, you don't tell kids that there are no pedophiles out there, or whatever, you tell them, you reinforce it, you make them understand. And at some point, you know, bells ring, you know, he's on the thing, he's on the Net, and he sees something that makes him understand that that is what's going on." This father emphasized the role of the parent is assigning some of that responsibility to the child, showing another way in which parents articulate the necessity of not only regulating but of imparting the importance and best practices of self-regulation on to their children.

The mother in Family B also disagreed with the use of hard controls as she found them to be too passive. She asserted: "Those sorts of rules should be imposed by the parents and not left to something else. I wouldn't even consider doing that, it's all about us very carefully structuring the kids and then letting them have their freedom in that structure." These parents had their reservations about the potential dangers of new networked technologies in their children's lives, in particular video games, but their parenting approach towards the devices their children used was largely congruent with their overall perspective on fostering autonomous thinking in these children. At the same time, their approach to regulation was still aligned with the expectations reflected in the rhetoric of neoliberalism in which it was their responsibility to cultivate well-being, literacy, and competence within their children.

Monitoring

Depending exclusively on software or hardware to ensure the security of one's children was seen by some parents, particularly those with a greater sense of tech savvy, as a passive form of risk management. Technologically inclined parents preferred to employ more flexible and active forms of regulation in their domestic policy such as monitoring activities. In terms of video game play, monitoring often entailed stationing computers and

consoles within shared living spaces where parents could take a quick look at what their children were doing at any given time. The father in Family E, who was very positive about the role of technology in his children's lives, was quite strict about not having a computer in his son's room: "My son has wanted the one in his room for a long time. I said no. I said, until you're eighteen, it's not going to happen. They're there, that way when I'm sitting down at mine, I can look over. If I can walk by, I can see what you're looking at." The mother in Family B, whose children play digital games on the Wii and the computer, emphasized the importance of having digital play observable for a sort of peripheral monitoring: "Our living space is a big open space and the computer's right in the middle of it, so we're always in that room, and I can see or hear if something sounds different to what I'm used to seeing in my peripheral vision. I can tell when something's different." The father in Family I also made reference to this innate form of parental instinct: "You don't have to be in their face and watch them every second to know what they are doing, and I'm more along the lines of I like to know what they're doing without them knowing so therefore they aren't trying." This kind of passerby surveillance was significant because it prompted children to in turn engage in their own form of reflexive self-discipline as we will see later in the consideration of youth practices.

Overall, monitoring was a less invasive regulatory practice in terms of the young person's privacy because the potential for the parent to glimpse their child's activities and communications was explicit rather than undertaken in a covert fashion such as through reading the web browser's saved history. Steeves (2012) suggests there is an inverse relationship between surveillance practices and feelings of trust in parental monitoring of networked communications technologies. Parents who advocated for monitoring practices argued this was a more reflexive practice, often entailing dialogue between them and their children, and they were as a result more actively involved in their gaming practices. Children were, in turn, granted more autonomy than is afforded by restrictive tools like censorware. Practices of monitoring often led to active co-use and literacy work where children and parents discussed the content of the game and in some cases played together on a regular basis. These forms of co-use were not available to parents who expressed a lack of comfort or fluency with these technologies and who were then put in the position of taking on a gatekeeper role.

Children's Self-regulation

An important exception to the rule of needing to have a computer out in the open was the household of the family that did not adopt game technologies (Family H). The mother spoke to having faith in her son's capabilities for self-regulating in his use of ludic technologies based on a few years of co-use and discussion of online content and practices. I include here a

lengthy excerpt that highlights how this parent understands her son's right to privacy through his use of the computer in particular:

> MOTHER: "I think my son's pretty able to take care of himself. Actually, just in maybe the past year, he's had a computer in his room. Before that, I made a point, he didn't have his own computer and the computer was in the living room. In the old apartment that we were at, it was sort of right smack in the middle of the living room, so when he was on the computer, it wasn't like private. So, you know, I could see what he was doing. And only then maybe a year or two years ago, his older brother gave him, or kind of sold him, an old laptop and then he was able to have it in his room and so on, but then he was, you know, fourteen. So it was, and he knew how to take care of himself on the computer."
>
> RESEARCHER: "How does he know how to take care of himself on the computer? Or what does that mean for you?"
>
> MOTHER: "I think he knows to avoid things that aren't, you know, that look suspicious. And he's told me about some things, too. Um, you know, I can't remember the specifics now, but he's told me a few times about something that made him feel a bit uneasy and said okay yeah, go off of that, you know, un-friend them or whatever."

What was interesting here was this mother was a very reluctant adopter of technology and her household was the only one in the study that did not own even a Wii console, the most popular console adopted by non-gamer parents. As she said: "I'm sort of low tech. If anything, I sort of tend toward, you know, well, let's not have too much technology. I'd rather, you know, read a book, go out and play. It's been a battle between me and my son, him being on the computer." It was the influence of the older brother, who worked in the tech industry, and his contentious purchase of a laptop for the younger son that was the impetus for this mother to relent on her stance on restriction and engage in sufficient active co-use so she felt comfortable with a computer her son could use out of her sight.

While this might be read as an exception to the rule in terms of correlating tech savvy parents with domestic policies allowing greater autonomy, it was apparent from her other statements that this was actually a particularly gendered moment related to the performance of parenting in the neoliberal context where the mother was overruled by masculine experts. Though her preference was entirely for a lower-tech type of upbringing, she could not counter the will of her sons, and she then had to justify this turn of events through a different type of parenting strategy, that of trust-building. At times this was the repertoire parents drew on, including in Family A, where the parents articulated a strong sense of being unable to counter the quickly moving technological landscape and as a consequence came to a sort of surrender, expressed through the grammar of building trust. While

trust-building is certainly positive, it was significantly always associated with the parents asserting the child was capable of adequately self-regulating and taking responsibility for moderation and balance. In addition, this was only expressed in discussions of male children.

Tech Savvy and Scepticism

Overall, tech savvy parents tended to be more sceptical of the extremes of the discourse of fear and emphasized the necessity of technology in the lives of their children, highlighting the educational potential of using play software and hardware. When asked about the discourses of fear and new media, one tech savvy mother (Family C) scoffed: "I don't have those fears at all, I think that they are entirely overstated and embellished and blown up in the media." On the other hand, parents with less tech savvy were more likely to impose rigid regulations and to adopt ludic technologies with a "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" mentality, as exemplified by the mother in Family F mentioned above, who said she had given up. For these parents, combatting the risks of new media was part and parcel of the parenting project to mitigate dangers to their children, as articulated by the less tech savvy mother in Family D: "I have no idea, like I'm really not into this at all and whether [the dangers are] overstated, I don't know. It's a worry that's there and to what extent it's a worry, it's hard to know. It's just like you wouldn't let your kid go out and go on their own on the street, I don't mean in front of the house, but go somewhere, depending on the age, obviously, and talk to anyone or do anything. It's like getting into a car with a stranger, to some extent, or giving a stranger your information on the street, where do you live, you know. …" Here the adoption of potentially risky ludic technologies was seen as nothing new in terms of the role of parents defending threats to children's well-being and potential development.

What is shared between these different approaches is the performance of good parenting in and through the regulation of digital games, via practices emphasizing for the most part the training of young people to self-regulate or serving to foster an environment of unease with digital play technologies. While parental impressions of and interactions with the discourses of hope and fear were shaped by their own tech savvy, which in turn impacted on their practices of regulation, what was shared in the tasks of performing good parenting was the mobilization of the tensions of inter-generational conflict in these activities. I will now explore this in greater detail.

"A UNITED FRONT AGAINST THE ENEMIES": INTER-GENERATIONAL CONFLICT AND DIFFERENCE

As I have shown, some parents were reluctant or critical of any conception that ludic technologies were actually a necessity outside social pressures.

However, some parents, such as the father in Family E, were resolute that children need to be socialized into technology use specifically in order to develop digital literacies:

> I feel that computers are everywhere. You need to know how to use them, you need to be comfortable using them, and you need to know what you can and can't do, what you should and shouldn't do, all that kind of stuff, right? I feel that if you try and, you know, twelve years old you start letting your kid go on the computer, ninety percent of the kids in the class are already, you know, a hundred years ahead as far as computer literacy. Some kids are more computer literate than their parents.

This tech savvy father articulated the concern that some young people can go beyond their parents' capabilities in terms of their technological knowledge, as this means adults cannot actively assist their children in learning computer literacy skills or limit the worst excesses of the Internet, which, for him, a father of a young daughter and a teenage son, was access to extremely violent video games and pornographic content. As this shows, the relationship between parent and child is positioned as one of not only a balancing act between risk and opportunity but also as a constant battle hinged on the conflict inherent in emphasizing generational difference, as articulated by the father in Family I as "a united front against the enemies".

  The mother in Family F highlights the explanatory power of generational difference: "As far as actually playing on the systems, I do think it's this generation. That's what they do and I don't think there's much you can do to stop the flow of that." The inter-generational tension emphasized within discourses of fear in association with new media was cited by reluctant parents in terms of their resistance to adoption and their eventual capitulation. Generational difference was also expressed through differences in the activities of childhood such as reading, playing outside, and creating things, which were framed as more beneficial and lost in a media-saturated climate. The low-tech mother in Family H described this: "I think people are over-stimulated now, and then when they aren't stimulated, they don't know what to do with themselves, whereas before, I mean, even more so my mother's generation, people made things, you know, worked for themselves. They went out and found things instead of it being more given to them." When articulated via generation difference, the concerns took on a slightly different tone, where instead of falling in line with established traditions of battling for power between parents, the worries were something new to the tech age. As the mother in Family C lamented: "Yeah, there's lots to worry about, and I do think that it's certainly different since when I was kid." There was also a sense of loss articulated in terms of participating in video game culture, which, for the father in Family A, represented the worst excesses of a violent heritage that he as an anti-war protestor sought to challenge:

"Boys will be boys, and you got the need to express these things every now and then. But at the same time I come from the generation that tried to discourage this kind of thing, fought back." Inter-generational contact tended to be expressed in terms of difference and the lack of understanding between these groups, rather than in terms of the potential benefits of this contact or the shared experiences between generations.

The emphasis on generational difference served to act as an explanatory device for the discomfort and tensions these parents experienced in their contact with youth culture and ludic technologies with which they had varying degrees of comfort. Sometimes references to inter-generational dissimilarities were used to communicate to me the vast differences between childhood today and childhood when they were young. This was demonstrated when the mother in Family B said: "It's probably a generational thing. Because I'm not only in a different generation to them but a different generation to you as well. And, you know, when I was, when I was this age there was TV with ten channels. So, you know, my bias is still towards reading and writing and face-to-face and playtime and real interactions, and I am very skeptical of what kind of adults we're producing." Here the logic of generational difference was used to bridge the gap between me as a self-identified student of video game culture and a mother who simply did not understand the value of this medium in everyday life despite her adoption of it. Interestingly, despite references to playing outside in these discussions of generational difference, nobody made reference to the diminishing spaces for outdoor play, the shrinking roaming range of children in contemporary culture (Derbyshire 2007), and how this has contributed to increased time spent in virtual fantasy worlds (Jenkins 1998). Rather than a structural analysis of the conditions shaping the increased use of digital media and technologies in Canadian culture, this was seen as an inherent property of today's young people, in sharp contrast to the interests, priorities, and behaviours of parents when they were children and teenagers.

Accordingly, in many ways domestic policy operated through overt and implicit (i.e. "kids these days") generational discourse and served in turn to perpetuate notions of difference and insurmountable divides. This is interesting because generationality can confound the notion of masculine expertise when the father and the mother are different ages, such as in Family C. The mother here attributed a generational component to the father's lack of interest: "He's 52, right, so he's of a little bit different generation even from me, like as far as, like I remember my first gaming system, when we were kids, I had to be nice to my brother for a year, a whole year, we called each other dear, and then my mom bought us an Atari 800. The best thing out. … You know, you remember these things. I don't think he has moments like that that he can remember." As noted in Chapter 3, childhood experience with ludic technologies can shape the degree to which a parent feels tech savvy with games and play, which in turn shapes their modes of domestic policy and the relative degree of autonomy these activities allow.

For the most part the question of generational difference and conflict intersected with and reified the association of masculinity with technological proficiency. Different levels of tech savviness were often linked to notions of generational difference where a lack of understanding was attributed to differences in age or cohort. This can be understood as a remnant of the early experiences of parents in relation to games, as the correlation of masculine expertise and digital games is deeply dependent on the timing of the domestication of digital games in the lives of these parents. In today's environment of the re-domestication of digital games, these technologies are marked by associations with hegemonic masculinity, despite the universality of game play. However, this was not necessarily the case when these parents were first introduced to this technology. For parents that do not play, their interactions with video games were limited to their children's uptake of them, and to broader discourses about good parenting and potentially risky digital play.

The generation of people in the domestic realm can impact their later consumption of technology as their early experiences in life shaped their tastes and orientations. This is why the field of domestication research emphasizes the consideration of not only youth and technology but also encounters with technology as people reach adulthood, move from the parental home, form partnerships and families, reach middle age, and enter retirement. "The social context in which different cohorts have grown up and passed through during their life course help to shape their habits and routines, their values and tastes – and hence their very perception of what different technologies can offer" (Haddon 2004, 129). When parents were less comfortable with video games, perhaps because of their generation's vision of ludic technologies, they were less likely to engage in active or reflexive practices of regulation and limiting their child's autonomy. Generational difference also served to reinscribe a particular vision of what the gamer subject looks like as articulated by the father in Family I:

> We're in the turnaround generation, whereas parents like myself, computers were coming out when I was growing up. … So we were being introduced to it growing up but not as many of us worked on them or worked with them or got used to using computers whereas the kids these days are … learning Internet and how to use the Internet and how to use the computers in elementary school. They've got computer lab where, a computer lab when I was going to school was like a bunch of geeks, well, not geeks, but there was only a small group of like a small computer room and the computer was the size of a classroom basically.

In the next section I will explore how domestic policy is informed not only by social expectations about keeping up with other families and parental tech savvy related to ludic technologies but also by the spectre of the

problem gamer subject. This figure serves to represent the worst excesses of digital game play for tech savvy and less proficient parents alike and was mobilized to legitimize domestic policies, parenting practices, and game play activities around the domestication of the video game.

PARENTING AND PLAYING IN THE SHADOW OF THE PROBLEM GAMER

Within this group of participants, play was regulated differently, not only across households but also within specific domestic environments. Those children whose use was problematized as beyond the ideal balanced or moderate media diet parents emphasized were often subject to different forms of regulation than their siblings. This was exemplified by the fathers in Family E and J who both evoked not only the rhetoric of nutrition and moderation, referring to a balanced media diet, and also to the spectre of "that guy" (Bergstrom, Fisher, & Jenson 2011): the isolated, antisocial, sunshine-deprived problem gamer. The father in Family J was adamant that though both children play digital games, neither of them were gamers of the problematic sort: "My son is not like, waking up first thing in the morning and going to his video game and falling asleep with his video game on his chest, you know. He doesn't do that." The notion of balance was very important to parents setting rules for activities they themselves enjoy, as they spoke to the necessity of leisure time, technology, and entertainment in their children's lives, but they did not want to give the impression of having a maladjusted child or indeed of being maladjusted themselves.

Special regulation and the spectre of problem gaming became particularly evident in families with siblings. The mother in Family F told me: "[The rules are] different for each because it doesn't seem to matter to her. She's not that interested. He is an addicted personality as far as anything with a screen goes. So that's why he can only play on the weekends." While limiting weekday play and hours of time of the computer was a common practice, particularly with children who were identified as having an unhealthy, unbalanced relationship to digital games, often these rules were fluid depending on things like the weather, other family plans, and specific consoles and games. The mother from Family F articulated the different rules for the Wii and the other consoles: "No Xbox or PlayStation or computer games during the week, during the school week, obviously. … They can pretty much play on the Wii. We'll let them do that because it's social, interactive and it's not just mind-numbing violence." This differential regulation for the Wii was interesting, as it was motivated by successful marketing that framed Wii play as more social and physical, less violent, and overall a more productive, useful, and beneficial video game console, a positioning that in turn neutralized the riskiness of digital game play and allowed for its use when other video games

were limited. Wii play was positioned in opposition to ludic technologies linked to the practices of the problem gamer, specifically more isolated, solitary, and stationary play.

Too much time spent with ludic technologies, straying into the realm of the problem gamer, was overall an important spectre in the regulation of play and figured significantly in the question of balance and necessity. The mother in Family D noted the pressure of balancing social necessity with the problem gamer position: "To some extent I think that he needs to be using to be at the same level as everybody else at least. Whether it's with games or the computer or the Internet or whatever. But certainly he's doing a lot more than he needs to be for that." For this reason, time-limiting was a form of active and flexible regulation that hinged on notions of balance that were more explicitly linked to problem gaming. While for some families, there were firm rules legislating time spent on the screen, for others they were fluid, depending on the parent's stance on the importance of tech savvy and the best way to ensure that use of ludic technologies did not encroach too far into the realm of problem gaming.

This was exemplified by two tech savvy fathers. For instance, the father in Family E's approach to time-limiting was contingent on a variety of factors: "I don't say they're allowed an hour a day but I'll kind of see what's going on. Like if it's a Saturday morning and I know they get up around eight, by 10:30 I say, 'OK time to get off, go do something else'. It's a nice day, you know, get off, go outside. I won't let them sit there for a whole day playing computer." Such flexibility on time limits was mirrored by the father in Family J who thought his son had a good ratio of time spent both with his game devices and away from the screen, though for him this was not about hard and fast time constraints. Instead it was about the given day, the weather, whether money had been spent on a game rental, and how much time his son spent playing the previous day.

As I have demonstrated, technologically inclined parents were more likely to emphasize practices allowing for autonomy. They were also, however, inclined to focus on rationalizing and justifying game practices for their own use of these devices, tying ludic pleasures to more "useful" pursuits. The father in Family J, for instance, made sure to emphasize to me that technologies like his PlayStation 3, his iPhone, and his computer, all of which he uses for digital play, were multipurpose. Therefore, he assured me, he was just as likely to be browsing CNN as he was to be playing video games on any of these machines. He also underscored the importance of exposing young people to a range of technologies including video games because of the purported cultural inevitability of digitization. Rather than outright limiting the use of these technologies, time limits were seen as a method of curbing the worst excesses of screen time, particularly in terms of young people who are seen as unable to control their own use. The tech savvy mother in Family C articulated this: "We've had to control our daughter's access because she would be on there all the time. And we'd have fights over homework and

so … she doesn't normally go on during the week. She's allowed on on the weekends."

The problem gamer as a figure to regulate against and to compare with the healthiness, balance, and moderation of one's practices was an important disciplinary tool for the articulation and enactment of good parenting practices in relation to ludic technologies. In the next section, I will explore how this figure, along with the emphasis on balance and generational difference and conflict, was also central to children's activities of subversion and conformity.

SUBVERSION AND COMPLIANCE: CHILDREN, RHETORIC, AND VIDEO GAMES

It was not only parental behaviour that shifted around the consumption of and expectations related to potentially risky networked technologies such as video games. While parents actively set parameters limiting use, children also took an active role in shaping the conditions of their childhood activities through their play, media use, and practices of everyday life, sometimes resisting regulation and at other times exhibiting not only obedience but also buttressing and echoing the discourses of hope, fear, and necessity related to digital play. Haddon (2004) found children tend to react to monitoring as an invasion of privacy, employing a range of tactics for evading control and outwitting their parents where possible, which can lead to an atmosphere of distrust in the home. Within my study, this was displayed at moments with young people engaging in some practices of resistance. The teenaged daughter in Family C, for instance, said: "I'm not allowed on during the week, so I go on on the weekend. But, yeah, sometimes I go on, like just after school if there's no one home and the computer's not locked." When I visited her home for the interview, she even took the opportunity afforded by me interviewing her mother to jump on the computer even though it was a weekday afternoon, a tactic that did not go unnoticed by her mother. The teenage son in Family D also found ways to circumvent the rules in his household by taking up the options available at other homes: "Up until I was ten, my mom wouldn't let a single video game console apart from the computer in the house, so I'd just sneak over to my friends' houses to play video games." In a time-honoured tradition, this teen capitalized on the availability of forbidden games in the homes of other, earlier adopters.

For the most part, subverting domestic policy entailed seizing on the possibilities offered by the gaps inherent within soft controls, which I use to refer to more flexible forms of regulation including time-limiting and monitoring. It also entails mobilizing technological proficiency to override hard controls. Aside from sneaking on and gaining access at less restrictive homes, young people also employed the negotiating tactic of nagging for "just ten more minutes", which several parents mentioned. The only child

I interviewed who talked about being able to subvert the use of hard controls was the teen son of Family A, who self-identified as a budding hacker and who sought to evade the limitations on the computers at his school: "I've been trying different ways to get around the system. Like, at school they have passwords on all the stuff, and they have proxy server … For a long time I've been trying to figure out ways around that. And I have, and then I haven't." Because his parents emphasized autonomy and trust-building activities in their home, he did not have to focus his technological mastery on his personal devices and so he identified the challenges at the level of the school, including blocks on YouTube. Through these articulations of rebellion at the level of software and code, this teenaged boy demonstrated a key problem with the use of software and hardware controls is that young people can, and do, find ways around them.

I was not surprised to find in my interviews with these children and teenagers that they wanted to talk about ways they resisted rules and regulations. These strategies are not necessarily unique to video games or computers and even parents acknowledged these tactics were similar to those they engaged in when they were themselves young and tried to gain access to forbidden materials. The father of four sons in Family I laughed about this: "These guys, well, they don't understand that I am the youngest of four boys and my brothers and I felt we've just about done anything and everything you could think of that could get you in trouble or try to get around things." Rebellion was not a surprise. More interesting was how young people also referred to the discourses of fear and hope regarding video games and new media and how they in turn engaged in their own practices of self-regulation.

Younger children (those aged eight and nine) all mentioned the domestic policies of their home without any statement of their justice or unfairness. The young son in Family D told me he never stops playing, which his mother agreed was a challenge in their home, but these kinds of negotiation should be differentiated from subversion. There were children, both young and adolescent, who not only followed their parents' rules regarding restricted games but also ventriloquized the familial rhetoric around these regulations. The young daughter of Family F stated: "I'm stuck on the Xbox with two games that I'm allowed to play. The other games are all my brother's and they're inappropriate for me." Her brother also echoed his mother's language on acceptable play, not only in terms of the exact rule set his mother described but also telling me he does not play video games during the week "because that's school time. I have to do school stuff." Young people not only mobilized the language of rules (such as "inappropriate" and "school time") but through their discourse sanctioned the neoliberal logic of self-regulating a balanced set of productive activities. The teenaged son in Family J, for instance, by his own admission and his father's was a very deferential teenager. His status as a good kid was hinged on his high degree of self-regulation and self-discipline, as shown in his admission to me: "I have to go to bed at ten but I always listen … and go to sleep because I get up

early." This young person also described his computer use in instrumental terms, as he used it as a tool for research and writing, and his father told me that though his son knows the parental-control code on the PlayStation, he always asked his father for permission to use it to play first-person shooters.

While some children expressed enjoyment of gory, violent, and otherwise offensive games, others decided of their own volition not to play the kinds of violent genres parents reviled. The teenage son in Family F who was framed as the prototypical problem gamer within his family and the neighbour's told me: "*Heavy Rain* and *Condemned 2: Criminal Origins* are games I cannot play. I played them and they literally sickened me and I just turned them off and played a different game, a more fun game." In this way, this teenager reinforced his mother's heavy controls on access to mature games through his own assessment of some games as simply too violent to be enjoyable. Other children spoke to the figure of the problem gamer interpellated in discussions of video game violence with contradictory emotions about the rhetoric of causal effects. The teenaged son of Family A, a self-professed connoisseur of violent games, said: "I agree, but I don't at the same time. It's like people will tell me like, 'Oh don't play so many violent video games, you're just gonna be an angry child all the time.' But do I really seem that angry? Honestly. Like the way that I see it, it's also a form of like stress relief. Like if you're really angry, go play the game, kill, beat the crap out of a whole bunch of people, you'll feel better." Some young people, such as the son in Family I, agreed with the stance that the media coverage was overblown: "That's probably just a vague connection that news people tried to show us to show that video games are very violent, we should get rid of them. It could have just been their own anger at something else as much as a video game. … Pretty much all my friends play video games and none of them are violent. They like talking about the games but none of them are violent or cause fights or anything like that." For this teen, his own interest and those of his close peer group belie the direct-effects rhetoric related to video game play, despite the fact he finds his younger brother's play of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* somewhat problematic as he is "excitable".

As with the tech savvy parents above, the older youth in this study were attuned to the problem gamer subject-position and sought to frame their play in opposition to that figure. The son in Family E was very concerned I did not see him as this kind of player, asserting both a high degree of skills and proficiency while at the same time distancing himself from the "nerdcore", by which he meant a type of player with an undesirable degree of expertise or passion, the type of player he describes as: "I live with my mom and sleep in the basement." This teen was fluent in gamer terminology and slang, and rationalized his abilities based on points and scores, but he talked about game play excellence as not something to be desired: "When I got really addicted to the first *Modern Warfare*, I was averaging about twenty kills a game which is kind of sad. … Because then everyone goes, 'Wow, I wonder how much time this guy has on his hands'." For young

game players, then, self-regulation was often premised on ventriloquizing parental discourse, especially that of moderation. This was at times tied to the necessity of balancing game play with other activities and resisting the problem gamer positioning.

Youth engaged in tactics of rebellion as well as conformance, and within families these tended to be negotiated dynamically, depending on the child, the game, the technology, and the family's circumstances. Furthermore, young people experienced social regulation particularly in terms of being identified as nerds or other socially unacceptable labels. The son in Family A summed this up best in his insistence on social play: "Sometimes I'll play video games alone, but mainly only on weekends. Cuz that's just when I really have nothing to do. But if I'm playing during the week, I won't play, because then I just feel like I have no life. Cuz I get really really good. … Everyone gonna be like 'You're a nerd, you just play all the time'." The teen son in Family H was equally concerned with his social status and echoed this in talking about his mother's restrictions: "She isn't keen on the idea of buying me consoles, which I'm not too keen on it either because I have friends who have consoles and I can go over and play at their house. I've got a Windows 7 PC which runs most PC games and also it's a PC which I think is much more useful than any console." The son in Family J also evoked the image of the socially maladjusted gamer, saying: "Some friends are better than me because they are very into video games and they don't like to go outside and play." For these teenage boys, despite their play of digital games, being social, having varied interests, and getting outside tempered the less desirable implications of fully adopting the gamer subjectivity. They were regulated by social imperatives regarding their identities as much as their parents. They all cited the spectre of the stereotypically isolated, socially inept hardcore player and placed themselves in opposition to that subject-position. As one says: "These people have no lives, that is all they do, they live in Texas, they play video games, and they have their parents bring them nachos and pizza every day. That's it. The only insult they ever have is calling me a fag. All the time."

The gamer subject, discursively configured, is something young game players negotiated just as much if not more than the domestic policies enacted based on the understood practices of good parenting. However, some of these young people supported their parents' enactments of domestic policy, describing it as fair, sensible, and necessary. The teen daughter in Family C, for instance, distinguished between protective and overprotective measures, agreeing with her mother's rules and monitoring and the rationale of "just making sure I'm not doing anything that I shouldn't be". In this way the children of these families also spoke to the differences between autonomy-building regulations and heteronomous types of policing through the language of trust. As the son in Family E said of his father: "He trusts me. I don't think he's really that worried about me going crazy over a game." Young people echoed the logic their parents articulated about domestic

policy, reflecting the dominant discourses speaking to the need for parents to establish a balanced media diet in the household in order to support the development of productive citizens.

REGULATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAY IN THE NEOLIBERAL RISK SOCIETY

The Rhetoric of Risk And Responsibility

The discourses that parents in this study referenced produce influential systems of meaning about boyhood, girlhood, and youth culture, as well as adulthood and proper practices of parenting. I argue it is the conditions of the neoliberal risk context that make these discourses possible as they contribute in their own ways to the creation and reproduction of the neoliberal subject. In terms of digital play, in particular, political responsibility is limited to indicating the risks inherent in youth video game play and then to charge families with their policing. Within this double move, of governmental distancing and the indication of risky behaviours, two related neoliberal risk subject-positions are created: the parent charged with protection, prevention, and productive cultivation of the child as well as the child as at risk in his or her potential criminality or victimization. This was illustrated in the lawsuits filed against Rockstar Games, publisher of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise. The attorney at the centre of one video game violence controversy, in which an eighteen-year-old boy shot three men in a police station, stated: "What we are saying is that [the shooter] was, in effect, trained to do what he did. He was given a murder simulator" (quoted in Leung 2005, np). The language of risk is firmly ingrained in reports on this event. When questioned about the youths who do not kill after hours of playing these "murder simulators", child psychologist David Walsh contends: "It's a combination of risk factors, which come together in a tragic outcome" (quoted in Leung 2005, np). Devin Moore becomes an example of the worst possible outcomes of an improperly regulated young video game player. His identity, actions, and history are decontextualized and flattened into a series of high-risk indicators such as adolescence, troubled upbringing, and emotional stress. These discourses, and the emphasis on risk, indicate their productive role within the broader trends of the neoliberal risk society even if parents reject the most extreme moral panics problematizing digital play.

According to Beck (1992), technology is central to the risk society, characterized by the move from questioning the deployment of technologies to questioning how to politically and economically manage the potential and actual risks of technologies. The positioning of risk has moved from the uncertain possibility of natural threats to statistically calculable and thus potentially manageable human-made threats. The risk society is bound up in emerging areas of knowledge, including the calculation of probability

through statistics (Hacking 1990), the assessment of populations, and the likelihood of events based on risk factors managed through a variety of precautionary and preventative measures (Castel 1991). Risks are an unintended consequence of modernity, characterized by industrialization and advanced capitalism as well as the institutions of surveillance and the promise of human progress through rational action. What accompanies this shift from the unpredictable to the calculable is an amplified process of individualization (Giddens 1991). Individualization refers to the declining importance of social distinctions, particularly of social class, as the factors shaping people's lives become increasingly untethered from traditional living, undermining the norms and values that had previously defined the routines of everyday life. While this implies people have the freedom to select between different ways of living, individualization is not emancipation. It refers instead to the processes of institutionalization and standardization increasingly characterizing and regulating ways of life, with life paths shaped less by birth, family, or community than increasingly by institutions such as schools. Furthermore, though individualization means we have greater choice, implicated in these increased options is the risk of making a mistake (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). To put it simply, making more choices means individuals must weigh more risks. Furthermore, the locus of risk management with individualization shifts from the responsibility of the nation-state to the individual level (Beck 1992). Hence subjects of the risk society are tasked with managing their health, evaluating the risks of their movements, and regulating their well-being in every choice they make.

This downloading of responsibility of risk management to the individual level is a key feature of neoliberalism. Variously framed as a prominent and hegemonic global political philosophy, a political force in people's lives, an ideology, a project, and a rationality, neoliberalism at its core values individual human freedom and to this end seeks to facilitate the accumulation of capital through free-market principles (Braedley & Luxton 2010). There is an important relationship between this political philosophy and everyday life as neoliberal policy shapes and reshapes people's daily lives. Neoliberal proponents believe freedom and the promotion of the growth of wealth allow individuals to pursue wealth and other desires (Harvey 2005). What is new about neoliberalism is how the logic of a free market is brought to bear on not only economics but all dimensions of social life, with the family acting as a key unit therein (Duggan 2003). Neoliberalism is not simply a matter of the vagaries of the market. It penetrates social relations, impacting how social benefits are distributed and, through this, reifying and challenging social stratifications related to gender, race, and class. In this neoliberal organization of society, according to Braedley and Luxton (2010), the logic of the free market influences not only how people live their lives but how they understand their selfhood.

Neoliberalism as a sociocultural logic is in particular tied to a masculine politics of meritocracy and competition (Connell 2010). The problem with

these neoliberal values is they emphasize that individuals make choices but do not account for how these choices are structurally limited by conditions beyond the making of individuals, oppressive and exclusionary systems that benefit elite groups in power. Within neoliberalism, there is no acknowledgment of how some benefit from the dominant social order and how others, particularly racialized and gendered groups, face greater inequalities in this mode of regulation and how it shapes people's living conditions, such as their access to leisure, education, employment, and social participation opportunities (Braedley & Luxton 2010).

Risk technologies are centrally important to neoliberal forms of governance, as risk is a key consideration in the production of neoliberalism's enterprising subject. Neoliberal subjects are expected to embrace risk in every aspect of their lives, from financial markets to extreme sports, and manage it effectively, as "neoliberalism imagines a rational, calculative, and responsible subject who takes into his hands the daily management of the multiple uncertainties he faces" (Côté-Boucher 2010, 42). In its emphasis on individual agency, neoliberalism masks relations of social difference and systemic inequalities at the level of discourse, often through the rhetoric of equal rights and political correctness, while maintaining and often intensifying them in practice. In the neoliberal context, risk is articulated largely through moral panics and fear, which serve to mediate anxieties about moral values. As Côté-Boucher (2010) notes: "The problematization of anxiety by invocation of risks constitutes an important tool for the moralization of everyday life" (p. 44). As I will review below, this is particularly pronounced in relation to youth and the domestication of digital games in the home.

Young Game Players in the Risk Society

In the shift from community-shaped everyday life to decision-making on the part of individuals implied in this new form of modernity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002), the figure of the child and the institution of childhood are implicated in important ways. In Western thinking, risk anxiety focuses on the threats of violent play, stranger danger, cyberbullying, and adult content, among others. Livingstone (2009) argues anxiety over risks to children serves to maintain the boundaries of the construction of childhood itself. The inflamed moral panics related to children's use of new media, in particular ludic technologies, expand discourses of both parental anxiety and children's vulnerability, specifically linking the range of choices available in digital culture to the risks inherent in poor parental choices. Young people growing up in this risk society experience a tension between the amplified individualization of childhood, wherein they are expected to begin working on Giddens's project of the self from a very early age, and the increased regulation and risk management parents are expected to perform around their upbringing. Increasingly, the length of the period of youth is extended as young people find themselves caught in between a series of

cultural shifts with often contradictory effects – for example, rising tuition and costs of living alongside expectations about vocational training through unpaid labour – positioned between narratives of opportunity and choice as well as discourses of crisis and risk (Livingstone 2009).

In terms of anxieties and fears over the dangers of game play, the child is a vulnerable figure who circulates in the broader concerns in the shift to the risk society. Overall, Canadian families are placed in the position within the contemporary context of negotiating a society characterized by rapid change and decreased recourse to the wisdom of previous generations, "with parents neither benefiting from the experience of their own childhood nor having the moral right to impose rules and sanctions without democratic consultation" (Livingstone 2009, 7). Because youth practices are framed as representing threats to adult hegemony and established conventions, they must be subject to regulation and surveillance. At the same time, discourse frames young people as persons in their own right rather than people in the making (Livingstone 2009). According to Beck (1992), children face these tensions because they are, in contemporary society, one last remaining source of re-enchantment.

To return to the questions of the risks of unbalanced or unrestricted digital play, research on its risks is presented to parents through a multiplicity of mediated discourses, thereby reinforcing the shift of responsibility. The language of risk is mobilized as researchers "encourage physicians, particularly pediatricians and specialists in adolescent medicine, to ask patients and their parents about their experiences with video games and to actively mediate any potential health risks" (Haninger & Thompson 2004, 865). Epidemiological risk factors allow video game violence to become a population-based risk strategy employed by experts and exerted as expert knowledge within the clinical environment. Parents are charged with self-surveillance as well as with the monitoring of their children. As different sectors transfer responsibility away from themselves and onto each adult member of the population, the risk presented by video games is dispersed over the whole market of game players and a whole population of families, wherein the training potential of video games can unleash risky behaviour in a calculable pattern hypothesized by psychologists and disseminated by policy groups and popular news media. As this occurs, risk categories solidify and a formula for required interventions is prescribed for those responsible for their surveillance: parents. Parents are encouraged to undertake "systematic prediction" (Castel 1991, 288), monitoring and regulating the technology and media consumption of their children.

TYING DOMESTIC POLICY IN A NEOLIBERAL CLIMATE TO GENDERED SUBJECT-POSITIONS

Haddon (2004) notes: "Wider social discourses in general and media coverage in particular can have a role in influencing the reception of

ICTs [information and communications technology]. They help to create interest, even enthusiasm, but they also shape expectations" (150). The discursive frameworks speaking to the particularly masculine culture of and risks inherent in networked video game play – as well as, for instance, the marketing of the Wii console and games with images of the family at play – represent digital play in various, often contradictory ways that inform how parents negotiate the dangers and opportunities of networked ludic technologies within the domestic sphere. These discourses, along with the relegation of risk management to the family, exist in tension with the socially shaped and historically contingent character of the subject-positions and relationships within families. What it means to be a good parent and a good child, as well as conceptions of the ideal expected interactions between mothers and fathers, siblings, and parents and children, are dynamically informed by these material circumstances and cultural shifts.

In this chapter, I highlighted how parents and children negotiate the discourses of opportunity and risk circulating around ludic technologies and how this shapes the regulation of play in the home in a particularly neoliberal manner. Video games perform a significant role in moral panics about youth and in this manner, children's digital play activities become problematic sites of concern, prompting gestures of protection against harm, contradictory notions of the best way for parents to mitigate the risks of technology while harnessing its opportunities, and scepticism of as well as fear over the prevalent rhetoric demonizing ludic technologies. The father in Family I summed up this struggle: "I don't think there's a kid out there that can't figure out a way to get around their parents and do as much as they want on the computer as possible and actually join these things. If you catch them and they see you catching them and they see what you do to stop them from getting on the sites, they're just going to figure out a different way to do it, to get it." Young people in turn self-regulated and resisted restrictions based on their own perspectives on this discursive milieu. Thus the practices of family members within the domestic sphere served to make material the pervasive discourses related to digital play, which then impacted on access to ludic technologies. These practices worked in tandem with broader discourses of good and bad parenting in the neoliberal risk society, generational difference, and the socially unacceptable nature of being a particularly problematic type of gamer, with tech savvy directly impacting on how controlling these domestic policies were.

These domestic policies are shaped by the construction of young people on the frontiers of technological adoption as simultaneously endangered and dangerous to the social order. As with other technologies and entertainment forms, digital games in the domestic sphere were perceived by all parents in this study as an object requiring their mediation just like other networked technologies in order to fend off threats that range from desensitization to violence, cultivation of antisocial or aggressive tendencies,

obesity, and addiction to or obsession with fundamentally unenriching content or screen-based devices. When it comes to the networked nature of these increasingly convergent ludic technologies, the concerns extend to a set of recurring figures, including the predator and the bully, as well as more novel anxieties regarding the implications of performing identity and communicating online, such as peer pressure, sexualized imagery, and loss of privacy. These fears were tied to dominant discourses framing technology use by young people as something inherently different from the practices of adults, a strong rhetoric of generational difference founded on the logic that parents and children are always at odds when it comes to their communicative, social, leisure, and play activities, interests, and priorities. This is not only articulated in parenting discourses but also in how the child consumer is appealed to through us vs. them rhetoric hinged on notions of generational difference (Banet-Weiser 2007). It then in turn acted as an explanatory device for differences not only in activities but understanding, which then shaped the methods of regulation enacted by parents.

The shape of parental regulations in turn influences the degree of autonomy afforded to children in terms of their use of networked technologies such as digital games. A parent's sense of tech savviness tended to be correlated with their choice of hard or soft controls, which then had an important impact on the child's resulting practices. This is because autonomy and agency are required for any engagements that go beyond simple passive consumption of culture and ideology, such as hacking, modding, and tinkering as well as civic and political engagement, the activities so often highlighted in studies of youth and digital media (Buckingham 2007a, 2007b; Ito et. al. 2008; Kafai & Fields 2009; Livingstone & Haddon 2009; Salen 2007). The young people in my study who did engage in any kind of DIY activities were, without exception, male children of tech savvy fathers or siblings of technologically proficient brothers (or both), emphasizing the need to practice autonomy-building forms of regulation as in Family A, where the son claimed to engage in hacking and other activities on the border between lawful and illegal.

As shown in Chapter 3, the father in this family articulated the stance: "It's impossible to regulate. You can get anything you want. And so what you have to do is work on the kid." Similarly, the teenaged son in Family H emphasized the role of his older brother in shaping his technological development, particularly in terms of cracking software and games. This brother showed him how to pirate software and content when he was thirteen and discussed with him the ethics of downloading, which shaped this teen's approach: "I download music fairly frequently, too. In fact, I just about never pay for music unless it's someone I haven't heard of, someone who isn't popular, and someone who I think could use the money." Regardless of the slippery nature of these ethics, it was interesting that only teenaged males in the study with technologically proficient

mentors in their lives professed to engage in activities on the borderlands of sanctioned consumption. These same participants took on the helping role when it came to those with less tech savvy having technological issues, one way in which masculine expertise is maintained (Williamson & Facer 2004). The son in Family J told me he learned how to configure computer settings when watching his father repair computers as a child. He described his relationship with his mother in very different terms: "She's okay on Internet but she's not going to go into the configurations and change something. She's going to ask me or just leave it like that." The son in Family A also claimed to have taken on a helping role at school, where his performance of expertise was ratified by his teachers: "The school just spent like two thousand, three thousand dollars on a projector and a new laptop and a surround-sound speaker system and a lot of the teachers don't know how to get it to work, so they'll like come get me from class if I'm close and be like 'Hey come help us'." Not one of my female participants, child or adult, described their technological abilities beyond straightforward use and certainly not as the helping expert these boys were. What matters here is not whether these accounts were overstated but that the performance of technological mastery and positioning of oneself as helper were exclusively male.

A consideration of domestic policy and its influences and implications highlights the context of the uneven quality of use and access of video games within the home. The degree to which a parent identifies as tech savvy can influence the extent to which they regulate their child's play using hard controls, which can in turn impact on the child's development of autonomy in their engagements with technology. This is important because, as I show in the next chapter, discursively being a tech savvy subject is constrained in association with intelligible gender norms, with mastery more readily available to masculine subjects. Feminine subjects have to engage directly with the tensions around being normatively female and being tech savvy, which can in turn influence their level of proficiency and impact their domestic policies. While this chapter has focused on the ways family members regulate through discourses of balance, responsibility, and risk, notions of generational difference and the figure of the problem gamer, the chapter that follows considers the subtext behind participants' identification as tech savvy or not. The material-discursive formations reviewed above are (re)produced through domestic policies, informed by and in turn shaping particular subject-positions in relation to digital play, premised on and reinscribing gendered technological subjectivities. While this consideration of domestic policy has indicated some gendered components such as the relationship between generational difference, gender, and tech savvy, as well as the masculine character of the gamer subject, in the next chapter I consider more specifically how forms of disciplining can serve to reify normative visions of masculine participation while challenging the validity of female performance in these realms.

Responsibility for mediation, intervention, and discipline was differently organized between mothers and fathers, hinging on relations between subjects, technologies, and time in the domestic sphere that mirror conceptualizations of technological proficiency as masculine. For this reason, it was fathers who were by and large responsible for setting up systems and administrating permissions and other forms of restriction such as protective software. For the most part, they determined which technologies were purchased – with the notable exception of the Wii, often purchased by mothers and grandmothers – and what games were bought or rented. Mothers, on the other hand, were tasked with disciplining time limits and balancing the media diet that is so central to the construction of a healthy household of well-adjusted and productive children. I will consider how the performance of gendered subject-positions can, alongside practices of monitoring, surveillance, and restriction, limit the ability of females in the home to gain access to the same tools, devices, and activities as their male peers, constraining their ability to develop technological skills, proficiency, and expertise with/in digital play and to fully embody the subject-position of digital game player.

NOTE

1. http://www.netnanny.com/

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5   Regulating Technological Subjects

DISCIPLINING GENDERED PLAY THROUGH DISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, I explored how material practices of domestic policy, the most visible forms of ludic regulation within the home, predominantly serve to reify what prevalent neoliberal discourses say about what the performance of good parenting entails, and how these activities are often hinged on a parent's relative degree of tech savvy and belief in the necessity of ludic technologies in the home. In this chapter, I consider how less overt forms of regulation occur in the perpetuation and reconfiguration of technological subjectivities as they are linked to gendered identities. Domestic policy works in tandem with other regulatory systems. I am referring here to normative material-discursive formations shaping gender: how discourse disciplines certain subject-positions as normal and intelligible and in turn positions others as transgressive. While domestication of the video game stratifies access through a set of parenting strategies enacted in relation to screen-based and networked technologies generally and video games in particular, these actions are deeply informed by gendered relations to hardware and software and to intelligible relationships between proficiency, expertise, masculinity, and femininity.

In this chapter, I focus on several examples related to the disciplining of gender performances, indicating the restrictive character of the subject-positions available within domesticated digital game play. I argue female participants – young game players, self-indentified non-gamers, and their mothers, who themselves may or may not play – negotiated discursive associations linking technological dominion, including mastery of video games, to masculinity. Hence these women and girls in their use of ludic technologies were required to undertake complex negotiations in order to find a way to inhabit subject-positions that did not necessarily align with normative feminine gender performance. I showcase in this chapter the tactics of family members exemplifying some of these negotiations. Furthermore, I link practices of domestic policy to these discourses and negotiations, analyzing how the regulation of digital play can be shaped by gendered notions of expertise over particular areas. For instance, when mothers take on the regulation of structural elements of play, such as time limits, and

fathers take on responsibility of content, such as the purchase of games, they reaffirm a hierarchy of engagement with mothers as administrators and father as experts.

To understand some of the ways in which this might happen, I explore the different modes in which digital play is implicated in the interactions of discourse and practice, enacting particular visions of the relationship between gender and technology in the domestic realm. Video games and their play are implicated in much broader gendered networks of technology that shape and are in turn shaped within the space of the home in conjunction with the prevalent rhetoric explored throughout this book. These include risks and opportunities offered to children through their participation in digital culture as well as deeper cultural codes articulating expected gendered subjectivities and differences in tech savvy. One of the key observations outlined in Chapter 2 is the ongoing work within games and gender studies shows the need to undertake examinations that understand playing games not as an activity solely determined by gendered preferences in either content or mechanics. Instead, play is shaped by an array of influences from content and mechanics to marketing and culture to the player's access, experiences, and expertise (Taylor 2008). In order to gain a sense of how digital games may be gendered in Canadian domestic contexts of play, I consider here the interplay between the material practices of family members and the discursive framing of game play, focusing on the tensions between three crucial and interrelated dichotomies that I indentified within my interviews: feminine and masculine technologies; proficiency and incompetence; and play and work. Through the identity performances of participants, in and around digital play specifically and technology use broadly, I showcase how the material-discursive frameworks constraining gendered engagements with ludic technologies are perpetuated and challenged in the space of these homes, impacting on access and the development of the skill sets required for expertise that have been shown to erase gender differences in degrees of tech savvy (Dholakia 2006), when and if quality time for use of the technology is available.

To gain some understanding of the production of intelligible subject-positions in ludic culture, I begin with a brief introduction to the way gender, identity, and subjectivity are understood in this analysis. I then consider two families with young game-playing daughters in order to discuss how these exemplify in many ways the tensions of gendered subjectivities and tech savvy in the home, particularly in terms of feminine and masculine interests and technologies. I also introduce a few other instances demonstrating the negotiations of notions of proficiency, incompetence, and the tensions between play and labour undertaken in the home. The rhetorical strategies family members undertake indicate the ways in which normatively gendered play subjectivities are negotiated by participants in the domestic sphere and how the deployment of language in particular can act as both a challenge to and reaffirmation of the configuration of technology use as masculine.

CONCEPTUALIZING INTELLIGIBLE SUBJECT-POSITIONS IN THE DOMESTICATION OF DIGITAL GAMES

The analysis of gendered interactions related to digital games here is informed by the conceptualization of gender as a political technology of power. Rather than endorsing visions of innate differences between men and women, located within the "truths" of the body (Laqueur 1990), post-structural gender analysis posits that regulatory gender practices contribute to the constitution of identity as the locus of a subject's psychic coherence (Butler 1988, 1990, 1993). Any expectation of coherence between biology, sex, and desire is not a logical feature of personhood but becomes intelligible as the power order reproduces and prohibits them. This order requires society to renounce some identities as abnormal or deviant in order to maintain the intelligibility of other gender identities such as reproductive, heterosexual married couples (Foucault 1990).

Focusing on the systems that discipline the intelligibility of gendered subjects demonstrates that gender is not a fixed category or a set of natural traits but a performance; "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990, 33). Butler argues gender identity is not optional or free. The performance of normative gender is necessary and undertaken within compulsory systems marked by clear punishments for subjects who do not perform the expected coherent identity. Normative identities are reified through the continuous repetition of intelligible stylized acts and performances around their expression. For Butler, there is no "outside" of power, nowhere for subjects to be free of the expectations of this required coherence in gender identity. The only alternative and route to subversion is to cause gender trouble, actions that require an understanding of the mutual constitution of subjectivity through discourse and culture within the hegemonic system of power. Within her conceptualization, the subject is produced through discourses that reify intelligible performances, and it is the repetition of these acts that perpetuate the notion of coherent identity, concealing and enforcing gender regulation. As this would indicate, regulatory and disciplinary power structures mark both normative, intelligible gender performances and gender performances that may exceed the boundaries of these power structures.

Gender here is understood as relational, constructed on masculinity and femininity alike, and is thus a normative cultural ideal that both male-identified and female-identified subjects are compelled to perform in an intelligible manner. Masculinity like femininity requires rites of passage and enactments that align with its cultural ideology of intelligible gender performance (Connell 2005). As a complement to women's studies, masculinity studies highlight the ways in which the hegemonic discourses and social forces of the normative gender order provide acceptable and problematic definitions of the appropriate ways for boys and men to feel, think,

and behave. They reveal the constructed nature of masculinity, highlighting different and clashing masculinities, including hypermasculinity, that are produced through diverse cultures and institutions. While masculinity is easy to recognize and widely supported and celebrated within our society, it is often difficult to define, especially when it is discussed as something that is not necessarily a product of the male body (Halberstam 1998). One key categorization of masculinity is that of hegemonic masculinity, characterized by performances of aggression, strength, ambition, and autonomy (Connell 2005). Within this construction, the ideal traits of men and women are premised on fundamental differences, as women are the opposite and subordinate of men, better at collaboration than competition, and domestic affairs than career paths requiring ambition, a set of distinctions that are central in discussions of gendered preferences for certain games and proclivities for particular technologies in general.

Rather than understanding identity as a product, it is more apt to think of it as a performance. For Goffman (1959), identity performance is understood theatrically as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [*sic*] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (22). Thus identity is premised on social interactions, which govern the ways individuals take different positions in their encounters with each other. In this conceptualization, people rely on cues, visual or otherwise, to predict the required performances within given situations, from the first day of school to the dinner routines of the home to the social contexts of game play, wherein individuals take on the role of player in relationship to other players (Åresund & Björk 2009). There is a feedback loop in performances as audiences also manage impressions and in this way become performers as well.

This links back to Butler's (1993) conceptualization of performative acts as self-confirming discursive practices that enact what they name. As Butler shows, identities arise in negotiations between individuals and society. Subjects are not, however, simply constrained by discourses about identity. Through their performance of identities, subjects in turn cite cultural norms and performatively produce them. Performances only work when they refer to other actions, making repetition crucial. While performances refer to singular acts, performativity refers to the productive effects of power, wherein the reiteration and citation of identity norms performatively (re)produce them (Butler 1990). These citation practices indicate identity is not static but fragmented, mutually constructed, and fractured across often intersecting discourses, practices, and positions, influenced by major institutions and social groups, such as the school, the peer group, and, of central importance here, the family (Hall 1996). However, though identity performance can be linked to everyday acts such as choosing clothes, which subjects can use to realize subject-positions (Duits 2008), in no way does this indicate autonomy for the production of one's subjectivity, as gender is an effect of discourse rather than the creation of the subject. Through performances of identity a subject either lives up to or queers particular norms.

In sum, identity norms are defined and reified on a continuous basis, and they are also challenged, negotiated, and rejected (Butler 1990). This is clearly demonstrated in digital games culture, as Beavis and Charles (2007) find the girl gamer as a subject is instantly othered in public gaming contexts, through her interpellation in a range of ludic and gendered practices and communities. However, "this combination of interpellations in turn opens opportunities for the girls in our study to fragment and extend the grounds of intelligibility for being a 'girl' gamer" (Beavis & Charles 2007, 695). As this demonstrates, subject-positions are neither fixed nor open but a zone of possibility for negotiations, resistance, and reinscription of intelligible identity norms. In Butler's words: "If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (Butler 1988, 271). For this reason, actions and practices are important objects of study, as it is here the possibilities for resistance lie. Indeed, discourses are rooted in situated practices, particularly in terms of language and images. While there is some flexibility of use in practice, there is a range of powerful constraints also implied within discourse (Potter & Wetherell 1987). As circumstance change, for instance as the video game is domesticated and adopted in varying ways, actors must reinterpret actions, finding new ways to fit into emerging social configurations.

GENDERING TECHNOLOGICAL INTERESTS THROUGH DISCUSSIONS OF EXCEPTIONALISM

Stratifying Mainstream Play

While many participants in this study discussed play loosely as occurring across a range of devices, platforms, and games, this was not the case in every circumstance, particularly when it was young women who took on the gamer subjectivity. It is precisely the tensions expressed by participants, between normative feminine identity and the exceptions to these norms, feminine and masculine technologies, among a variety of other related dichotomous conceptualizations, that I consider here. These clashes and contradictions are significant because they demonstrate how important gender as well as age and generational difference are in shaping play through their use as explanatory tools as well as their impact on access to the time and space for use of ludic technologies.

The young people I interviewed, both male and female, integrated some form of digital play into their lives, including a wide range of genres, from *Webkinz* to *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Many participants were sibling pairs, often brothers and sisters, and for this reason both played many of the same games by circumstance, though some invested their allowances and

part-time work income into game purchases for their exclusive use. Despite the fact that within the everyday context, both girls and boys participated in game play, they were not equally or consistently interpellated as fulfilling the gamer subject-positions by themselves or by others in their family. Indeed, the enactment of ludic competence often fell in line with discursively constituted stereotypes of masculine proficiency and feminine inability. In a number of cases, feminine game play was framed as outside the bounds of normative feminine identity and how it relates to technologies. In these cases biological essentialism as a dominant explanation of appearance, behaviour, and interests was highly influential.

Boy Brains and Tomboys

Within this study, there were a number of daughters who expressed interest in video games, and I want to focus in this section on how the ludic pleasures of two of these girls were discussed by their parents and in contrast to their siblings. Both thirteen-year-old Chloe, the daughter in Family G, and eight-year-old Mackenzie, the daughter in Family E, expressed passion for gaming, and in turn their parents, forty-five-year-old mother Regina and forty-one-year-old Dean, constructed a particular vision of gendered technological subjectivities around girls who game. In both of these cases, the exceptional nature of female play was showcased in comparisons with the interests of the older siblings: Chloe's fifteen-year-old sister Naomi and Mackenzie's twelve-year-old brother Quinn.

In both cases, each daughter's digital play was understood as part of a range of practices that distinguished them from normative feminine gender performance. Chloe's interests, including game play as well as archery, dog-training, and baseball, were explicitly contrasted to the activities of the "normal" child and she was described overall as "a very different duck" by her mother. Specifically, her tech savvy and pleasures in game play were for Regina a deviation from intelligible gender norms, as Regina explained each of Chloe's differences from what she framed as normative feminine gender performance through reference to her daughter's "boy brain", which was positioned in opposition to her sister's "girl brain." For Regina, technology and digital play were inherently part of the masculine domain and she rationalized Chloe's participation with the following logic: "I think there is a gender difference. Chloe tends to play more games, but boys tend to play more games. Chloe has a boy brain." What this demonstrates is the important role of using gender norms linked to notions of biology or nature to explain feminine participation in perceived masculine domains. Within my study, Regina most carefully explained how parenting, along with teaching young children, puts an end to the "nature versus nurture" debate. She detailed for me the futility of subverting genetic hardwiring of gendered behaviours and interests through the example of toys, telling me that though she initially refused the purchase of Barbie dolls, she was unable to combat Naomi's

persistent desire for highly feminine toys. She also provided examples of gendered interests through the children she taught at the pre-kindergarten level, telling me: "I see it at school, too. A lot of the boys will want to get onto the computer, even in JK, even four-year-olds will want to get on the computer, and a lot of the girls won't care. So there's a higher percentage of boys who will want to play anything on the computer." In the work environment of the school, she observed that boys were innately interested computers as well as in things like cars, blocks, and electronic devices like the DSi, DS, and PSP, which provided some of the evidence for the contrast of normative and exceptional interests.

With Family E, Dean also explained his daughter's interests as exceptional to normative feminine performance, in his case through the subject-position of the "tomboy", which Halberstam (1998) depicts as an acceptable temporary identity for some of the gender play of young girls around masculinity before it becomes restricted in the passage to adolescence. Mac's (Mackenzie's) interest in games, which extended from a passion for *Club Penguin* to a zeal for *Halo*, was for Dean simply another example of her innate difference from the feminine norm, expressed also in her appearance. For example, Dean thought she was unlikely to enjoy playing as a female character or avatar because: "It's just not her. You know, if she wears pink, it's pink with pink skulls. Okay, I'll wear that. Pink butterflies? Not touching it." This aligns with Regina's characterization of what it means to have a boy brain, including being generally comfortable and competent with technology, good at math and science, uninterested in clothing, makeup, and hair, and endowed with a good sense of humour. The embodiment of these attributes for Regina was not her husband (who she said was not tech savvy) but her sister Helen, who was the go-to person for advice and expertise on new media and technology in this family – unlike the older brothers who played the role of expert in Families A and H. However, even though there was a feminine role model in Regina's family who was the object of much admiration, tech savviness was still framed as a masculine attribute, and female competencies as exceptional.

Like Regina, Dean linked Mac's participation in digital game play with other performances of non-normative femininity, including tomboyish activities like her playing *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, her BMX biking, her skateboarding, and her proficiency in paintball. He noted also some exceptions to this tomboy performance: "She does the odd little things like, she'll paint her nails some days, right, but she wants to ride her skateboard." For the most part, though, for both Dean and her brother Quinn, Mac's interests were exceptions that reified the norm. As Quinn said: "Mac's just kind of her own little self."

Quinn also emphasized Mac's exceptionalism. He described game play as universal at his school – across the boys. In this account, another female exception was evoked, the class tomboy who played football with the boys, of whom he said: "I wouldn't be surprised if she picked up a controller",

linking participation in sports with digital play and non-normative feminine gender performance. He agreed with his father that playing as a masculine character can act as a deterrent for girls and he therefore designated *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* as a game that might appeal to female players: "I think guys would like her for her appearance, but girls might like her because that means girls can do whatever guys can do kind of thing." For both Dean and Quinn, girls like Mac and the class tomboy are classified as exceptional rather than acting as examples of how the association of masculinity with video games might not be accurate. Furthermore, girls interested in games might need aid in terms of strong female characters with whom they can identify.

Both Regina and Dean supported and encouraged these boy-brain/tomboy activities rather than enacting domestic policies that limited these non-normative hobbies. But while neither parent implemented regulations that restricted their daughters' access to ludic technologies, each made reference to the exceptional nature of these interests and Chloe and Mac's difference from the feminine norm, reifying the concept that interests in video games were transgressive for girls and serving to again associate ludic pleasures and tech savvy with masculinity, suggesting the force of this mythologized relationship in everyday life.

I argue the use of gender as an explanatory tool for talking about technological proficiency serves two purposes. First, the discussion of game play and technology use as gendered highlights how, through discourse within the home, people in everyday life participate in the maintenance of the regulatory power structures that delineate normative and intelligible gender performances (Naomi's "girl brain") and those that do not conform to these (Chloe's "boy brain", Mac's "own little self"). Second, this illuminates the important role played by technology in these performances, showing how in the domestic realm and even beyond, despite the mass adoption of game technologies within mainstream culture including within families, for some there continues to be a clear association between masculinity and digital games and more broadly between masculinity and technological expertise. Both Regina's and Dean's articulations of this relationship were very similar to broader cultural discourses related to masculine expertise and the role of the game console in constituting the subjectivities of men (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter 2009). However, while in some ways the deployment of biological essentialism around gender in these discussions of exceptionalism can be seen as perpetuating this discourse, it is significant that all of these daughters had "pure" access to ludic technologies in their shared spaces and bedrooms.

Masculine and Feminine Technologies

Within Family G, the association of gender and technology was also articulated through the comparison of Chloe and Naomi, and through the construction of some technologies as masculine and others as feminine. As noted

above, Naomi, like her mother, was described as having a "girl brain", a biologically based explanation for proficiency in multitasking, being artistic, invested in one's appearance, and highly social. Regina described her eldest daughter as "all girl, social, online all the time." Despite there being a degree of tech savvy among all the female members of this family, with proficiency differing depending on interests (chat technologies for Naomi, game devices for Chloe, and online searching and participation in fan communities for Regina), there was a distinction being made between social/leisure uses and hardcore practices, explained through natural gender interests and non-normative exceptionalism. Hardcore tech use was embodied in Chloe's digital play and in Helen's ability to fix both software and hardware problems. Generally, Helen was seen as being immersed in technology and very proficient with it, because she used a range of new media and technologies in her everyday life. However, Naomi's attachment to her cell phone – she was described as keeping it by her side during all other activities, including television viewing, and on her pillow as she slept – was framed as aligning with naturally feminine interests in socializing rather than technophilia. Regina emphasized the social dimension of the device rather than the technological, and framed Naomi's constant texting as a ubiquitous practice common among all teen girls. These social practices were offset with Chloe's lack of interest in social technologies: "Chloe isn't on Facebook and MSN because Chloe is not very social." Whereas use of video games is linked to exceptionalism, the cell phone is a technology of social interaction and thus a normatively feminine technology, inscribing not only a relationship of fixed, innate difference between boys and girls but between masculine and feminine technologies.

What is striking here is how different uses of and interests in technology within Family G were not discussed as a matter of different kinds of tech savvy but again through the language of the boy brain and the girl brain. This exhibits the enduring association of many technologies with masculinity and the importance of using gender as an explanatory tool to discuss moments when this relationship is challenged. As noted above, proficiency or comfort with technological devices as exemplified by Regina's sister and her daughter does not trouble this association but instead, highlights their exceptional nature and affirms the technologies they use as masculine. While constructions of the boy brain and the tomboy implicitly understand gender as biologically engrained, with certain abilities, interests, preferences, and desires framed as inherently masculine or feminine, the fixing of video games and cell phones as a component of this indicates the centrality of technology to these constructions of gendered subject-positions.

Dean also articulated a gendering of technology through a notion of age-based difference. When questioned on the relationship between games and gender, Dean argued ludic toys are gendered when children are younger but this was not the case with games aimed at older audiences. Instead, these grown-up games were explicitly targeted at boys: "Those games for girls are gone by the time the girl is like five or six years old. So all the

games now are based around guys." For Dean this was exemplified by the predominance of male characters in games, which he saw as a reason for girls to stop being interested. Even then, in games with female options for play such as his preferred role-playing games, "it is still, basically, a boy's game." Once again, ludic technologies are construed as masculine, which is why Mac's interest in games was exceptional, as she still played despite the male characters and boyish essence of video games: "Now, with her, she's more tomboyish anyway, so I don't think she would purposely select a female character. ... She likes playing. I think maybe for her, it's the way it is. If I want to play *Halo*, that's who I play as." There is thus an important linkage between the coding of some technologies as masculine and of some uses as exceptional.

Denigrating Proficiency

Aside from the outright categorization of certain activities and technologies as masculine or feminine, participants in the study also disciplined technological subjectivities through rhetorical strategies wherein they applied qualifiers to their own technological skills or the skills of others by making them invisible, by denigrating them, or by challenging their validity. In these cases, we can see some female participants did have basic physical access to ludic technologies in the home but their proficiency with these consoles or systems was then challenged, reinscribing notions of deviance in relation to feminine use and, as a result, a lack of intelligibility in the relationship between femininity and technological mastery.

One moment where participants implicitly described feminine participation in ways that diminished its significance was in the case of Family E. Throughout his interview, Dean largely referred to Mac and Quinn in similar terms, and he told me he distinguishes between them not according to gender but to age. He said both of his children were technologically competent and supported this by describing how Mac navigates *Club Penguin* without guidance and set up her own MSN account and could locate new game sites without his assistance. However, later in the interview he described Quinn's interest in circumnavigating system constraints and setting up networks between his computer and that of a friend. When I asked if Mac was similarly able to tinker with the system tools, he was more dismissive of her abilities: "She would stay out of the Windows control panels and that kind of thing, she wouldn't even go into that. But stuff that, you know, is *accessible to anybody* (my emphasis), like setting up an MSN account, Hotmail account, she's quite comfortable doing that, no problem at all." Mac's abilities were downplayed, rhetorically linking her abilities to those of the masses, those who need simple, user-friendly interfaces to mediate between themselves and underlying mechanics or systems. In the same breath, however, Dean moved away from any notion of gendered difference and said it was a matter of age difference, classifying the activities

of Mac and Quinn as similar: "It's pretty much the same stuff. Except Mac does *Club Penguin*, she was right into the *Webkinz*." This distinction proved somewhat fallacious, as Quinn admitted to still playing *Club Penguin* at times through a shared account with Mac.

Family E was one of the few exceptions in this study in that they did not own a Wii console. Unlike Family H, it was not a matter of spurning game systems. There were a number of consoles in this household but Dean actively rejected Nintendo systems: "The Nintendo has always been more of a kids-oriented system whereas the original Xbox had *Halo*, it had *Call of Duty*, *Grand Theft Auto*, which I never played, but just had more grown-up games." Dean in his own terms reinscribed the hierarchy between casual and hardcore games through the language of kid and grown-up games and systems, inverting the unique selling point of Nintendo's marketing, first targeting children with "The Nintendo Generation" and then families with the Wii, and dismissing this play as "childish" and "cartoony." As we saw previously, Dean rejected most of the typical parenting logic regarding technology, including the marketing towards family play. Another example of this is how, rather than limiting his children's play based on ratings, Dean determined the appropriateness of games based on his own philosophy regarding how real-world the violence might be: "There are games I wouldn't let them play, right? Like I don't have a problem with them playing *Modern Warfare*, it's a mature-rated game, but *Grand Theft Auto*, I wouldn't. I just don't like the concept of that game." Both Mac and Quinn played a range of games on the Xbox 360, and specifically they enjoyed first-person shooters such as *Halo* because "they are games they can play with their friends." Despite his initial comments about Mac's non-normative gender performance, Dean tended to qualify the abilities of children based on their age rather than gender. For instance, he preferred to play role-playing games, which he saw as beyond the skill level of either Mac or Quinn: "Because they're the long, story-driven games. Where you can't go around blasting stuff. You know, you gotta get into the story, the quests, the dialogue with the in-game characters, and that sort of thing. They're just not at that level yet. They found it slow." Dean often referred to not only game play but technological practices broadly in terms of a hierarchy. For example, he prioritized game play not because it is overtly educational per se but because: "Games are a way to be comfortable with technology. You know, you can't sit there and do spreadsheets all day. So you need to be comfortable on computers or just using that stuff. Games drive computer technology. You don't need dual core processors and graphics chips and all that to run spreadsheets. So computers are driven by the game demands. So if you're comfortable at that level, you're comfortable with doing the lower stuff, too." Here Dean affirmed a hierarchy of not only technologies but also abilities. This tended to resemble the well-trodden distinction between consumption and production, a binary that often accompanies distinctions between female and male use (Shade 2002).

The desire to follow Dean's example is of particular importance in this single-parent household as Quinn and Mac's mother was not at that time a fixture in the household and was described by Dean as never having been proficient in technologies: "She was, for a university graduate, very technically illiterate. Even programs like running Word, I mean, I don't expect her to do the network. I set the network up at home and all this stuff, but even her stuff, like she'd have problems running Word." It was interesting he had no expectation of her undertaking set-up as he assumed he would be responsible for both software and hardware configuration. Furthermore, Dean's ex-wife's lack of ability was a problem for him. He emphasized the importance of technology in contemporary society and not just any technology but what he categorized as higher-level programs and devices (in his denigration of Word software, spreadsheets, etc.). He summed this up as: "Experience is everything. Experience is sort of that familiarity, being comfortable …," pointing to tech savvy, which he posited required computer training in the home and not exclusively in the school, adding a class dimension to his analysis[1].

Mac, in contrast, lamented not owning a Wii and told me the reason they did not own one is because "they're all sold out. … They don't make them anymore," a justification her father had given her. In line with Pearce's (2008) observation about the leapfrog effect of play occurring between grandparents and grandchildren rather than among parents and children, Mac enjoyed access to the Wii at her grandmother's home and was enthusiastic about playing the sports games in particular. Mac, like her father, coded her participation in video games as non-normative as she classified harder games and shooting games for boys and violence as something "most girls" would dislike. For her, *Club Penguin* was a non-gender-specific game and instead cited hyperfeminine activities as girl games such as websites for "making your own supermodel." She and her brother often had disagreements about play, which they both told me was a matter of Mac's lack of aptitude: "It's because I suck at the games he plays. … I like to play [*Modern Warfare 2*] but I always want him to be on my team so we'll be good at it but he never will be on my team." Quinn was very reluctant to mentor Mac in the style of the older brothers in Family A and H, and instead he trolled her in the game, which eventually led to Mac getting frustrated and giving up on play. While Quinn felt his sister was exceptional in her desire to play, her proficiency was still not adequate: "Yeah, she sucks. I don't want to be held back, you know." He was also concerned her play might damage his reputation online as any poor play would be reflected on his gamer tag. For this teenaged boy, game play was understood in a hardcore fashion about playing assiduously until completion, with a preference for "fighting games, like blood, gore everywhere." Sibling play was not something he enjoyed, though Mac desired this. He mirrored his father in disdaining the Wii because most of its titles were limited to sports games and the controls for playing his preferred genre of FPS games like *Call of Duty* were "stupid."

We thus see the many ways in which particular kinds of players and play styles and interests can be denigrated as lesser, child-like, or insufficient.

Self-assessments of Game Play Activities

These constructions of exceptional interests, masculine and feminine technologies, and denigrated abilities sometimes operate in tension with the performances of the daughters themselves in terms of their digital play desires. Though her interests and technologies were coded as masculine, Chloe's favourite games were often those explicitly targeted to a young female market or the most broad demographic of possible players, including *Petz, The Sims 3, Wii Fit, Wii Resort,* and *Super Mario Kart.* Chloe played the online games that parents in this study often cited as the safe and sanctioned walled gardens of children's digital play, including *Club Penguin*, *Webkinz*, and *Neopets*. Her game technologies were those most likely to be coded as outside the bounds of hardcore play: games on the Wii, the DSi, and the iPod Touch. Though these games were targeted at female gamers or premised on neutral design mechanics, Regina framed them as masculine because of their kinaesthetic engagements: "Her games are actually more physically, like, boyish," a reference to Chloe's sword-fighting, flying airplanes, tennis and bowling activities in *Wii Sports*, framing, as Quinn did above, sports as another masculine activity.

Though Regina talked about her behaviour, proclivities, and interests as masculine and highly technological, Chloe did not understand herself or her activities as such. Although she displayed ease in playing several different genres, downloading free game apps, learning the controls of games through trial and error, and discussing the merits of certain games over others, Chloe was reluctant to define herself not only as a gamer but as tech savvy at all. She framed herself instead as a late adopter, noting it was odd she was the first of her friends to get an iPod Touch because: "I'm usually not the first one to get anything." She was not interested in a wide range of technologies like her aunt, noting in particular no great fascination with the computer, but did emphasize she enjoyed playing games on her three devices. She used to play more games on the computer, including *Barbie* flash games on the Mattel website, *Webkinz*, and *RuneScape*, but said these games did not have an enduring appeal for her. She was much more animated when it came to the Wii, which she chose and saved up for based not on the games available but because of its accessibility and openness: "It really just seemed like a family thing. The whole family could do it. It was fun." Despite her visions of the family coming together for play, she told me that for the most part, she played on it in a largely solitary fashion.

Chloe's lack of sociality in her technology use appeared to have more to do with the restrictions or limitations of the social utilities at her disposal. For instance, she told me most of her friends no longer come online on MSN, Facebook was not very active any more, and when she played games

online, she found it difficult to make friends in virtual worlds because of the constraints of safe chat that did not allow for easy conversation. Her sociality was related to offline, non-networked play activities, particularly in terms of going over to her friends' houses to play Wii or PS3. Her play of the Wii was solitary because her family was not particularly interested in joining in game play on a frequent basis. At no point did she code her activities or preferred technologies as either masculine or feminine, nor did she articulate a sense of being exceptional.

Chloe did, however, understand there to be a gendered component to some ludic devices. For example, she told me she had she tried some games on the PlayStation 3 at another girl's house but she found the number of buttons on the controller overwhelming and became discouraged. She attributed this difference to experience, telling me she thought she would likely have been comfortable with the PS3 or the Xbox 360 if that were her first console. And yet, despite this sentiment, she closed her interview by gendering the consoles: "The Xbox and PS3 kind of seem like a guy's game because if you look at the games they sell, they're really all guy stuff." Here, Chloe was referring to *Call of Duty* specifically, as well as themes of violence and militaristic storylines in video games. However, she was not saying girls cannot play those games. She was indicating the masculine bias in the marketing and the fact that from her experience, girls prefer games with less violence and gore. She cited *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* as a girl-friendly alternative to hyper-violent action games as it allowed players to explore and shoot without gory carnage resulting. Her favourite games were those "that let you create your avatar, the one who you want to look like," which I found out in observations of her play referred to an assortment of activities including paper-doll websites that allow users to customize a hyper-feminine character with clothing, jewellery, and makeup from an inventory of trendy items. Customizing and creating avatars were why Chloe was so enthusiastic about playing *The Sims*.

This account of her preferences demonstrates Chloe's game play and technological activities were not as hardcore as accounts of her exceptionalism might have indicated. The game content she enjoyed was often heteronormative and feminine, playing ultra-pink games like *Barbie*, *Petz*, *Fashion Designer*; the rationale for play was oriented towards sociality or to pass time, as she framed her play on her mobile phone; and the devices she used were designed for mass appeal to those who were previously identified as non-gamers or at least not viable game markets as discussed in Juul (2009), including the Wii, the DSi, and the Touch. Chloe's play was precisely the sort that might have been denigrated by Dean as "accessible to anyone" and therefore illegitimate or marginal.

Because of these clashing accounts and positionings, Chloe's case exemplified some of the contradictions that can characterize the relationship between young girls and digital play technologies. She transgressed expected intelligible subject-positions linked to technological practices and was thus

framed as exceptional, though she did not see herself in this way. Even though she had the time and space to access and engage with ludic technologies, her play took place in a context where such interests were framed as non-normative. Furthermore, her decision-making about purchases and activities was guided strongly by marketing imagery, as she wanted the Wii so she could share her ludic interests with her family. Her coding of the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3 as boys' technologies was related to their marketing using clips of play of violent first-person shooters like *Call of Duty*, as well as her lack of proficiency with these devices when she tried them. Indeed, her abilities were cited by her mother and her sister, she muted any notion of her own skills when talking to me.

Through this case, we see the hurdle that is so often invoked by game scholars and designers in regards to feminine game play – the challenge of access – becomes a much broader issue than simply getting to spend time on a device. Instead, girls have to negotiate the notion their play is at the same time exceptional and not good enough, even when they have ease of access to the technologies. Because of the dominant narratives around video games as toys for boys, access to ludic technologies in no way easily leads to the development of a sense of tech savvy and competency, nor to expertise or a feeling of membership in game culture. In between these points of transition are forces and sources of contention, as shown through the examples of these two young female game players.

Overall, in both Family G and Family E, ludic pleasures were coded as masculine and non-normative with feminine participation seen as exceptional. This happens through a number of related constructions: the emphasis on the exceptional nature of girls who play games; the connection of certain technological practices to feminine gender performance and others to masculinity; and the denigration of skills and aptitudes seen as falling higher and lower on the hierarchy of technological practices through the language of accessibility and kiddie games. In both families, the end result was Chloe and Mac were framed as outside normative feminine identities because of their interests in gaming, whether they understood themselves this way or not.

GENERATION AND GENDER: MOM'S GOT GAME

There was a significant exception to the explicit coding of technological proficiency as masculine within the study that I would like to highlight, particularly because of the emphasis on generationality. In Family C it was the mother, Adrienne, who was understood as the master of technology in the home, possessing a sense of tech savvy as well as having a history with video games. The thirteen-year-old daughter Kelsey told me: "There's not very many things that I know how to do that my mom doesn't." Adrienne's

dominion over all technology was never questioned in my interviews, nor did anyone problematize, denigrate, or highlight this mastery as strange in any way in this household. And yet there was still a gendered component to claiming tech savvy or the gamer identity in the home. For instance, Kelsey excitedly proclaimed herself to be a fan of video games but when I asked her whether she was a gamer, she was tentative: "I think so. Like, I love playing video games. Um, I'm not very good at *Halo*, but I'm good at NHL games and the skateboarding games, um, I guess I'm good at *Sims*." She was reluctant to claim gamer status, or at the very least to boast about her abilities, and was careful to point out she is better at some things than others. Kelsey told me she played a range of games, from casual games on her iPod Touch before bed as an alterative to reading to racing games and *The Sims* on the PS2 to *Halo* when she visited her male cousins. As opposed to the casual games on her phone, which she described as "really pointless stuff," Kelsey was very enthusiastic about this first-person shooter: "I have a big thing for *Halo*, like, up north I play *Halo* for, like, hours and hours at a time with my cousins." She was not overly concerned by her lack of skill as she still enjoyed playing it: "I suck. But it's a lot of fun, just going around shooting people." Despite her pleasure in play and her nonchalance about her lack of expertise, when probed about who plays games at school Kelsey coded game talk as masculine: "All the guys are talking about their Xbox Lives, and how they play all their, whatever they play on there." There was also gender segregation of game play in her school, as exemplified by her answer to whether video game play was prevalent in her school:

> A lot of the guys, like on the bus, they just talk about 'Oh you should play this' or 'You should play that last night' or 'I didn't see you on last night' and stuff like that. Me and one of my pretty close friends we keep planning on having this day cuz she's obsessed with *Sims* and I am too so we keep planning on having this day where you just go and play *Sims* for hours at a time.

Based on her separation of her game play and that of the boys in her school, I asked Kelsey whether she sees video game play as a "boy thing." She told me: "For Facebook it's pretty equal, and everyone has Facebook, but not so much like *Halo* and Xbox and all that stuff, and mostly it's just guys on there. But, like, I don't really think to talk to girls about, like, did you play *Halo* last night or whatever." Kelsey understood her interest in games as not something to be shared with girls: "Personally I love it, but a lot of my friends are just, shopping and movies and painting your nails and stuff, they're not really into killing games." Not all video games were a boy thing, but violence was a trait Kelsey described to me as a masculine pleasure, with most of the girls at her school more likely to play *The Sims* rather than shooters. I asked why she played those games and she explicitly took up the position of the tomboy: "I've always grown up with the boys, I used to dress

like the guys all the time, I used to do everything they did. Cuz the girls were just, like. … I always have better relationships with the guys than I do with the girls." While teasing and trash-talking characterized her play of *Halo*, she felt comfortable with it because she and her cousins see her lack of proficiency as a matter of a lack of experience rather than gender: "If I played as often as I do when I'm up there, then I'd probably be as good as them. … It's never about 'You're a girl so you suck,' it's always just making fun of me because I suck. I don't think it's anything to do with the fact that I'm a girl. Like, cuz, they have their, like, guy friends over all the time, and they suck too." Tech savvy is in this way understood as something that is developed, not as something associated to a particular gender identity.

Kelsey's relationship to the gamer identity was complex. It was not a straightforward ownership of the gamer position, as evident in her reluctance to take up the label and her frequent reference to the guys at school and game talk, but she also emphasized her enthusiasm for game play generally and her passion for *Halo* in particular. Kelsey had strong feminine influences in terms of performances of tech savvy, not only from her mother but also her grandmother, who bought them their Wii and whose technological interests Adrienne described as "way beyond." Kelsey had the example of two generations of female role models referring to technological knowledge and pleasure. While her grandmother "likes new technology," her mother took them up as a "matter of necessity" (in Adrienne's words).

While Kelsey was tentative about taking up the subject-position of gamer, she was comfortable expressing her proficiency vis-à-vis the rest of her family:

> I definitely know more about technology than my dad. But my mom, she's really into the whole computer thing. … I definitely know more about video games than both of them. I don't think they know the difference between Xbox Live and Xbox 360 and Xbox, it's just like all these different gaming things. I know my dad knows about the PS3 and that it can play Blu-Ray.

The constitution of technological ease, proficiency, and expertise in this Canadian household was complex and dynamic, contingent on the relative skills of other subjects such as cousins, grandmother, and school friends. It was also tied to the materiality of the technology, in particular the Wii. Having this console in the home was a major development in the family, according to Adrienne, because of their status as late adopters of video-game technologies: "We bought her a PS2 a few years ago. … We're the last people in the entire city. Kelsey calls us the hillbillies in the hillbilly shack because this year, for Christmas, we got a Wii, everybody got a Wii, what, five years ago? We're like 'Oh let's get one of those Wiis.' So, but to me, we already had a gaming thing, we had a PS2, and we played with that. I encourage her to play on that, and so it's in her room now, and she plays

games on there and I find them much less threatening than Internet games." Despite the marketing of the Wii for families, for Adrienne it was a redundant technology. Instead, her preference was for console play because it was not networked and accordingly less threatening than online play because its affordances were bounded by its design. Kelsey's PS2, unlike the networked home computer, stayed in her room, where she played *The Sims* as well as hockey and racing games.

Unlike other participants in the study, Adrienne was unenthusiastic about the Wii's emphasis on physical, familial play and the Wii was largely dormant in their household. As Kelsey told me:

> We don't really play many games 'cuz we just have the games that came with it … the *Wii Sports*. And then, my grandma got, when she got us the Wii, she got me an extra controller and it came with Wii Play, it's just got a bunch of random games on it, but we didn't really, we never bought any actual games to play on the Wii. We rent some from the video store, once in awhile.

However, the family did play together. Further complicating visions of ungendered play of the Wii, Kelsey told me: "My sister and I, we really like the tanks game, we just try to shoot the bad tanks. My mom and my dad and I, we have a lot of fun playing tanks, we rented this one shooting game, me and my mom and dad and I, we just take turns with these shooting games. I dunno, we just have a thing for shooting games around here." Therefore, in this household shooting games were not coded as masculine. They were something to be enjoyed together while the games deliberately targeted to family play lay dormant on the shelf.

However, both Kelsey and Adrienne distanced themselves from the play of the war-themed shooting games Kelsey's father enjoyed: "My dad rents *Call of Duty* and he plays *Call of Duty* really late at night, stays up til like four in the morning, playing *Call of Duty*." For Kelsey, this game was "so real and it just scares me," not because of the game genre or its marketing to masculine subjects but because she does not enjoy violent content. Adrienne echoed Kelsey's discomfort with this genre of game: "Guy rents *Call of Duty*, he likes the war games, and I just can't stand it. I tried. I really did. I like shooting games where it just doesn't feel like. … There's bad guys robbing planes and stuff. But in *Call of Duty*. … We shouldn't be having fun around war." For both these game players, preferences for content or particular games were more complex than simply enjoying or disdaining violence or seeing genres as inherently gendered.

Kelsey emphasized to me a passion for play, not only for *Halo* but also for *The Sims*: "I have this huge thing for *Sims*, so we just, like, rent all these *Sims* games and just play them for, like, hours and hours at a time." However, she performed a complicated relationship to game play that at times was not explicitly premised on gendered subjectivities but in other moments

was. For instance, when I asked her who taught her how to play she evoked not her tech savvy mother or early adopter grandmother but male family members: "My uncle, he used to have Christmas parties all the time, and then I'd just be like playing a lot of video games with my cousins, like NHL, I was horrible at it, but we got it and then I just started playing a lot. I used to play with my uncle all the time, when we went to their Christmas parties. My cousins, they used to have the really old Nintendo things and I used to play a lot with them." She did not, however, see this as masculine modeling of video games but as familial mentorship. This was a role she began to play with her younger sister. "I showed her the tank game, like I taught her how to point it at the screen and shoot and stuff. But she's not the greatest at it." Kelsey was sufficiently tech savvy to find walkthroughs and cheats that allowed her to unlock items such as furniture, clothing, and money in *The Sims*, a skill set she learned from an older female cousin. She also referred to a range of online practices dismissing virtual worlds as "silly" and describing the process of finding new games and activities online as trial and error through Google searching. She was also amenable to being called tech savvy without hesitation or qualification.

This aligned with her mother, who was also a no-nonsense tech savvy figure. It was instead the father in this household, Guy, who fell to the bottom of the list of technological proficiency, which Adrienne attributed to a lack of interest: "He just doesn't have much time or inclination or patience for anything to do with the computer. … We did try to teach him a couple of things and he now knows how to Google." Unlike other technology leaders in the family such as Dean, Adrienne was not particularly passionate about technology, describing her use as: "More along the lines of necessity, like I've learned what I've need to learn to get by." She also described her role in Kelsey's technology uptake and development of proficiency as "encouraging" in terms of learning both the basic skills as well as a certain degree of literacy "and to think about sources and where it's coming from." She encouraged her younger daughter Susie to play educational video games to make long car rides bearable in a way that is both fun and purposeful: "I bought Susie her Leapster, for instance, because I knew it would keep her busy and she would have fun, but I also knew it had an educational component, right? That it would teach them numbers and letters and so it's doing double duty." Her youngest daughter was encouraged to play for purposive ends with computer games purchased: "To teach her how to click and drag, basically, it's all basic functions, how to control the mouse, that's what those games teach them." However, she spoke to pleasures in play, particularly racing games across the whole family, even Guy: "We want to play. Guy will play with Kelsey too. They'll play, NHL 2K or whatever, he'll play hockey with her and she'll be like 'I wanna go to bed' and he'll be 'one more game.'" Though Guy was not interested in computers, social networking sites, or new media generally, he enjoyed video games. Adrienne explained this by arguing video games were easier to learn, running contrary to the vision of

video games as hardcore or high tech: "It's very easy to just sit down and start playing a video game, right? They design them so that you can just start to play whereas I think he finds the computer not that accessible." This was more a matter of generational difference than gender, as she played games in childhood while Guy did not. This aligns with the notion that the life cycles of a technology impact on its adoption. Adrienne's lifetime experiences with gaming made it more accessible to her and less accessible to her husband, which she attributed to their age difference rather than normatively gendered subjectivities in relationship to game play. Despite her framing of technology use as a matter of need rather than leisure, Adrienne was a game player and did not frame play as simply a way to supervise her daughters.

Though both Adrienne and Kelsey were tech savvy and enjoyed play, they both carefully negotiated their gendered subjectivities and video games, with Kelsey coding game talk as masculine and Adrienne, like Dean, describing her daughter as a tomboy. Adrienne positioned her daughter's comfort with her male game-playing cousins as a matter of Kelsey being something of a boy herself or of gender being unimportant for children of that age:

> I think they think she's a boy, it's very funny, it doesn't seem to matter. Even last summer when they were thirteen and they were all sleeping in a camper at my brother's, she was always up north by herself, and there's like five boys and her all sleeping in there, and nobody thinks twice, they're all, they're just kids and kind of doing kid things and getting into trouble and setting fires and stuff.

What this case demonstrates is two of the ways the participation of women in digital play can be subject to less obvious forms of self and external regulation. While Chloe, Mac, Adrienne, and Kelsey were all tech savvy with varying degrees of pleasure in and comfort with games, they themselves and their families wavered between pride and excitement about this ease and a discomfort that became discernable in talk about exceptionalism or denigration of ability, reinscribing particular notions of gendered technological proficiency and incompetence. In the next section, I showcase another form of gendered tension related to domesticated digital play, this time in terms of work and play time.

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY: GENDERED LEISURE TIME IN THE HOME

Another important dichotomy impacting on gendered digital play subject-positions was the persistent gendering of labour in the domestic sphere, limiting access to digital game play because of the stratification of leisure time. This was particularly visible in Family B wherein the mother Olivia

articulated the gendered division of labour over digital play regulation in relationship to her husband, Jin:

> I bought the Wii, Jin bought the Playstation. I bought the Wii because it looked like it had really fun games. It looked way cooler because of, I had seen the tennis and those sorts of things, they don't, I don't think they don't do those ones as much but originally I had thought, don't wanna say it's interactive, but more sort of physical interaction looked really interesting. I don't play it very often. I did in the beginning, but it's not my thing.

Olivia told me her logic for the purchase of the Wii was hinged on the marketing message focusing on the kinaesthetic nature of its play. Like others, however, she reported her use of this console in reality did not mirror her hopes for the technology as she did not see herself as having an affinity for video game play. Instead: "It's the three of them [her husband, son, and daughter] that do it." She explained she did not play because she was responsible for childcare on top of her graduate school work, limiting her access to leisure time.

Because of these limitations, Olivia's primary focus was on regulating her children's screen time, and she delegated the supervision and restriction of content to her husband, Jin: "I'm more concerned about the amount of time they spend doing it and, because I don't think it's possible for me to control all aspects of it, I trust that Jin is looking out, because he plays the games with them, that they're appropriate, and I trust that the websites that his teacher recommends are appropriate as well." However, aside from lacking the material resources for play, Olivia also described an emotional response to her perceived lack of tech savvy: "It's sorta anxiety-producing, you know, to play games I'm not very good at, that I seem to be lacking in co-ordination completely. … I'm just not interested at all." Though Olivia purchased the Wii and had physical access to gaming, her sense of her lack of skills led to frustration and abandonment. Unlike Chloe and Mac, Olivia did not experience discipline from without but from within, through the rationale of domestic policy responsibilities, time constraints, an inability to become comfortable as a gamer, and a lack of interest. Unlike Dean, for whom being more tech savvy than his children was important, Olivia said it did not upset her: "[Tyler] is definitely way more advanced with setting up the system and manoeuvring around it than I am and I have to ask him for assistance, but it's fine." In their household, though Olivia took the lead of setting limits on screen time, it was the father and son who were the tech savvy figures: "Jin has got things hooked up in a very complex way that I can barely figure out, so Tyler seems to be able to manage those really well. And he gets it set up for his sister and he's really good about doing that." We can see this mirrors a broader rhetoric of cables, cords, set-up, selecting content, and mentoring as part of the masculine domain: "I trust Jin too,

cuz he's more familiar with how the games work and how to play them, I trust that he's monitoring in that way. I don't take sole responsibility for that." Olivia also relied on popular culture familiarity with certain games such as those themed with Mario and Pokémon: "I don't look at the really weird ones that I don't know anything about." Finally, she depended on the judgement of her son's teacher, delegating the authority to the teacher to select appropriate gaming websites and sticking to those selections. She again described her responsibility as the regulation of time: "In terms of his video games, I legislate the times when he can do it. So that it doesn't get out of control. So, occasionally, if the teacher says, you know, 'Check this out during the week,' I'll let him go on to the website during the week as part of the homework space, but otherwise he's only allowed to play video games and watch the TV at the weekend."

This household was interesting because Olivia most clearly articulated the division of labour that is the product of one parent feeling more tech savvy than the other. One was more concerned with structure (mother as administrator) and the other with content (father as expert): "I let Jin be in charge of that [selecting games based on ratings]. And then likewise he lets me be the bad guy and legislate the times and the places when video games are allowed." Olivia attributed these different domains of responsibility to Jin's skills and her lack thereof: "I can't do anything at all. I'm, like, really useless, so he's very very very savvy, and he can set it up and set it up again and reconfigure it and add things and buy things and fix it up and try different arrangements and configurations and I haven't got a clue." For her, the different responsibilities were a positive characteristic of the parenting strategy in her household as it meant both adults shared parental duties: "In our family, Jin and I are pretty united on how we raise our children, so, you know, one parent can't do everything and I don't try to. But I do rely on him to be very conscious of the content and he relies on me to be conscious of the structure of how it works."

This splitting of content and structure in domestic policy on digital play cannot be extricated from the ways in which certain subjects are positioned as technologically proficient (fathers and sons) and others are not (mothers and daughters). Beck's (1985) argument about domestic tasks is relevant here, as he notes: "The imperatives posed by the production of gender relations mean that the division of household labour not only is concerned with the rational sorting and optimal matching of tasks and time to household members but is also centred on the symbolic affirmation of the members or their 'alignment' with each other as husband and wife, man and woman, brother and sister" (26). It is important to recognize the ways in which the content/structure divide also creates a schism between the more and less playful parenting decisions. While Olivia was responsible for "being the bad guy" and removing the screens, Jin was in charge of purchasing games and playing them with the children. His parenting duties were therefore tied to leisure time, during which Olivia worked on her professional tasks. As

this demonstrates, gaining access to gaming – even when the mother-gamer is interpellated in the advertising for a console, as is the case with the Wii – did not necessarily entail the development of skill sets, a feeling of tech savvy, and certainly not the advancement to expertise.

Too often the answer to shifting the association of masculinity and technology is framed as one of access. But getting access to the technologies of play is not only a matter of having a console in the home, as once the device is purchased, it becomes subject to bargaining over space (where will it be located?) and time (who can use it when and for how long?). Play is gendered when patterns of gendered leisure time are perpetuated in the adoption and use of ludic technologies. There is nothing new about unequal access to domesticated video games. As Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) note, the first wave of video game popularity and the second wave of feminism took place at the same time and then "the old divide between male production work and female housework, apparently superseded, was reconstituted inside immaterial labour" (p. 19). Video games became a "sphere of cultural 'remasculinization'" (20) even as other male prerogatives were being challenged, with boys and men making up eighty percent of game players in the era of domestication in the mid-1990s. In sum, access is not and has never been a direct solution to gender differences related to technology use, as quality of use is determined by concrete practices shaped by discursive notions of the masculine domain and feminine tasks. Access cannot be equated with the development of skills or expertise and certainly not to the erasure of gender differences in relation to technology use when access is shaped by the gendering of time. Furthermore, the above-mentioned rhetorical strategies frame feminine use as exceptional, non-normative, and gender deviant. Therefore we can observe an important relationship between the materially situated nature of subjects such as good mothers and normal girls and the discursively constructed character of objects such as technologies of play. As Olivia demonstrates, the domestic policies she enacted were entangled with her subjectivity as a mother and woman. These in turn were interpellated by dominant discourses ascribing acceptable subject-positions regarding femininity and tech savvy.

Indeed, it is precisely at the micro-level of interactions such as these that subject-positions operate. While the pervasive neoliberal Canadian context I have been delineating operates on entrenched notions of individualism and emancipation through individual choice (Braedley & Luxton 2010), the web of possible subject-positions discourse creates is already always restricted, with options limited as discourse impedes movement to all nodes. This definitively points in certain directions while making difficult other positionings. We can understand the repertoire of choice offered within neoliberal discourse as one of the ways in which marginalized subjects such as women and girls can take control over and resist their often delegitimized position (Duits 2008). In other words, an insistence on agency is a way for young people to legitimize themselves as subjects. However, within the

neoliberal discourse there also exists a prevalent rhetoric of authenticity requiring the evaluation of identity performance and for people to aim to achieve a coherent narrative through time, which is why there is only partial intelligibility for feminine subjects playing video games.

In the next chapter I consider how we might understand the linkages between the regulatory practices of domestic policy and the disciplining of gendered technological subjects through digital games in the home to better imagine the possibilities for shifting the still-exclusionary culture of gaming. I introduce the notion of gaming capital as a way of understanding the relevance of the findings within this micro-context for the broader ecosystem of digital game-playing subjectivities.

NOTE

1. Dean made reference to "welfare moms," which he defined as mothers who only have children to obtain government subsidies and who do not invest in new technologies.

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6   The Politics of Play at Home

PLAYERS, PLAY, AND GAMING CAPITAL: BEING HARDCORE, PLAYING CASUAL

Throughout this analysis, digital play has not been framed as an activity tied exclusively to a given console, system, game, or mobile device or as an activity segregated from other practices. Both the parents and the children in the Canadian families participating in this study discussed game play as an integrated part of everyday life and something they engaged in across contexts and technologies. Particularly for young people, video game play in its various incarnations, on the PlayStation 3 and the Wii, on iPod Touches and DSis, on Facebook and in virtual worlds like *Club Penguin* was part of a landscape of daily technological practices enmeshed with young people's other everyday activities, including e-mail, instant messaging, texting, social networking, searching, downloading from iTunes and on peer-to-peer networks, and watching videos on YouTube. Juul (2009) argues the integration of digital gaming into everyday activities demonstrates that for many players of digital games, ludic pleasures are part of mainstream popular culture and entertainment practices. This means these technologies, activities, and pleasures are no longer associated with practices of the relative niche and specialist geek clubhouse such as programming and hacking (Kafai & Peppler 2011). Instead, as evinced in this study, game players, particularly children and youth, move fluidly between playing first-person shooters on their Xbox 360s to personalizing their avatar in *MapleStory* to chatting with friends and family on MSN to watching spoof videos on YouTube, on their computers, TVs, and mobile devices. As a result, within my study all young participants, regardless of their gender and age, referred to a wide range of activities when I asked how and what they play online. Playing was a flexible term for these young people and for their parents as well, which is reflected in the complexities of the material-discursive networks shaping digital play in the domestic realm. However, the elasticity of the term when referring to digital culture rather than tabletop or other kinds of games directly impacted on the configuration of games, players, and practices through binaristic classifications of hardcore or casual, which, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, are themselves deeply entangled with gender and age-based stratifications in game culture.

Digital play was a term that was reconfigured in many ways within the interactions and practices of young people. However, boundaries delineating categories of play, from hardcore to casual in reference to participation in game play and culture, remain and co-exist in tension with the widespread adoption of play technologies and uptake of gaming in a variety of contexts. Though there is no consistent definition of a hardcore game or gamer, this label typically refers to games, or those who play those games, with violent content, complex rules or other play mechanics, and dedicated, assiduous game play expectations. This can include tremendous time investment in developing a character, gaining achievements in the form of reputation, trophies, or badges – and increasingly viewers in online game play streaming circles – or playing through a game every available way. For Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009), the hardcore is "a demographic stratum well recognized in game marketing: young men who play intensively, have disposable income, adopt new hardware platforms early, buy as much as twenty-five games a year, are literate about genres and conventions, read the game magazines, and form opinions, through word of mouth or online, about games and machines" (80), a game-playing subject they distinguish from other types of players, including casual gamers, lifestyle gamers, and family gamers. As this indicates, the hardcore gamer is a construction based on consumption practices, but as was shown within this study, it is also an identity bound up with other material and discursive meanings and practices. For example, for many of the study participants this was a recognizable subject-position that was regulated by the spectre of the problem gamer.

The ideological dimension of the hardcore gamer identity is most often reflected in the ways it is dynamically co-constructed alongside the casual gamer identity, and it is in this differentiation that we can see its links to the gendering of game play (Harvey 2009), wherein games that require less time-intensive play or specialized knowledge have less legitimacy than games that necessitate the kind of leisure time that is not typically available to female or older game players. This is reflected in Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter's (2009) above reference to "young men" as the locus of the hardcore demographic. Despite the steadily increasing breadth of a diverse game-playing audience across an expanding range of platforms and titles, this image continues to circulate, as a recent (now deleted) Twitter ad posted by computer manufacturer Asus UK demonstrates (Baker-Whitelaw 2014). The ad asks: "What type of gamer are you?" and offers a graphic representing the two available options. The hardcore gamer is a bearded, headset-wearing white man angrily crushing a soda can while the casual gamer is a relaxed, blond white woman sipping a drink and playing *The Sims*. The text below delineates the financial, time, knowledge, and skills-based differentiations to be made between each player. For instance, the hardcore player's weekend would include a gaming marathon whereas the casual player's most extended game play sessions were spent in the past, again playing *The Sims*. This distinction between gamer identities based on time investment

is significant because, as previously reviewed, time constraints and time competition directly impact on the amount of user activity of computers and the Internet as women are more likely to use technologies to complete household tasks than for leisure (Dholakia 2006), which then shapes the development of all those factors such as comfort and competence that lead to a sense of tech savvy and a feeling of belonging in digital games culture. In this way we can see the origins of the basis for disagreements over the correct definition or categorization of video game play: those who can be deemed legitimate gamers and what can be called a real game within the negotiations that occur within the domestic sphere.

These debates have arguably intensified in the recent mainstreaming of game play. Play for the masses has become increasingly available through short, casual titles on social media, smartphone game applications available for free or at a very low cost in app markets, and the spread of much-vilified[1] (at least within game studies) gamification, referring to the application of game elements, for instance digital badges. This has spread to other online activities not usually understood as playful, such as checking in at (i.e. visiting) one's bank. This sudden mainstreaming can be and has been jarring for those who "did it before it was cool."[2] Those who unwrapped the gift of *Pong* for their birthdays in 1975 are now in a number of cases the middle-aged parents of elementary school students, such as the fathers in Family E and J. For many, what was once a secret and even shameful pleasure is now something they can enjoy in the open, in their living rooms rather than in their darkened bedrooms. And yet with the popularity, widespread diffusion, and explosive uptake of digital play, discussions of legitimacy emerge, many of which entail the denigration or dismissal of female game players while white, male, middle-class, and heteronormative game players police the borders of their cultural knowledge.[3] As Juul (2009) notes in his consideration of casual game design: "For some players, there is a genuine sense of loss, watching games becoming mainstream and accessible" (151). According to Juul, this can be attributed to the threat that, with the increasing diversity of game-playing audiences, hardcore games simply might cease to be the primary production of the industry.

The boundary policing around what counts as play also relates to the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), where investment, training, and immersion in the language, habits, activities, and institutions of a practice allow for a participant to accrue visibility among those within the same domain. Those within that domain become recognizable to one another through their ease with the vocabulary and routines of the realm. For example, as a researcher on this study, I opted to mobilize certain indicators of insider status to gain a degree of comfort when interviewing young players who identified as gamers. I would purposely integrate specialist language and slang, such as "pure pwnage in Utgarde Pinnacle"[4] and "ganking Hordies"[5] in my conversations. Even for those who did not play the game I was referring to (*World of Warcraft*), these phrases were performative and

indicated my membership within the broader game culture. This allowed participants in turn to understand me as not simply another one of those adults who might scoff at game play, which was particularly important, given my affiliation with a school. In sum, as with many other areas of interest and expertise, digital game play becomes a field, a structured social space with its own rules, power relations, tastes, and normative opinions (Bourdieu 1984). Central to the development of such a field is the decision-making on what constitutes legitimate membership and what does not, which often, in the context of digital games culture, leads to the devaluation or exclusion of particular games and forms of play associated with girls, women, and older players.

One way to understand how this works in regards to digital play is to account for what Consalvo (2007) has called "gaming capital," a modification of (sub)cultural capital that refers to an array of player knowledge as well as their experience and positioning and in turn shapes their identity as a gamer. The identity of the gamer as defined through knowledge, experience, and status in turn impacts on the industry's future, as it can account for shifting pleasures and preferences in future developments, resulting in higher or lower sales for given titles and genres. In this way, gaming capital is a product of a feedback loop between user and producer. Gaming capital also refers to how being a gamer is not only about just playing games but also about being a part of a culture that understands, among other things, different game magazines and their valuations, game websites and their strengths, where to find walkthroughs, guides, and reviews, and how to locate Easter eggs (which is the term for hidden treasures coded into the game), resources of game expertise often fiercely guarded by male players (Stevens, Satwicz & McCarthy 2008; Williamson & Facer 2004). The trappings of gaming capital are not only ways for players to mark their affiliation with each other but also a method by which gaming as culture can be made profitable, with game magazines and websites playing a central and market-oriented role in expanding gaming capital by circulating knowledge that is codified as necessary for belonging to the gaming world for the purposes of cultivating the game industry. Those who are identified as having gaming capital are oriented towards games, play tactics, terminology, and secrets that may increase this capital. As Consalvo (2007) notes, early paratexts of gaming culture such as video game magazines like *Nintendo Power* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* served to construct an ideal gamer, and marketing and online games journalism still perpetuate this assemblage of ideal traits. This model game player is frequently young, male, heterosexual, and of a socio-economic standing that allows for sufficient disposable income to purchase many games, while required to fit into the niche of the power gamer, an identity entailing the play of a large number of games a lot of the time. This constructed audience was simply the product of industrial anxiety and marketing statistics indicating a slightly higher number of male gamers than female. As Haddon (1993)

indicates in his consideration of gender and games, it is often a lack of gaming capital that was missing for girls, contributing to their lack of participation. Furthermore, this does not account for the many ways in which players outside this construction may very well play hardcore games or casual games in a hardcore fashion, as in the female power gamers in Taylor's study (2006) and the hardcore adventure gaming baby boomers in Pearce's research (2008), or the players who may well reject the label of gamer for reasons related to the intelligibility of subject-positions rather than game-playing practices (Shaw 2014).

Gaming capital is amassed by a very specific type of game player, one who participates, purchases, and practices in a patterned way, earning membership as a gamer. This player may also be referred to as a hardcore, elite, or power gamer. For game players of this profile, who have invested a great deal of time in learning how to accumulate game capital and how to recognize others like (too often) him, the conflation of a variety of genres, games, technologies of play, and gaming practices becomes problematic. Additionally, it is not only those who self-identify as hardcore gamers who regulate the boundaries delineating legitimate play. Scholars studying the medium of the video game tend to be invested in defining what constitutes play and games, what may be borderline in these classifications, and categorizations such as serious games, casual games, and social games. They, along with many game designers, also have a propensity for challenging the inclusion of particular games within the field of consideration[6]. Like the gamers who found their passions belittled in the mainstream, game scholars have struggled for recognition in academia and for the authority of disciplinarity in their burgeoning field of study. In turn, they seem to mirror their subjects in reinforcing certain kinds of games as real and others as scurrilous. These categorizations tend to directly align with those of game players. This is unsurprising, considering how game players within the field of game studies are unequivocally positioned as making better researchers of the form (Aarseth 2003). Where this becomes an issue, however, is when these tastes, in Bourdieu's sense, remain rooted in the gaming capital, perpetuating the terrain of game play as that which belongs to the limited demographic that can participate. Taste is the product of meaning and interest held by the text learned through a cultural competence, and academics can become themselves implicated in the power of knowing the code, as I did when I indicated my membership to my participants through the use of gamer terminology (see also Taylor 2008 for how this happens in other studies).

As this indicates, the terms "play", "player", and "game" are not simple, innocent, or neutral. These labels are tied to a particular material and discursive formation that is capitalist (in the marketing of games and paratexts for the accumulation of gaming capital), sexist, racist, classist (in its profile of a particular type of gamer as ideal), and elitist (in the maintenance of certain configurations of meaning, interest, competence, and legitimacy that definitively include some and exclude others). It is with this understanding

of the terms of play as loaded with cultural meaning, especially in terms of gendered subjectivities, that the stratification through regulation informing the adoption of video games in the domestic sphere must be understood. This legitimization and policing of digital play are inscribed through a number of exclusionary and problematizing discursive tactics that, as this analysis has indicated, can render feminine participation and tech savvy as non-normative or insufficient.

DISCIPLINING GENDERED LUDIC SUBJECTS

At the same time as advertising materials such as those that accompanied the release of the Nintendo Wii crystallize a vision of equitable play in the home, other practices and paratexts related to gaming still affirm the ideal player as masculine in their denigration, dismissal, and differentiation of female players. While some might understand this as a remnant of previous rounds of digital game domestication, there are a bounty of events over the intervening period since the release of the Nintendo Wii indicating the continuing predominance of this exclusionary, sexist, and increasingly misogynistic culture, including perhaps most famously the continued violent harassment of popular-culture critic Anita Sarkeesian after she started a fundraising initiative to subsidize a proposed project on gender tropes related to female characters in video games, a campaign of vitriol, stalking, and abuse that is inflamed with the release of each video on her website, Feminist Frequency. This harassment and that of other women participating in game culture, from writers and designers to journalists and critics to community organizers to everyday players, as well as the responses and interventions of feminist activists and researchers, have been well documented and analyzed in academic analysis (Consalvo 2013; deWinter & Kocurek 2012; Huntemann 2012; Salter & Blodgett 2012), as well as in mainstream and games press (Chambers 2012; Eördögh 2014; Fletcher 2012; Lewis 2012; Plunkett 2012, Robertson 2014), resulting in the growth of active feminist critiques and organizing against sexism and misogyny in games culture (Jenson & de Castell 2013). Indeed, the overwhelmingly negative response on Twitter to the above-mentioned Asus ad juxtaposing the casual and hardcore stereotypes resulted in it being quickly pulled from the Internet. The mobilization across a range of quarters, be they academic, in the industry, and within journalism, against gender-based exclusion in games culture is promising. But we must not forget that the wide range of hateful instances and intensely policed exclusionary spaces increasingly showcased in mainstream and specialized news indicates that while woman and girls, along with other "minority" players, are participating in digital games activities in large and growing numbers, it is within a toxic culture where their presence is dismissed, denigrated, disparaged, and detested in ways that are becoming more rather than less aggressive, despite the mainstreaming of play.

What becomes clear from the words and practices of participants featured in this study of the domestication of digital play is the exclusionary practices outlined above are not simply the actions of anonymous and oft-dismissed "trolls" online but are manifested in more subtle ways in the regulatory systems at work within the home. Despite the notion the sexism inflecting technological practices is simply vestigial of a masculine history, the difficulty of associating technological prowess, interest, and aptitude with particular gendered subject-positions remains, as evinced within the sample of participants in this study. Family members make reference to a number of playful practices and technological abilities, speaking to love of games, anxieties related to play, and successes and shortcomings with ludic technologies. They both celebrate and problematize their own participation and the involvement of their kin in video game culture. These complex perspectives render feminine game play and technological proficiency invisible or irrelevant, particularly when the play of girls and women is limited to casual or stereotypically feminine game play, such as the *FarmVille* and *Sims* games, or when their technological competence is related to sociality, consumer activities, or word processing, such as texting, chatting, downloading via iTunes, and working in the Microsoft Office suite. Within the space of the household, which is understood to be a primary gateway to technology use and development of skills and expertise, there are practices at play that produce several realities related to ludic technologies and activities. Games are categorized and understood as casual and hardcore, falling higher or lower on the hierarchy of play. Game players are equally divided and these notions of game players and the technological practices of game play are enacted along normative gender lines as expert and novice, as well as active and passive, through the coding of feminine use as consumption and masculine participation as production (Connell 2005; Shade 2002). The statistical portrait of universal digital game play and growing numbers of adult female players in particular only reveals one reality. As Dholakia (2006) points out in her examination of the statistics on gendered use of computers and the Internet in the home, while the numbers indicate a closing divide and even greater female than male use, closer inspection reveals patterns of use are still shaped by the gendered production of technology and an array of user-related variables constraining this use, including disparities in economic resources, expertise, ease, and leisure time.

Through this empirical examination of gendered game play, it becomes evident that statistics reporting a disappearing gap between feminine and masculine play neither reflect the multiplicity of realities lived by game players nor reveal the tensions and contradictions characterizing the adoption of digital games and regulation of game play. The development of competencies is not simply a matter of gaining access to games, which the mainstream of video games might indicate, as access is itself contingent. Access, the development of literacies, and participation in culture are dependent on the user's context, agents, and tools, as well the coding and framing of this use

on a hierarchy of legitimacy, the availability of time, and the construction of certain skills and pleasures as deviant or illegitimate. While the performance of gaming as dependent on a masculine player is not a stable or given construction, in the domestic sphere the participants in this study perform technological competence in line with gender norms that limit the associations between tech savvy, digital play, and femininity. Access is therefore highly conditional and is not a guarantee of the development of competencies, skills, or expertise, which is too often hindered by a range of discourses and practices producing masculine subjectivities in relation to video game play (Jenson & de Castell 2010), particularly within the domestic sphere, highlighting the need for both a continued focus on the spaces where people are introduced to games and the material-discursive frameworks shaping their engagement and play.

MAKING DISCOURSE MATERIAL IN EVERYDAY LUDIC AND REGULATORY PRACTICES

The classical and foundational work of games scholars Caillois (1967) and Huizinga (1950) depicts play as an activity occurring outside the strictures of ordinary life, a free practice secluded in time and space, creating its own order and promoting the formation of player communities. But the notion of a magic circle surrounding play, untouched by the world beyond, is widely contested in game studies because it obscures a number of important considerations. These include the inextricable entanglements of the virtual and the real through the body, the materiality of consoles, games, and other ludic technologies, and the concrete and tangible nature of the acts of play themselves, as well as their social and cultural context. As has been shown in the words and actions of the participants of this study as well as through a consideration of the predominant discourses about digital games, particularly in relation to young people, play is not free but is on the contrary dynamically constrained and enabled by culturally intelligible and normative subject-positions shaped by gender and age. The ideal player identity is a construction that continues to circulate in the paratexts, cultural practices, and dominant discourses related to video games, alongside persistent visions of legitimate play and real games in opposition to ideas about problem gamers, lesser play, and insignificant games. Rather than rendering this vision of the true ludic subject archaic, the proliferation of play becomes a site of tension that can serve to reinscribe the ideal and problematize other types of players, games, and play, specifically in terms of visions of the relationship between gender and technology as well as parenting and children in the neoliberal risk society.

As I have shown, the domestication of digital games, from adoption through to everyday use, is a process that is deeply entangled in the regulation of subjects through disciplinary practices both material and discursive.

Despite the fact the young people in this study had access to technologies of play, whether in the home or through their social networks, and ostensibly had the opportunity to develop a sense of tech savvy, their actual ability to do so was curtailed by dominant gender norms about what a gamer looks like, what a mother and a father do, how young girls and boys engage with youth culture, and who is expected to be an expert in technological domains. Within the material-discursive networks around game play the regulation of ludic technologies goes hand in hand with the disciplining of gendered subjectivities in the home, leading to stratified access, fewer opportunities, and limited opportunities for girls and women to develop a sense of their tech savvy.

This analysis has highlighted a number of ways in which subjects, both male and female, parents and children, negotiate player identities based on their experiences within the mutually constituted material and discursive frames shaping games, play, and players. The centrality of certain normative subjectivities – boys, girls, mothers, fathers, men, and women – persists in dominant Western discourse. However, a gap remains in our analysis of not only digital games but also digital culture broadly in addressing the material contexts in which these discourses converge: the domestic uses of and practices related to digital technologies including games. It also becomes evident the sole method by which to trouble pervasive discourses of digital natives, as well as the legacy of technological determinism and media effects in this rhetoric, is to interrogate the everyday interactions between subjects, technologies, and discourses. Through such an examination, it becomes possible to get a sense of the ways in which children and parents challenge and reify normatively gendered technological subjectivities and how playful contexts are contingent on shifting but pervasive cultural norms informing ludic pleasures, particularly gendered subject-positions but also complicated by age and generation.

The domestic sphere and its regulations and activities can be a powerful and productive space for the perpetuation of intersecting discourses regarding normative technological subjects constituted through the materiality of banal, everyday practices. Two important sets of beliefs and values characterize parental narratives about networked technologies such as digital games: tech savviness and necessity. Regulation, of both digital games and through gender systems, plays a key role in the material-discursive networks around ludic technologies that shape play. Though there are a number of important demographic similarities between each family, there are also significant differences, including a sense of tech savvy. One's degree of enthusiasm, comfort, experience, and expertise with new technologies significantly impacts the form regulation takes in the domestic sphere.

Families deploy regulations disciplining technological play in light of the persistent framing of these technologies as good or bad, as sheppards of a hopeful future or harbingers of the greatest possible threats to Western society. While the discursive terrain informing understandings of youth and video games shapes domestic policies enacted through monitoring, surveillance,

and time-limiting, what cannot be overlooked is how these practices of discipline are shaped by the negotiation of neoliberal subjectivities related to risk and the development of technological proficiency for the purposes of developing good. This takes place in a context where gendered subject-positions are linked to technology. Masculine family members are often cited as taking leadership over the hardware and the setup – the wires, cables, and cords – whereas mothers are more likely to talk about being charged with risk management through the activities comprising domestic policy: time-limiting and other forms of rule-setting. In this way, women are still responsible for social reproduction (Jarrett 2013), curbing the excesses of their children's leisure while still providing the grounds for them to harness all the opportunities afforded by new media and technology. The relegation of gaming and computing technology in the household to masculine expertise, either that of the father, brother, or son, whether self- or externally imposed, demonstrates how female participants can enact normative gender roles in association with domesticated ludic technologies. Mothers often referred to the discourses of fear surrounding games and online interactions more broadly, evoking the figures of the pedophile and the bully and justifying the uses of nanny programs, surveillance of play, and a variety of other practices as an extension of their maternal protectiveness against dangers to the home. Many respondents were fellow academics who self-identified as feminists, aware of the rhetoric speaking to technology and feminine ignorance, and yet still they implemented policies in the household that structured technology as inherently dangerous. In this way technological proficiency and comfort are shown to be not just a discursive construct. They are perpetuated in concrete, situated ways through local practices reaffirming and circulating particular subject-positions related to gendered technological use. It also demonstrates just how powerful discourses on parenting and parental responsibility are, as related to managing youth media practices, in shaping domestic practices. Children are also implicated here as they navigate the expectations regarding their technology use and becoming enterprising individuals with the emphasis on productive play. I argue it is through these activities and discussion that the neoliberal ethos also permeates the activities of the domestic sphere in relationship to video game play.

This is not to say control and regulation take a unidirectional pattern in the household. Not only do parents discipline and facilitate access and use; young people have their own strategies for resisting limits on their play as well as self-regulating with their own notions of the discourses speaking to their ludic practices. Children, along with their mothers and fathers, make material in their own ways the discursive constructs about video games, producing particularly stratified patterns of access to game play as well as the opportunities for becoming increasingly technologically proficient. These practices operate in tandem with discourses of generational difference, a dimension of the fear of technology use that shapes the implementation of regulatory structures disciplining play, as those with a greater sense

of tech savvy tended to enact regulations that allow for greater autonomy on their part of their child. The intersection of gender and tech savvy had a crucial impact on the ways in which digital play in the home is restricted and allowed. This in turn can, though not necessarily, impact on the opportunities for young people to become literate, comfortable, and skilled with technologies in the home. This study has highlighted the ways in which discussions of new media use as a matter of youth culture are flawed as the relationship of young people to technology is greatly shaped in relation to people of other ages and discourses of generationality. Age, like gender, is relational, and future studies would benefit by addressing the impact of these intersections.

As the analysis of the rhetoric of family members around video games and gendered subjectivities demonstrates, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons reinscribe ludic practices as well as technological proficiencies as masculine and challenge or stratify feminine participation in these areas. The ideal video game player is shown not as an idealized construction who emerges in exceptional circumstances such as the harassment of Anita Sarkeesian, out there, so to speak, but in the most banal and everyday spaces of play between family members who have the best interests of their relatives at heart. The promotion and denial of playful subjects are not a straightforward matter of exclusion and inclusion that can be addressed by providing access. The ubiquity of video game play does not correlate to increased use, comfort, or expertise as too often the game play marketed to female players is framed as the feminization and/or infantalization of video games. Male participants minimized feminine participation in some cases to preserve the cultural capital of their own play mobilizing the constructs of casual and hardcore gaming. Female participants also diminished the relevance of their participation, proficiency, and pleasure as they had difficulty aligning these with expected gendered subjectivities in association with technological play, a clash of identity and culture in games and culture observed decades ago (Kiesler, Sproull & Eccles 1985; Turkle & Papert 1990) that persists today. Even those who enjoy play reaffirm the construction of the ideal game player, framing their play as exceptional and thus perpetuating a conceptualization of the female player as unusual or non-normative.

As this would indicate, industrial shifts such as the so-called casual revolution and its attendant broadening vision of audiences and market share are important but not overdetermining. While industry trends, as well as statistics about use, are important and indicative of shifts in the terrain of video game play, they do not reveal anything about how people are playing. Just as the creation of girl games did not lead to the formation of girl gamers – and nor did the emphasis on games for boys eliminate the participation of these female players – innovations on play styles and controllers did not create a sea change in the industry. The emphasis on first-person shooters and traditional modes of play in the latest generation of consoles indicates the persistence of visions of the hardcore audience. Furthermore,

nearly equal play across female and male users and design and marketing for envisioned market shares of mothers, families, girls, or older players tell us nothing about how people understand their play or about the complex interactions that take place around ludic participation. For this reason, the observations made by early researchers of the domestication of ICTs about the need to differentiate between access and possession are important in studies of game play in the contemporary context, simply because presence in the home does not guarantee straightforward access. As I have shown, players, both parents and young people, must negotiate constraints limiting use, including material-discursive networks that discipline acceptable and unintelligible subject-positions vis-à-vis gender and technology. Despite the ever-increasing prevalence of games within everyday life, video game play is still stratified at the intersection of gender, age, and technological proficiency through the regulation of play and a discursive terrain that allows some linkages between subject-positions and constrains others. Instead of grappling with the persistently dichotomous rhetoric of technological anxiety and digital promise, scholars working on game studies, design, and digital culture more broadly need to recognize the dynamic network of factors that shape allowed and problematized subjectivities in relation to technological play.

As this study illuminates, constructions of the ideal game player are pervasive, and they become entangled with neoliberal rhetoric about parenting to limit and minimize feminine participation. This highlights the necessity of nuanced studies of access that recognize the contingency of use and participation for girls and women, given the constraints placed on their game play by the material-discursive context of video game play. Feminine participation is limited both literally and figuratively by the regulation of activities and subjectivities, and therefore the ubiquity of play cannot be understood to provide opportunities for females to develop competencies, skills, or aptitude in any straightforward or direct manner. Because of the contingency and complexity of use, game scholars cannot understand access as a final answer but as something deeply informed by game cultures, familial dynamics, and intelligible gender identities. This is particularly significant given the rhetoric regarding digital game play as a gateway to education and careers in the STEM professions as well as within the game industry.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS: THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS ON PLAY, PARTICIPATION, AND PRODUCTION

While this research has provided a glimpse into what a great number of small- to large-scale quantitative studies have shown about what children and parents do with digital and new media (for example Ito et. al. 2008; Larsson 2003; Ofcom 2008; Pew Internet & American Life Project 2008, 2014), further work is needed on questions of access, its relationship to

discourse and identity, and to the development of technological competencies and a sense of tech savvy. How do factors related to cultural differences, such as non-domestic access to technology, local perceptions of game players, barriers related to language, historical and technological contexts, social values, habits, and customs, and of course intersections with gender, age, race, ability, and sexuality shape what games people play, frequency of play, and perceptions of other gamers? The ways in which intelligible subject-positions around ludic technologies are negotiated would undoubtedly be very different in queer, non-white, and otherwise marginalized groups and families, as indicated in Shaw (2014). What does play look like in the homes of recently immigrated families and in the domestic sphere of families with first-generation Canadian children, and in other geographical contexts? Further considerations of other kinds of intersectional micro-politics shaping digital game play are necessary.

Future research should also address different stages of the domestication of video games. As indicated in the emphasis on discourses of parenting, there are important methodological limitations inherent in questioning parents on their domestic practices as they are very likely to give what is seen as the "right answer" that fits the profile of the "good parent" (Haddon 2004). Yet the domestication framework still provides a productive and interesting approach as it can highlight not only uses but also how people exhibit active resistance to adopting certain technologies, expressing negative sentiments, and resisting their use. Considerations of the lifespan of ludic technologies in the home may also indicate changing relationships to those devices and indeed highlight the ways in which access to time and space for play can shift depending on life circumstances. Domestication studies can provide insights of greater complexity on the adoption, use, and even discarding of technologies, particularly those that take a longitudinal view. What are the long-term relationships families have with ludic technologies and how does use change with shifts in the circumstances of individuals and households, including new work, different financial situations, the birth of children, and the emptying of the nest?

These kinds of analyses are necessary because of the relationship between the regulation of both digital play and technological subjects and the development of technological ease, proficiency, and expertise. These two forms of discipline, I have argued, shape the quality of access, at times constraining the opportunities young people have to become comfortable as technological subjects, to skill up, and to enter into realms of participation and production from hacking to user-generated content to programming, the burgeoning DIY cultures celebrated in youth media studies (Kafai & Peppler 2011; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison 2006; Ito et. al. 2010).

Here, the issue is not a digital divide between haves and have-nots but a participation gap, wherein some young people have access to texts and some access to the tools required to engage with media-making and critique through media production and participation of communities of users.

At stake here is the need to ensure youth develop the skills and experience required to fully participate as digital citizens in contemporary society. This entails moving beyond media literacy to computer literacy, which remains under-taught in the North American education system, likely because programming is seen as exclusive and largely masculine, as the term "brogramming" would indicate. Rather than finances, it is "the lack of experience and cultural perceptions" (Kafai & Peppler 2011, 7) that limits access and participation in areas of creative media production. Unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge required for full participation in digital culture is crucial in the context of increasing emphasis on not only consumption of new media but also amateur production therein. DIY creation is important because it allows for expression, creativity, and critical reflection, with young people asked to reflect on their knowledge of cultural texts and dominant discourses and to respond through their own work.

Therefore, gendered access to ludic technologies is not limited to considerations of play as solely a leisure pursuit. For a fuller portrait, young people must be understood as technology users in light of all questions of empowerment or exploitation and participation or consumption online. Whether young people are engaged or disinterested in civic matters online (Wells 2010), in reading commercial content in negotiated and resistant ways (Grimes & Shade 2005), or in authoring subversive or creative identities online (Thomas 2007) depends in pivotal ways on how access is negotiated in the domestic sphere and how their practices are enacted in the family. As this analysis of the lived realities of youth and parents shows, youth participation is shaped by a dynamic and diverse network of norms, discourses, material practices, and power relations. Future examinations of youth participation online, ranging from digital play to political activity to creative development, should engage with this landscape of heterogeneous factors as they are located in the domestic realm as well as in other spaces with their own regulatory systems.

This also indicates another important avenue for future research. Whereas the statistics indicate a levelling of the playing field in terms of use, the context of games production is still incredibly homogenous when it comes to who gets to design and program titles, whether they are independent ventures, the productions of small- to medium-sized enterprises, or large triple-A releases. Those who celebrate youth DIY cultures are particularly enthusiastic about the potential benefits of game design in terms of how it includes a range of marketable practices, from expertise in graphics and product design to proficiency in coding, animation, writing, and interactive and audio design (Kafai & Peppler 2011). However a range of studies, both from within the industry (International Game Developer Association 2005; Shirinian 2012) and external to it (Prescott & Bogg 2011), indicate extremely low numbers of women working in digital games companies, with figures ranging from a high ten percent to a low four percent, depending on whether we consider non-development, managerial positions

or focus exclusively on content creation such as writing, level design, and programming, where women are present but rare.

As this indicates, there is a large gap in production activities, one that extends from participation in DIY activities by young people to the incredibly uniform nature of the labour force in digital games production. As Fron, Fullerton, Morie, and Pearce (2007) have argued, the hegemony of play perpetuated by the game industry plays a key role in marginalizing and excluding players outside the vision of the normative ideal player, and I would argue that, given the persistent minimization and problematization of feminine play even by female players, it is vitally important to conduct research and where possible undertake direct action to counter this dominant mode of production. Tokenistic female hires are not going to change the status quo and common practices of digital game production, including the assumed primary audience, nor will they shift the understanding of video games as boys' toys. Nothing less than an overhaul of the industry is needed. But until that happens, greater attention is vitally necessary regarding how women negotiate this context of production and support or challenge the notion that greater diversity in the labour force leads to greater diversity in the games produced, especially given the emphasis on celebrating game design as a DIY practice, particularly among young people. Just as access requires greater nuance in how it is conceived, participation in production necessitates closer examination of the context of this labour and how girls and women who do engage with design subvert or reify the discourses of games culture.

And yet, while we consider and aim to intervene in gaming publics and participation within contexts of production through educational and community initiatives, we must not lose sight of the constitutive role played by familial interactions and regulatory systems within the domestic realm. Public spaces are subject to greater scrutiny and thus are more available for research action and intervention (see for example de Castell & Bryson 1998). It is vitally important, however, to consider the spaces where interventions can be difficult or untenable – the home – precisely because it is constructed as in opposition to public spaces of discourse in neoliberalism: communities, civic spaces, and public institutions. The socialization young people experience in relationship to technology is central to access and participation (Kiesler, Sproull, & Eccles 1985). Given the stratification experienced in the home demonstrated by this analysis, even by girls and women who do play digital games, systems of regulation enforced in the home may have a significant impact on the shift from play/use to more expert play/production. It is only through close analysis of the practices and spaces shaping access, participation, and related experiences – the home, where socialization begins and continually reproduces intelligible subject-positions – that we can understand the circumstances we must grapple with when we engage in public, organizational, and policy initiatives related to digital games, inclusivity, and stratifications based on identity.

NOTES

1. See for example Ian Bogost's critique at http://www.bogost.com/blog/gamification_is_bullshit.shtml.

2. For an example of an articulation of this intolerance to change see Leigh Alexander's 2012 article "Fearing the Hipster Designer" at http://www.edge-online.com/opinion/fearing-hipster-developer.

3. With the mainstreaming of these interests we can see this boundary policing being taken up by female fans as well. For an example, see Tara Tiger Brown's *Forbes* article entitled "Dear Fake Geek Girls: Please Go Away" at http://www.forbes.com/sites/tarabrown/2012/03/26/dear-fake-geek-girls-please-go-away/ and Leigh Alexander's response at http://sexyvideogameland.blogspot.ca/2012/03/about-that-fake-geek-girls-article.html?spref=tw.

4. To be "pwned" is a permutation of the gamer phrase being "owned," which means being trounced by another player or a game instance. Pwnage is therefore the state of owning something or triumphing valiantly. Utgarde Pinnacle is a level 80 dungeon in *World of Warcraft* wherein groups of high-level players come together to defeat a difficult enemy.

5. To "gank" is to kill in gamer terminology. A Hordie is a member of the Horde, one of the two battling factions within *World of Warcraft*, and to gank a Hordie means you play as a member of the Alliance, which comes with its own particular sort of gaming capital.

6. An excellent example of this can be seen in Brenda Braithwaite's 2011 Game Developers Conference rant on social games, wherein the majority of games of this genre are described as being made by those who don't "love games," whereas those she defends are made by people who fought for respect and recognition of the form through a number of difficult years. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5CZFTB2dM4&feature=player_embedded.

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Glossary of Games

Atari Inc. (1972)

Pong (arcade game). Sunnyvale, California: Atari Inc.

One of the earliest arcade games to gain mainstream popularity and one of the first commercially successful video games, *Pong* is hailed as heralding the beginning of the video game industry. In both the arcade and the console versions to which it has been ported, game play resembles the mechanics of ping-pong, characterized by simple 2D graphics. http://www.classicgames arcade.com/game/21599/Pong-arcade-game.html.

Blizzard Entertainment (2004)

World of Warcraft (massively multiplayer online role-playing game or MMORPG). Irvine, California: Blizzard Entertainment.

Boasting seven million subscribers in August 2014, *WoW* holds the record for most popular game in the MMORPG genre. This game takes place in the fantasy universe of the offline real-time strategy video game *Warcraft*. The original game has had several expansions, including 2007's *The Burning Crusade*, 2008's *Wrath of the Lich King*, 2010's *Cataclysm*, and 2012's *Mists of Pandaria*. Players develop an avatar, selecting from several races and classes, and complete quests in order to gain achievement points and level up (the current maximum level is 90). Game play is highly variable, with some players focusing on player-versus-player combat in battlegrounds, others on role-playing, others on end-game raiding, and others on completing lower-level quests with one type of avatar, only to move onto an alternate avatar. All players, however, share their server with thousands of other players and encounter these other players during the course of play. http://us.battle.net/wow/en/.

Brøderbund Software, Inc. (1985)

Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? Computer game. Eugene, Oregon: Brøderbund Software, Inc.

This series of edutainment-style computer games focuses on geography and history. Players are tasked with tracking down the thieves of the Villains' International League of Evil and finally master thief Carmen Sandiego

herself. Players obtain arrest warrants and eventually locate suspects by deducing geographical locations through clues about these places. http:// carmensandiego.com/hmh/site/carmen/.

Bullet Proof Software (1989)

Tetris (multiple platforms). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

This puzzle game involves matching four block tiles in order to create complete rows that disappear. As the player completes more rows, the blocks fall down the screen more quickly, making it more difficult. Versions of this game are available on virtually every game console and device. http:// www.freetetris.org/game.php.

Bungie (2001)

Halo (Xbox game). Redmond, Washington: Microsoft Game Studios.

This science fiction franchise's storyline focuses on a war between humans and an alien alliance called the Covenant through the experiences of Master Chief, a human but cybernetically enhanced super-soldier. The series has been cited as the best in the first-person shooter genre and the killer app of the Microsoft Xbox. Games in the series include *Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2, Halo 3, Halo Wars, Halo 3: ODST*, and *Halo: Reach*. These games are top sellers and well received by critics, and their sales of games and merchandise number in the billions of dollars. The franchise has expanded into other media, including novels, graphic novels, animé, comics, and augmented reality games, as well as fan-made content, including machinima, such as the popular Red vs. Blue series, and fan fiction. http://halo.xbox.com/en-us.

Core Design (1996)

Tomb Raider (multiple platforms). London, England: Eidos Interactive.

A franchise of action-adventure games that have spun out into movies, comic books, and novels centering on the quests of Lara Croft, a fictional British archaeologist. With the success of the franchise, this character has become an icon within the game industry and beyond. The Tomb Raider series is one of the best-selling of all time, having sold over forty-two million units. Though the games vary, they largely focus on Lara's adventures through locations across the globe, obtaining archaeological artefacts while fighting off attackers, using third-person shooting-game mechanics. http:// eu.square-enix.com/en/games/tomb-raider.

Cyan (1993)

Myst (multiple platforms). Eugene, Oregon: Brøderbund.

A graphic adventure video game. Its popularity and enduring appeal are indicated in its multiple remakes, sequels, spin-offs, and ports to consoles and

portable systems. In this game, the player uses a special book to travel across a beautiful, desolate island to discover clues about the game's characters and solve the mystery that unfolds in the dialogue-free landscape. The player's actions determine the ending they meet. http://cyan.com/games/myst/.

DMA Design (1991)

Lemmings (PC game). Liverpool, England: Psygnosis.

In this puzzle game the player controls the migration of a swarm of lemmings to ensure they arrive safely at an exit rather than succumb to the obstacles in their path. http://www.elizium.nu/scripts/lemmings/.

DMA Design (1997)

Grand Theft Auto (multiple platforms). Tokyo, Japan: Rockstar Japan.

This franchise, often referred to as GTA, contains eleven games and four expansion packs, and features a series of sandbox-style action-adventure games with an open style of play that combines driving game mechanics with those of first-person shooters and a huge landscape available for the player to explore, with interactive city dwellers, buildings, and vehicles. Perhaps the most notorious game in the series is Vice City, where the story takes place in the 1980s in a city resembling Miami and focuses on a recently parolled Mafia hitman named Tommy Vercetti. This game is important because aside from being the top-selling video game of 2002, it encountered tremendous controversy because of its mature rating, anti-Haitian and anti-Cuban dialogue, and the shooting of two police offers by Devin Moore in 2003. The seventeen-year-old's lawyer Jack Thompson attributed his violent actions to the graphic content of the game. http://www.rockstargames.com/grandtheftauto/.

EA Canada (1994)

Need for Speed (multiple platforms). Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.

This series of racing games is part of a highly successful franchise. The game play entails racing a variety of cars on a number of tracks, often rendered in detail and including rare vehicles. It has included car customization in its game play since the release of 2003's *Need for Speed: Underground*. Titles in the series include *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* (1998), *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* (2005), and *Need for Speed: Shift* (2009). http://www. needforspeed.com/.

Family Education Network (2007)

Poptropica (PC/Macintosh game). Family Education Network.

This online game is aimed at children aged six to fifteen. Players traverse the islands of the *Poptropica* world, playing games and socializing with each

other. Communication is moderated through pre-scripted chat features, so children cannot use profanity or share personal information. http://www. poptropica.com/.

Game Freak (1996)

Pokémon (multiple platforms). Tokyo, Japan: Nintendo.

Pokémon is a contraction of Pocket Monsters, and it refers to a massive and extremely lucrative media franchise currently owned by Nintendo. The role-playing video game is but one component of the wide range of available merchandise, which also includes animé, manga, cards, toys, books, and games of other genres. In the game, you play as a trainer and your monster battles rivalling species of monsters. Once a player has defeated a Pokémon, she collects its information in her monster index (Pokédex) in the pursuit of becoming a Pokémon Master. http://www.pokemon.com/.

Ganz (2005)

Webkinz (online game). Woodbridge, Ontario: Ganz.

With the purchase of Ganz stuffed animals, children acquire a unique code to access the Webkinz World online game where they can play with a virtual version of their toy. As with other virtual worlds for children, the Webkinz World has its own economy and players earn currency through game play and answering questions. Players gain access to more money, rooms, and virtual objects with each new Webkinz toy they purchase, which has garnered some parental criticisms about the site. In addition, the once ad-free virtual world now includes advertising. http://www.webkinz.com/.

Harmonix Music Systems (2005)

Guitar Hero (multiple platforms). Mountain View, California: RedOctane.

In this music-rhythm game and its sequels, players use guitar-shaped controllers to play along with hit songs, on difficulty levels ranging from easy to expert. Successful play entails hitting coloured buttons and strumming in tandem with the visual cues on the screen. http://guitarhero.com/.

Harmonix Music Systems (2007)

Rock Band (multiple platforms). New York, New York: MTV Games.

In its three iterations, as well as the spin-offs of this music-rhythm game, the player is tasked with completing simulated renditions of rock and pop songs using controllers that resemble a microphone, drums, bass, or guitar and, in the third version, a keytar. Multiplayer and online features allow the player to form a band and play with others in the same location as well as those who are geographically distant. Games from the series are available

on PlayStation 2 and 3 as well as Xbox 360 and Nintendo Wii and in portable formats that no longer include instrument controllers. http://www. rockband.com/.

Her Interactive (1998)

Nancy Drew (multiple platforms). Toronto, Canada: DreamCatcher Games.

The long-running series includes titles directly based on the book series as well as new mysteries starring the famous titular character. The basic game play involves exploring the setting, collecting clues, and solving the mystery underlying the adventure. These games are targeted to teenage players but have been recognized for their appeal to a market of young female gamers. http://www.herinteractive.com/shop-games/all-games/.

Hi Tech Expressions (1991)

Barbie series (multiple platforms). New York, New York: Hi Tech Expressions.

This series is based on Mattel Inc.'s Barbie doll franchise and releases include *Barbie: Game Girl* for the Game Boy, *Barbie: The Island Princess* for the Game Boy Advance, *Barbie: Vacation Adventure* for the Sega Genesis, *Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Horse Rescue* for the PlayStation 2, Game Boy Advance, and Xbox, and *Barbie: Super Sports* for the PC. These games are targeted explicitly at girls and are premised on ultrafeminine game content. For more information see http://uk.ign.com/games/barbie/nes-7496.

Infinity Ward (2003)

Call of Duty (multiple platforms). Santa Monica, California: Activision.

The *Call of Duty* franchise contains a series of both first-person and third-person shooter games. Most of the games centre on World War II settings, though *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* 2 have expanded the war theme to more recent and modern contexts. This is a very popular and profitable series. According to Wikipedia, "as of November 11, 2011, the *Call of Duty* series has sold over 100 million copies." www.callofduty.com

Jagex Games Studio (2001)

RuneScape (MMORPG game). Cambridge, UK: Jagex Games Studios.

This free-to-play game has over 200 million created accounts, making it the most popular free MMORPG. Game play occurs in the fantasy realm of medieval Gielinor, which players traverse on foot, through teleportation, and on ships. Players battle monsters, mine resources, increase skills, interact through trade, chat, and play, and complete quests using personalizable avatars. http://www.runescape.com/.

KnowWonder (2001)

Harry Potter series (multiple platforms). Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.

This series of video games is part of a major intertextual and cross-media franchise targeted to youth based on the books by J.K. Rowling, which have subsequently been adapted to the screen. Games in this series revolve around a fantasy story about a young wizard. Games based on this franchise include *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup,* and *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1–4.* Their content follows the canon presented in the films and books, and targets a range of child and teen audiences. For more information see http://harrypotter.wikia. com/wiki/Harry_Potter_%28video_game_series%29.

Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo (1998)

Dance Dance Revolution (arcade game). Tokyo, Japan: Konami Digital Entertainment.

An early entry in the rhythm and dance genre of video games, this game requires players to hit colour-coded arrows on a dance pad/platform with their feet while following musical and visual prompts. This game was widely visible in arcades and has been adapted for home consoles and educational contexts. https://www.konami.com/ddr/.

Linden Research, Inc. (2005)

Teen Second Life (computer game). San Francisco, California: Linden Labs.

From 2005–2010, the virtual world *Second Life* operated a version reserved only for teenagers aged thirteen to seventeen, intended to keep young users safe from mature content and contact with adults. It was closed because of technical issues but while it was operational, it resembled the look and use of *Second Life*, though with less land, a less expensive economy, and less ease of communication. As of 2011, all accounts were transferred to *Second Life* and paused until the user turned sixteen. Users could only access mature content upon turning eighteen. For more information see http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/ Linden_Lab_Official:Teens_in_Second_Life.

Magnet Interactive Studies (1995)

Chop Suey (CD-Rom). Publisher information unknown.

Winner of *Entertainment Weekly's* CD-ROM of the year in 1995, this adventure game was specifically intended for a girl audience. The storyline

is centered on a town in the American Midwest and the lives of its inhabitants as well as the magical objects you find there. For more information see http://www.adventuregamers.com/games/view/23671.

Maxis (2000)

The Sims (multiple platforms). Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.

This series of real-life simulation games was created by Will Wright, known for *SimCity* and *Spore*. The first version was released in 2000 and the newest iteration (*The Sims 4*) was due for release in 2014. The *Sims 3* was playable on a range of platforms, from PC to Nintendo DS to Xbox 360. Game play consists of bringing characters (Sims) through the stages of life in a suburban setting, from the routine (eating, sleeping, urinating, showering) to the festive (marriage, babies, promotion) to the bizarre and exceptional (alien abduction, nervous breakdown). Each version has variances in reward systems but the primary objective is to keep your Sims contented. http://thesims.ea.com/.

Microsoft (1990)

Solitaire (PC game). Redmond, Washington: Microsoft.

This refers to the electronic version of the tabletop card game where a single player must arrange cards in a specific order by logically deducing the location of hidden cards. Microsoft bundled it with its software to ease new computer users into the functioning of its graphical user interface, computer processing, and the use of the mouse. Game can be played at http://worldofsolitaire.com/.

Monolith Productions (2005)

Condemned: Criminal Origins (Xbox 360 game). Tokyo, Japan: Sega.

This psychological horror video game uses a first-person perspective in a narrative-based mystery plot where you must locate the killers before you yourself are murdered. The player, acting as a crime scene investigator, visits crime scenes, gathers evidence, and engages in combat. For more information see http://condemned.wikia.com/wiki/Condemned:_Criminal_Origins.

Namco (1980)

Pac-Man (arcade game). Tokyo, Japan: Namco.

This classic and very popular arcade game requires that the player help the Pac-Man character move through a maze, evading ghosts, in order to eat all the pellets on the screen. In many ways the icon of *Pac-Man* is symbolic of digital games. Game can be played at http://www.thepcmanwebsite.com/media/pacman_flash/.

New Horizon Interactive (2005)

Club Penguin. (MMORPG). Los Angeles, California: Disney.

Purchased by the Walt Disney Company in August 2007 for US$350-million, *Club Penguin* is a highly successful massive multiplayer online role-playing game for children aged six to fourteen. It is a virtual world inhabited by players using cartoonish penguins as avatars to play a range of games and activities, including shopping for virtual clothing, pets, and furniture for the decoration of one's igloo. Players can choose between free and paid memberships, which change the number of options available. *Club Penguin* is a walled-garden style of playground. It includes safety features like safe chat, allowing only the use of preset phrases, filtering of adult language, sharing of personal information, and the use of moderators to patrol the winter wonderland setting. Players can be banned for repeated violation of in-game rules. www.clubpenguin.com/.

Nickelodeon Kids (1999)

Neopets (browser game). Glendale, California: Nickelodeon Kids & Family Virtual Worlds Group.

On this virtual-pet website targeted at youthful players, users navigate the world of Neopia and create and nurture virtual pets through the purchase of toys, food, and clothes. Players can earn two kinds of in-game currency. Neopoints are gained through game play, investment in the stock market, trades, and contest, while Neocash is purchased with offline currency. http://www.neopets.com/.

Nintendo (1985)

Duck Hunt (Nintendo Entertainment System game). Japan: Nintendo Research and Development 1.

This game is played with a light gun called the NES Zapper, which the players use to shoot ducks as they fly upwards on the screen. It was packaged with the first release of the NES. For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_Hunt.

Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development (1990)

Super Mario World (Super Nintendo Entertainment System game). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

This classic platform game was released with the SNES and is the fourth game in the *Super Mario* series. Game play revolves around iconic characters Mario, Luigi, and Yoshi and their quest to defeat Bowser, rescue Princess Toadstool, and save Dinosaur Land, which requires travel and battle across seven worlds. It has been rereleased for other consoles,

including the Nintendo Wii in 2007. http://www.nintendo.com/games/detail/OnTm1QccFa_Ht39i-dKiI-Af8WRu2Cje.

Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development (1992)

Super Mario Kart (Super Nintendo Entertainment System game). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

 This is the first game in a series of go-kart-style racing titles featuring characters from the Mario series. The series has included versions for Nintendo home consoles, portable systems, and arcades. The game comprises players racing in single player or multiplayer mode using Mario characters on themed tracks with go-karts, collecting power-ups for attacks and greater speed. For more information see http://uk.ign.com/games/super-mario-kart/snes-6884.

Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development (2006)

Wii Sports (Nintendo Wii game). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

 A sports video game packaged with the launch of the Wii console and featured heavily in the marketing campaign for the console, showcasing family and group play. It contains five sports simulations that showcase the motion-sensing Wiimote's capabilities, including tennis, boxing, golf, baseball, and bowling. *Wii Sports* became the second best-selling video game of all time in 2013, outselling even *Super Mario Bros*. http://www.nintendo.com/games/detail/1OTtO06SP7M52gi5m8pD6CnahbW8CzxE.

Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development (2006)

Wii Play (Nintendo Wii game). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

 This title contains a series of mini party games showcasing the motion-based input of the console. As with other games bundled with the Wii, this game features familiar activities, including fishing, billiards, shooting, and table tennis, and can be played alone or with another player. https://www.nintendo.co.uk/Games/Wii/Wii-Play-283949.html.

Nintendo Entertainment Analysis and Development (2007)

Wii Fit (Nintendo Wii game). Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

 An exercise game that includes yoga, aerobics, balancing games, and strength training using the Wii Balance Board input. As of March 2012, *Wii Fit* was the third best-selling console game of all time. This game has been used for therapeutic purposes in health clubs, physiotherapy, and nursing homes because of its focus on balance and posture. The balance board also records a player's weight, and the user profile associated with the game tracks player progress. http://wiifit.com/.

Numedeon Inc. (1999)

Whyville (online game). Pasadena, California: Numedeon.

An educational Internet site oriented towards young people, launched with the objective of engaging users to facilitate learning about science, art, geography, and business. It is one of the most popular virtual worlds for youth, with over seven million users. It is also critically acclaimed, having received awards from parenting groups for its safety features and educational content. It is sponsored by governmental, corporate, and non-profit agencies such as NASA, Disney, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and was developed with the explicit goal of using simulation-based gaming for education. http://www.whyville.net/smmk/nice.

PF Magic (1995)

Petz (PC game). San Francisco, California: PF Magic.

This series includes a range of animal-themed games including *Dogz, Catz, Bunnyz, Horsez, Tigerz, Dolphinz, Monkeyz,* and *Hamsterz Life*. The player adopts, raises, and breeds virtual pets, with negative consequences if the pet is neglected. The games in this series are now available on a range of consoles such as the PC, Playstation 2, Nintendo Wii, and Nintendo DS, with slight modifications in game play across each platform. http://petz.uk.ubi.com/.

Purple Moon (1997)

The *Rockett* series (PC game). Mountain View, California: Purple Moon.

This series includes titles such as *Rockett's New School, Rockett's Tricky Decision, Rockett's Secret Invitation, Secret Paths in the Forest, Secret Paths to the Sea, Secret Paths to Your Dreams*, and *Starfire Soccer Challenge*. They were created by Purple Moon, a software company founded by Brenda Laurel and her colleagues, who aimed to make games that would appeal to girls aged eight to fourteen through perceived feminine values such as friendship. The company faced critiques related to their stereotyping of both gender and race, and eventually merged with Mattel in 1999. For more on Brenda Laurel see http://www.ted.com/talks/brenda_laurel_on_making_games_for_girls.html.

Quantic Dream (2010)

Heavy Rain (PlayStation 3 game). Tokyo, Japan: Sony Computer Entertainment.

This thriller adventure video game was cited for its innovative play style. The game features a film noir atmosphere and an emphasis on interactive storytelling using quick-time cinematics. The player is tasked with identifying the Origami Killer, a serial killer who drowns his young victims, through four

protagonists: a father, a journalist, an FBI agent, and a private eye. These characters can be killed, depending on the player's decisions throughout play, which leads to an array of possible endings. For more information see http://uk.ign.com/games/heavy-rain/ps3-811232.

Rovio Mobile (2009)

Angry Birds (multiple platforms). Macclesfield, England: Chillingo.

Originally a mobile game available on touch-screen-based handheld devices such as the iPhone, the iPod Touch, and Android smart phones, this puzzle game entails toppling different kinds of structures to wipe out pigs stationed therein, using a variety of projectile birds. Additional content, such as holiday versions of the game, have been released periodically by Rovio Mobile for free, and the game has also been ported to non-touch-screen consoles including PlayStation Portable, PlayStation 3, and Windows. www.rovio.com/index.php?page=angry-birds.

Sonic Team (1991)

Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega Genesis/Mega Drive). Tokyo, Japan: SEGA Corporation.

This is the first installment of a series of platform video games centered on the adventures of a blue hedgehog named Sonic. *Sonic the Hedgehog* was designed to compete with Nintendo and its hugely successful Mario character, and it was bundled in with the original release of the Sega Genesis system. http://www.sonicthehedgehog.com/en/.

Valve Corporation (2000)

Counter-Strike (multiple platforms). Kirkland, Washington: Valve Corporation.

This first-person shooter was developed from a fan modification of *Half-Life* that has been expanded into a series by Valve. In play, you are given the option to act as a member of a terrorist or counter-terrorist team or as a spectator. http://blog.counter-strike.net/.

Wizet (2005)

MapleStory (MMORPG). Seoul, South Korea: Nexon Co. Ltd.

This game features a 2D, side-scrolling interface, and play comprises navigation of the Maple World, interaction with each other through chat, trade, via minigames as well as through guilds and parties. As with other MMORPGs, players battle monsters and level up their skills and abilities. While the game is free to play, augmentations for player appearance and game play can be purchased with offline currency. http://maplestory.nexon.net/.

Zynga (2009)

FarmVille (Flash game). San Francisco, California: Zynga.

   A social network game in which players must develop and maintain a successful farm using their social connections in order to obtain particular items. This game can be played on Facebook and as an App on the iPhone. At the peak of its popularity, it had over sixty-two million active users, and it was estimated that approximately ten percent of all Facebook users played *FarmVille*. www.farmville.com/.

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