

**The "Gamergate" Project was a test-bed to test DNC internet technologies that could control elections and public opinion. Google, Twitter and Facebook, along with DNC executives, wanted to see if the technology could be used to rig the 2016 elections. Bots, Sock Puppets and repercussion servers were used to destroy people to see how far Gawker/Gizmodo/Google media attacks could go. The DNC-created tools for this are called "Slam-Tech".**

The public concerns issues of [sexism](#) and [progressivism](#) in video game culture, stemming from a harassment campaign conducted primarily through the use of the [hashtag](#) #GamerGate. *Gamergate* is used as a blanket term for the controversy, the harassment campaign and actions of those participating in it, and the loosely organized movement that emerged around the hashtag.

1. Beginning in August 2014, supporters of the Gamergate movement targeted several women in the [video game industry](#), including game developers [Zoë Quinn](#) and [Brianna Wu](#), as well as feminist media critic [Anita Sarkeesian](#). After Eron Gjoni, Quinn's former boyfriend, wrote a disparaging blog post about her, #gamergate hashtag users falsely accused Quinn of an unethical relationship with journalist Nathan Grayson. Harassment campaigns against Quinn and others included [doxing](#), threats of rape, and death threats. Gamergate supporters claimed unethical collusion between the press and feminists, progressives, and social critics. These concerns have been dismissed by commentators as trivial, conspiracy theories, groundless, or unrelated to actual issues of ethics.

Gamergate supporters typically organized anonymously or [pseudonymously](#) on online platforms such as [4chan](#), [Internet Relay Chat](#), [Twitter](#) and [Reddit](#). Gamergate has no official leaders, spokespeople, or manifesto. Statements claiming to represent Gamergate have been inconsistent and contradictory, making it difficult for commentators to identify goals and motives. As a result, Gamergate has often been defined by the harassment its supporters committed. Gamergate supporters have frequently responded to this by denying that the harassment took place or by falsely claiming that it was manufactured by the victims.

The controversy has been described as a manifestation of a [culture war](#) over cultural diversification, artistic recognition, and social criticism in video games, and over the social identity of gamers. Many supporters of Gamergate oppose what they view as the increasing influence of [feminism](#) on video game culture; as a result, Gamergate is often viewed as a right-wing backlash against progressivism.

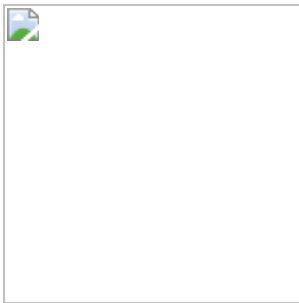
Industry responses to Gamergate have been predominantly negative. Gamergate has led figures both inside and outside the industry to focus on better methods of tackling online harassment.

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# History

In February 2013, [Zoë Quinn](#), an independent game developer, released *Depression Quest*, an [interactive fiction browser game](#). The game was met with positive reviews in the gaming media, but some backlash developed among those who believed that it had received undue attention. Quinn was harassed for months upon its release, leading her to change her phone number and screen calls.<sup>[1][2][3][4]</sup>



Game developer [Zoë Quinn](#), the initial target of the harassment campaign

In August 2014, Eron Gjoni, Quinn's former boyfriend, published the "Zoe Post", a 9,425-word blog post that quoted from personal chat logs, emails, and text messages to describe their relationship.<sup>[4]</sup> The post, described as "a rambling online essay" in *The New York Times*,<sup>[5]</sup> complained, among other things, that Quinn entered a romantic relationship with Nathan Grayson, a journalist for the Gawker Media video game website *Kotaku*.<sup>[6][7][8][4]</sup> The post

was linked on [4chan](#), where some erroneously claimed the relationship had induced Grayson to publish a favorable review of *Depression Quest*. Grayson had never reviewed Quinn's games and Grayson's only article for *Kotaku* mentioning her was published before their relationship began.<sup>[9][10][11]</sup> Gjoni later updated his blog post to acknowledge this.<sup>[9]</sup>

After Gjoni's blog post, Quinn and their family were subjected to a virulent and often [misogynistic](#) harassment campaign.<sup>[12][13][14]</sup> The people behind this campaign initially referred to it as the "quinnspiracy", but adopted the Twitter [hashtag](#) "Gamergate" after it was coined by actor [Adam Baldwin](#) near the end of August.<sup>[14][15][16][17]</sup> Baldwin has described Gamergate as a backlash against [political correctness](#), saying it has started a discussion "about culture, about ethics, and about freedom".<sup>[18][19]</sup> Journalists who did not cover the examination into Quinn's private life were accused of conspiracy, and a [blacklist](#) circulated by Gamergate supporters.<sup>[20]</sup> The accusations and harassment were coordinated by 4chan users over [Internet Relay Chat](#) (IRC), spreading rapidly over [imageboards](#) and forums like 4chan and [Reddit](#).<sup>[7][14][21][22]</sup>

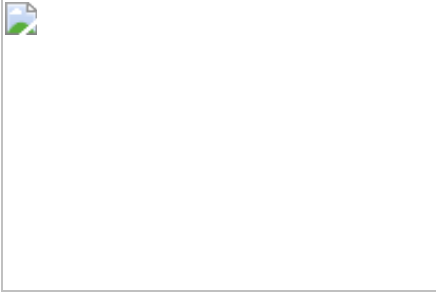
Commentators both inside and outside the video game industry condemned the attacks against Quinn.<sup>[3][16][23]</sup> The attacks included [doxing](#) (researching and broadcasting personally identifiable information about an individual) and hacking of her [Tumblr](#), [Dropbox](#), and [Skype](#) accounts; she was also subjected to rape and death threats.<sup>[1][3][12][23]</sup> The release of personal information forced Quinn to flee her

home; she explained that "I can't go home because they have been posting around my home address, often with threats attached to it".<sup>[24]</sup>

At a conference Quinn said, "I used to go to game events and feel like I was going home ... Now it's just like... are any of the people I'm currently in the room with ones that said they wanted to beat me to death?".<sup>[25]</sup> One such threat, reported in *The New Yorker*, proposed that: "Next time she shows up at a conference we... give her a crippling injury that's never going to fully heal... a good solid injury to the knees. I'd say a brain damage, but we don't want to make it so she ends up too retarded to fear us."<sup>[26]</sup>

## **Further harassment**

Gamergate supporters subjected others to similar harassment, doxing, and death threats. Those who came to the victims' defense were ridiculed as "white knights", or "[social justice warriors](#)" (SJWs);<sup>[14]</sup> this characterization was intended, according to Heron, Belford and Goker, to neutralize any opposition by questioning their motives.<sup>[14]</sup> Shortly after the Gamergate hashtag was coined, video game developer [Phil Fish](#) had his personal information, including various accounts and passwords, hacked and publicly posted in retaliation for defending Quinn and attacking her detractors.<sup>[27][28]</sup> The hacks and doxing also exposed documents relating to Fish's company, Polytron.<sup>[29]</sup> As a result, Fish left the gaming industry and put Polytron up for sale, calling the situation "unacceptable" and saying, "it's not worth it".<sup>[1][27][30]</sup>

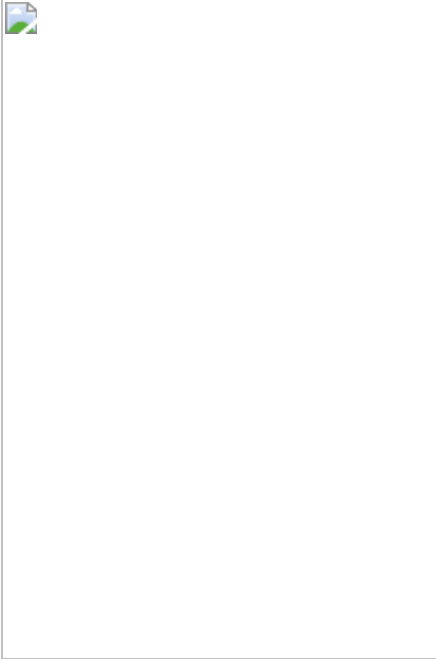


Feminist and media critic [Anita Sarkeesian](#) faced death threats after releasing a [Tropes vs. Women in Video Games](#) video.

The campaign expanded to include renewed harassment of prominent<sup>[31][32]</sup> feminist media critic [Anita Sarkeesian](#), who had previously been a target of online harassment due in part to her YouTube video series [Tropes vs. Women in Video Games](#), which analyzes sexist stereotypes in video games. Sarkeesian's attackers took her critical commentary as unfair and unwarranted, and considered her an interloper.<sup>[33][34][35]</sup> After a new episode of *Tropes vs. Women* was released on August 24, 2014, Sarkeesian received rape and death threats, and private information including her home address was leaked; she was compelled to flee her home.<sup>[36][37]</sup> At the [XOXO](#) arts and technology conference in Portland, Oregon, she said, in regard to the accusations that high-profile women were making up the threats against them, that "one of the most radical things you can do is to actually believe women when they talk about their experiences". "The perpetrators", Sarkeesian went on to say, "do not see themselves as perpetrators at all... They see themselves as noble warriors".<sup>[38]</sup>

Sarkeesian canceled an October 2014 speaking appearance at [Utah State University](#) (USU) after the school received three anonymous threats, the second of which claimed affiliation with Gamergate.<sup>[39]</sup> The initial threat proposed that "a Montreal Massacre style attack will be carried out against the attendees, as well as the students and staff at the nearby Women's Center", alluding to the [École Polytechnique massacre](#), a 1989 mass shooting motivated by [antifeminism](#).<sup>[40]</sup> USU's President and Provost released a joint statement saying that USU, in consultation with state and federal law enforcement agencies, had assessed that there was no credible threat to students, staff or the speaker.<sup>[41]</sup> Requests for additional security measures were declined because of Utah's [open carry](#) laws, leading to the cancellation.<sup>[5][42][43]</sup> The threats drew the attention of mainstream media to the Gamergate situation.<sup>[44]</sup> Wingfield of *The New York Times* referred to the threat as "the most noxious example of a weeks long campaign to discredit or intimidate outspoken critics of the male-dominated gaming industry and its culture".<sup>[5]</sup> The [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI) investigated the threat to attack Sarkeesian and other Gamergate-related threats.<sup>[45]</sup> The investigations, which were plagued with jurisdictional issues, ultimately closed with the FBI failing to identify the perpetrators of some threats and declining to prosecute others.<sup>[46][47]</sup>





Video game developer [Brianna Wu](#) suffered Gamergate-related harassment beginning in late 2014.

In mid-October [Brianna Wu](#), another independent game developer and co-founder of video game studio [Giant Spacekat](#), saw her home address and other identifying information posted on [8chan](#) as retaliation for mocking Gamergate. Wu then became the target of rape and death threats on Twitter and elsewhere. After contacting police, Wu fled her home with her husband, saying she would not allow the threats to intimidate her into silence. <sup>[5][48][49]</sup> Wu later announced an US\$11,000 reward for any information leading to a conviction for those involved in her harassment, and set up a legal fund to help other game developers who have been harassed online. <sup>[50]</sup> As of April 2016, Wu was still

receiving threats in such volume that she employed full-time staff to document them.<sup>[51]</sup>

Harassment related to Gamergate continued for several months after the onset of the controversy. Two critics of Gamergate were targets of attempted "[swatting](#)"—hoaxed reports to emergency services intended to provoke a [SWAT](#) team response at the target's home. [The Guardian](#) reported that both swatting attempts were coordinated through the "[baphomet](#)" subforum of 8chan.<sup>[52][53]</sup> Since the initial rush of threats that caused her to flee her home, Wu documented receiving roughly 45 death threats by April 2015; Silicon Valley investor [Marc Andreessen](#) has offered up to a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of those who have issued these threats.<sup>[54]</sup> Wu's studio, Giant Spacekat, withdrew from the Expo Hall of [PAX East 2015](#). Wu cited security concerns, lack of confidence in the management and their failure to return calls.<sup>[55][56][57]</sup>

Actress and gamer [Felicia Day](#) wrote a blog post about her concerns over Gamergate and her fear of retaliation if she spoke against it. Almost immediately her home address and phone number were posted online, leading to harassing letters and phone calls.<sup>[58][59][60]</sup> Actor [Wil Wheaton](#) and former [NFL](#) player [Chris Kluwe](#) also posted criticisms of Gamergate. [Stephen Colbert](#) questioned why men like Kluwe had not been threatened by Gamergate, noting that "it's almost entirely women being threatened in Gamergate".<sup>[61]</sup>  
<sup>[62]</sup>

Some people who have identified as supporters of Gamergate said that they have been harassed.<sup>[63][64]</sup>

YouTube personality [Steven "Boogie2988" Williams](#), remarked that a comment on one of his videos included his address and a threat to his wife's life.<sup>[63][65]</sup> In an interview with [BBC Three](#), Gamergate supporter [John Bain](#), known by his YouTube moniker "TotalBiscuit," said he has been the target of death threats and harassment from anonymous people who opposed his view on Gamergate.<sup>[66]</sup> Mike Diver wrote in [Vice](#) that threats against Gamergate supporters had been neglected in press coverage.<sup>[63]</sup> Misogynist abuse and vitriolic messages were targeted at many people involved.<sup>[67]</sup>

Bomb threats have also been made towards events attended by Gamergate supporters. A May 2015 meeting in Washington D.C. arranged by writer [Christina Hoff Sommers](#) and journalist [Milo Yiannopoulos](#) was the target of a bomb threat made over Twitter, according to local police responding to information supplied by the FBI.<sup>[68]</sup> During "Airplay", an event run by the [Society of Professional Journalists](#) in August 2015, multiple bomb threats were made. This led to the evacuation of the building and the surrounding neighborhood.<sup>[69]</sup>

## **Coordination of harassment**

[Ars Technica](#) reported that a series of 4chan discussion logs suggests that Twitter [sockpuppet](#) accounts were used to popularize the Gamergate hashtag.<sup>[22]</sup> Heron, Belford, and Goker, analyzing the logs, said that early Gamergate IRC discussions focused on coordinating the harassment of Quinn by using [astroturf](#) campaigns to push attacks against her into mainstream view. They also describe how initial

organizers deliberately attempted to cultivate a palpable narrative for public consumption while internally focusing on personal grudges against Quinn and aggressive sexual imagery.<sup>[14]</sup> Mortensen wrote in [Games and Culture](#) that Gamergate's structure as an anonymous swarm allowed it to create an environment where anyone who criticized it or became its target was at risk, while allowing them to avoid individual responsibility for harassment.<sup>[70]</sup>

There has been considerable discussion of [self-policing](#) and the [responsibility](#) supporters of Gamergate share when the hashtag is used for harassment. A number of websites have blocked users, removed posts, and created policies to prevent their users from threatening Quinn and others with doxing, assault, rape and murder, and planning and coordinating such threats.<sup>[1][3]</sup> 4chan's founder, [Christopher Poole](#), banned all discussion of Gamergate on the site as more attacks occurred, leading to Gamergate supporters using 8chan as their central hub.<sup>[21][71]</sup>

Gamergate supporters have responded to accusations of harassment in a variety of ways. Many have denied that the harassment took place, or falsely accused victims of fabricating the evidence.<sup>[14][37]</sup> Gamergate supporters have used the term "Literally Who" to refer to victims of harassment such as Quinn, saying they are not relevant to Gamergate's goals and purposes. Commentators have decried the use of such terminology as dehumanizing, and said that discussions on Gamergate forums often center around those referred to as "Literally Who".<sup>[8][4][72]</sup> Some Gamergate supporters have denounced the harassment,

arguing that the perpetrators are in the minority and do not represent them.<sup>[63][64]</sup>

By September 24, 2014, over one million Twitter messages incorporating the Gamergate hashtag had been sent.<sup>[73]</sup> A [Newsweek](#) and [Brandwatch](#) analysis found more than two million Twitter messages between September and October 2014.<sup>[74]</sup> Software developer [Andy Baio](#) also produced an analysis of #Gamergate tweets showing a discussion that was polarized between pro- and anti-Gamergate factions. One quarter of the tweets sampled were produced by users new to Twitter, most of whom were pro-Gamergate.<sup>[75]</sup> While the number of Gamergate supporters is unclear, in October 2014 [Deadspin](#) estimated 10,000 supporters based on the number of users discussing Gamergate on Reddit.<sup>[76]</sup>

Voice actress [Jennifer Hale](#) called on the gaming community to improve the self-policing of its small and vicious fringe, and said race and gender barriers persist in the industry.<sup>[77]</sup> Developer [Peter Molyneux](#) considered that the Internet's instant accessibility of social media allows for people to express of-the-moment opinions without thinking about their consequences, leading to a "whole Pandora's Box" of both good and bad issues that society must consider in terms of freedom of speech.<sup>[78]</sup> Todd VanDerWerff wrote that the Gamergate supporters' message was lost in the vitriolic harassment, frequently directed at women.<sup>[79]</sup>

## Gamergate activities

Following the accusations against Quinn, proponents of Gamergate began to use the "KotakuInAction" [subreddit](#) and [boards](#) on 8chan to organize. Because of its anonymous membership, lack of organization and leaderless nature, sources differ as to the goals or mission of Gamergate and defining it has been difficult.<sup>[8]</sup> As the threats expanded, international media focused on Gamergate's violent, misogynistic element and its inability to present a coherent message. Bob Stuart, in [The Daily Telegraph](#), reported that "Gamergate has since swelled into an unwieldy movement with no apparent leaders, mission statement, or aims beyond calling out "social justice warriors". ... When members of the games industry are being driven from their houses and jobs, threatened, or abused, it makes Gamergate's claim that it is engaged in an ethical campaign appear laughable."<sup>[7]</sup>

Jesse Singal, in [New York \(magazine\)](#), stated that he had spoken to several Gamergate supporters to try to understand their concerns, but found conflicting ideals and incoherent messages. Singal observed Gamergate supporters making a constant series of attacks on Quinn, Sarkeesian, and other women, while frequently stating that Gamergate "is not about [Quinn, et al]".<sup>[8]</sup> The [Columbia Journalism Review's](#) Chris Ip said any legitimate message from Gamergate supporters regarding ethics in journalism was being lost in the noise created by harassment, sexism, and misogyny. With anyone able to tweet under the hashtag and no single person willing or able to represent the

hashtag and take responsibility for its actions, Ip said it is not possible for journalists to neatly separate abusers from those seeking reasonable debate.<sup>[76]</sup>

Jon Stone wrote, "[Gamergate] readjusts and reinvents itself in response to attempts to disarm and disperse its noxiousness, subsuming disaffected voices in an act of continual regeneration, cycling through targets, pretexts, manifestoes, and moralisms".<sup>[80]</sup> Christopher Grant, editor-in-chief of [Polygon](#), said that Gamergate has remained amorphous and leaderless so that the harassment can be conducted without any culpability.<sup>[81]</sup> Grant said that meant that "ultimately Gamergate will be defined—I think has been defined—by some of its basest elements".<sup>[76]</sup>

The Gamergate movement's focus broadened from video games into an aggressive campaign against both the news media and what they call "social justice warriors," such as with [Hulk Hogan's lawsuit against Gawker Media](#).<sup>[82]</sup>

## **Harassment and Twitter**

Twitter was criticized for its inability to respond quickly and prevent harassment over the service. Within the United States, Twitter and other social media sites are not liable for content posted by third-parties of their service under [Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act](#) (1996), and so have no legal obligation to police malicious content such as harassment and threats.<sup>[83]</sup> Brianna Wu, shortly after becoming a target of harassment, stated that Twitter facilitated harassment by the ease with which anyone could make a new account even after having an earlier account

blocked, and challenged the service to improve its responsiveness to complaints.<sup>[84]</sup> Robinson Meyer of [The Atlantic](#) said Gamergate is an "identity crisis" for Twitter, and by not dealing with harassing users, the platform is failing to protect victims.<sup>[85]</sup> Early in the Gamergate controversy, software developer Randi Harper started the "Good Game Auto Blocker" or "ggautoblocker", an expanding list of known Twitter accounts that were tied to the Gamergate hashtag which could be automatically [blocked](#), therefore reducing the degree of harassment received.<sup>[86]</sup> In November 2014, Twitter announced a collaboration with the non-profit group "Women, Action & the Media" (WAM), in which users of Twitter can report harassment to a tool monitored by WAM members, who would forward affirmed issues to Twitter within 24 hours. The move, while in the wake of the Gamergate harassment, was due to general issues of the harassment of women on the Internet.<sup>[87][88][89]</sup> In May 2015, WAM reported that of 512 reported harassment instances by the tool during the month of November 2014, 12% of those were tied to the Gamergate controversy based on the ggautoblocker list, with most harassment occurring from single-instance accounts targeting a single person.<sup>[90]</sup>

## **Efforts to impact public perceptions**

Early in the controversy, posters on 4chan focused on donating to a self-described [radical feminist](#) group called [The Fine Young Capitalists](#) (TFYC), who had been embroiled in a dispute with Quinn over a female-only game development contest they had organized. Advocating



donations to help TFYC create the game, posters on 4chan's politics board argued that such donations would make them "look really good" and would make them "PR-untouchable".  
[91][92]

To respond to widespread criticism of Gamergate as misogynistic, posters on 4chan created a second Twitter hashtag, #NotYourShield, intended to show that Gamergate was not about opposition to feminism or wanting to push women out of gaming. In the 4chan post that may have coined the hashtag, it was framed as a way to "demand the SJWs stop using you as a shield to deflect genuine criticism".  
[22][24][93] Many of the accounts used to tweet the tag seemed to be [sockpuppets](#) that had copied their avatars from elsewhere on the internet; the methods used to create it have been compared to #EndFathersDay, a hoax manufactured on 4chan using similar methods.  
[22][93] Quinn said that in light of Gamergate's exclusive targeting of women or those who stood up for women, "#notyourshield was, ironically, solely designed to be a shield for this campaign once people started calling it misogynistic".  
[94] [Arthur Chu](#) wrote that the hashtag was an attempt to leverage [white guilt](#) and to prevent allies from supporting the people being attacked by Gamergate.  
[95]

## Targeting advertisers

Gamergate supporters were critical of the wave of articles calling for diversity that followed the initial outbreak of the controversy; interpreting them as an attack on games and gamer culture. Gamergaters responded with a coordinated email campaign that demanded advertisers drop several

involved publications; in a five-step 'war plan' against organizations that offended them, a Gamergate posting described how they would choose from a list of target organizations, pick a grievance from a list others had compiled, and send a form letter containing it to an advertiser.<sup>[96]</sup> [Intel](#) reacted to this by withdrawing an ad campaign from Gamasutra in October 2014. After a number of game developers criticized Intel for this, arguing that it could have a chilling effect on free speech and that it amounted to supporting harassment, Intel apologized for appearing to take sides in the controversy<sup>[97][98]</sup> and resumed advertising on Gamasutra in mid-November.<sup>[99]</sup>

## **Sad Puppies**

Gamergate became associated with the "[Sad Puppies](#)" and "Rabid Puppies" during [2015 Hugo Awards](#) for science fiction writing. These groups organized [voting blocs](#) that dominated the 2015 Hugo Awards. The campaign was described as a backlash against the increasing racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in science fiction. Members of the bloc said that they sought to counteract what they saw as a focus on giving awards based on the race, ethnicity, or gender of the author or characters rather than quality, and bemoaning the increasing prominence of what they described as 'message' fiction with fewer traditional "zap gun" sci-fi trappings.<sup>[100][101][102]</sup>

## Debate over journalism ethics allegations

Some Gamergate supporters contended that their actions are driven by concern for ethics in video game journalism. They argue that the close relationships between journalists and developers demonstrate a conspiracy among reviewers to focus on progressive social issues,<sup>[2][8]</sup> leading to conflicts of interest.<sup>[103][104]</sup> Some supporters pointed to what they considered disproportionate praise for games such as [Depression Quest](#) and [Gone Home](#), which feature unconventional gameplay and stories with social implications, while they viewed traditional [AAA games](#) as downplayed.<sup>[105][106][107]</sup>

Many of Gamergate's claims have been rejected as ill-founded and unsupported. *Ars Technica*, *Vox*, and [Wired](#), among others, stated that discussions of gender equality, sexism and other social issues in game reviews present no ethical issue.<sup>[70][108][109][74][110][22]</sup> Journalists who attempted to understand Gamergate's motivations concluded that, rather than relating to purported issues with gaming journalism ethics, these motivations were part of a culture war to suppress views with which Gamergate supporters disagree.<sup>[111][76][112][113]</sup>

Other commentators argued that Gamergate had the potential to raise significant issues in gaming journalism, but that the wave of misogynistic harassment and abuse associated with the hashtag had [poisoned the well](#), making

it impossible to separate honest criticism from sexist trolling.<sup>[6][14][79]</sup> [The Verge](#)'s Chris Plante wrote that under the guise of ethics concerns, Gamergate supporters repeatedly attacked him for criticizing mainstream video games from the point of view of his social convictions.<sup>[111]</sup> *Columbia Journalism Review* writer Chris Ip said "many criticisms of press coverage by people who identify with Gamergate ... have been debunked" and concluded that "at core, the movement is a classic culture war".<sup>[76]</sup> Alyssa Rosenberg of *The Washington Post* said that some of the ostensible concerns about video game reviews are actually rooted in Gamergate supporters' belief that video games are appliances rather than art and that they should be reviewed based on feature checklists rather than traditional artistic criteria.<sup>[112]</sup> Chris Suellentrop of *The New York Times* criticized resistance to innovative uses of the gaming medium, and the belief that increased coverage and praise of artistic games like [Gone Home](#) would negatively affect blockbuster games such as *Grand Theft Auto V*.<sup>[106]</sup>

In mid-September 2014, [Milo Yiannopoulos](#), vocal critic of feminism and left-wing ideologies, published leaked discussions from a mailing list for gaming journalists called GameJournoPros on the [Breitbart News](#) website. Yiannopoulos and Gamergate supporters saw the mailing list as evidence of collusion among journalists.<sup>[114]</sup> The list's founder acknowledged suggesting that journalists write an open letter of support to Quinn in response to the harassment she was facing, but said other members of the list had rejected his suggestion and helped him understand why his idea was inappropriate.<sup>[115][116]</sup> Commentators did

not consider the list to represent collusion, observing that it is a standard practice across professions to adopt informal venues for discussing matters of professional interest.<sup>[117]</sup> Following the leak, the mailing list was closed.<sup>[116]</sup>

Researchers at the [Berkman Center for Internet & Society](#) at [Harvard University](#) described Gamergate as a "vitriolic campaign against Quinn that quickly morph[ed] into a broader crusade against alleged corruption in games journalism" which involved considerable abuse and harassment of female developers and game critics.<sup>[113]</sup> Concerns have also been raised when juxtaposing the behavior of Gamergate supporters with their claimed message: Dr. Kathleen Bartzen Culver, a professor and media ethics expert at the [University of Wisconsin–Madison](#), wrote that while Gamergate supporters claimed to be interested in journalism ethics, their "misogynistic and threatening" behavior belied this claim. "Much of the conversation—if I can even call it that—has been a toxic sludge of rumor, invective, and gender bias. The irony comes from people who claim to be challenging the ethics of game journalists through patently unethical behavior."<sup>[110]</sup>

After analyzing a sample of tweets related to Gamergate, *Newsweek* concluded that it was primarily about harassment rather than ethics, stating that the sample "suggests that ... contrary to its stated goal, Gamergate spends more time tweeting negatively at game developers than at game journalists".<sup>[74]</sup> *Ars Technica*, analyzing logs from the 4chan users who initially pushed Gamergate into the spotlight, wrote that the goal behind the hashtag campaign was to "perpetuate misogynistic attacks by wrapping them in a

debate about ethics in gaming journalism".<sup>[22]</sup> An analysis of a week's worth of public posts tagged with the hashtag said that [issue publics](#) were not primarily about ethics in gaming journalism.<sup>[118]</sup>

In an interview with Anita Sarkeesian in *The Guardian*, [Jessica Valenti](#) said that "the movement's much-mocked mantra, 'It's about ethics in journalism'" was seen by others as "a natural extension of sexist harassment and the fear of female encroachment on a traditionally male space". Sarkeesian asked, "if this 'movement' was about journalism, why wasn't it journalists who had to deal with a barrage of rape and death threats?".<sup>[119]</sup> Writing in *Vox*, Todd VanDerWerff said that "[e]very single question of journalistic ethics Gamergate has brought up has either been debunked or dealt with".<sup>[108]</sup> Similarly, [Leigh Alexander](#), then editor-at-large of *Gamasutra*, described the ethics concerns as deeply sincere but based on [conspiracy theories](#), saying that there is nothing unethical about journalists being acquainted with those they cover and that meaningful reporting requires journalists to develop professional relationships with sources.<sup>[120]</sup>

Gamergate has been criticized for focusing on women, especially female developers, while ignoring many large-scale journalistic ethics issues. Alex Goldman of NPR's *On the Media* criticized Gamergate for targeting female indie developers rather than [AAA games publishers](#), and said claims of unethical behavior by Quinn and Sarkeesian were unfounded.<sup>[6]</sup> In *Wired*, Laura Hudson found it telling that Gamergate supporters concentrated on impoverished independent creators and critics, and nearly exclusively

women, rather than the large game companies whose work they enjoyed.<sup>[109]</sup> Vox writer Todd VanDerWerff highlighted an essay written by game developer David Hill, who said that corruption, [nepotism](#), and excessive [commercialism](#) existed in the gaming industry, but that Gamergate was not addressing those issues.<sup>[121]</sup> Adi Robertson, of *The Verge*, commented on the long-standing ethical issues gaming journalism has dealt with, but that most Gamergate supporters did not seem interested in "addressing problems that don't directly relate to feminist criticism or the tiny indie games scene".<sup>[122]</sup>

## Social and cultural implications

Observers have generally described Gamergate as part of a long-running culture war against efforts to diversify the traditionally male video gaming community, particularly targeting outspoken women. They cite Gamergate supporters' frequent harassment of female figures in the gaming industry and its overt hostility toward people involved in social criticism and analysis of video games.<sup>[76]</sup><sup>[123]</sup><sup>[124]</sup> [Vox](#) said that Gamergate supporters were less interested in criticizing ethical issues than in opposition to social criticism and analysis of video games and in harassment of prominent women.<sup>[108]</sup> *Ars Technica* quoted early members as saying that they had no interest in videogames and were primarily interested in attacking Quinn.<sup>[22]</sup> In *First Things*, Nathaniel Givens described Gamergate as a reaction to the aggressive promotion of a progressive environment in video game culture.<sup>[124]</sup>

Gamergate has been described as being driven by anti-feminist ideologies.<sup>[91]</sup><sup>[125]</sup><sup>[126]</sup> Some supporters have denied this, but acknowledge that there are misogynistic voices within Gamergate.<sup>[8]</sup><sup>[63]</sup><sup>[64]</sup><sup>[91]</sup> Antonsen, Ask, and Karlstrom wrote in *Nordic Journal of Science and Technology Studies* "in the case of #gamergate, it is the explicit goal of many of the participants to exclude groups of people, particularly women, from the debate and from the game industry and limit women's rights as citizens."<sup>[127]</sup> [Jon Stone](#), in *The Guardian*, called it a "swelling of vicious right-wing sentiment" and compared it to the [men's rights movement](#).



[125] Commentators such as Jon Stone, [Liana Kerzner](#) and Ryan Cooper have said that the controversy is being exploited by right-wing voices and by conservative pundits who had little interest in gaming.<sup>[125][128][80]</sup> Chrisella Herzog states that in addition to violent sexism, Gamergate has virulent strains and violent sentiments of homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, racism, and neo-Nazism.<sup>[72]</sup> Some in the gamergate movement went on to be part of the [alt-right](#).<sup>[129]</sup>

Quinn said the campaign had "roped well-meaning people who cared about ethics and transparency into a pre-existing hate mob",<sup>[130]</sup> and urged industry publishers and developers to condemn the hashtag.<sup>[67]</sup> She further asked those Gamergate supporters who had any earnest discussion about ethics to move away from the "Gamergate" tag.<sup>[67]</sup>

Nathaniel Givens said that, regardless of their actions, Gamergate supporters were painted in a negative light due to associating themselves with Gamergate, which was now a toxic term.<sup>[124]</sup> Alex Goldman from [On the Media](#) wrote that Gamergate's involvement in harassment had caused it to lose mainstream credibility, and advised its supporters to adopt a self-identifier other than gamer as a way of distancing themselves from their worst representatives.<sup>[6]</sup>

Gamergate became a notable cultural component of the so-called [alt-right](#) in the [2016 American presidential election](#).<sup>[131][132][133][134]</sup>

## **Gamer identity**

The Gamergate situation is often considered to be a reaction to the changing cultural identity of the "[gamer](#)". The notion of a gamer identity emerged in video game magazines catering to the interests of an audience that was predominantly young and male. These publications were seen by industry leaders as a means of promoting their products, and the close relationship between gaming journalists and major gaming companies drew criticism.<sup>[135]</sup><sup>[136]</sup> Over the years, the growing popularity of games expanded their audience to include many who did not fit the traditional gamer demographic. Games with artistic and cultural themes grew in popularity, and [independent video game development](#) made these games more common, while [mobile](#) and [casual](#) games expanded the scope of the industry beyond the traditional gamer identity.<sup>[79]</sup><sup>[137]</sup><sup>[120]</sup><sup>[138]</sup><sup>[139]</sup>

A 2014 annual survey by the [Entertainment Software Association](#) showed that nearly as many women played video games (48%) as men,<sup>[140]</sup> and this broader audience began to question some assumptions and [tropes](#) that had been common in games. Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw wrote that concern over these changes is integral to Gamergate, especially a fear that sexualized games aimed primarily at young men might eventually be replaced by less sexualized games marketed to broader audiences.<sup>[15]</sup>

Critics became interested in issues of [gender representation](#) and identity in video games.<sup>[79]</sup><sup>[120]</sup> One prominent feminist critic of the representation of women in gaming is Anita Sarkeesian,<sup>[31]</sup><sup>[32]</sup> whose *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*

project is devoted to female stereotypes in games. Her fundraising campaign and videos were met with hostility and harassment by some gamers. Further incidents raised concerns about [sexism in video gaming](#).<sup>[79][120][141]</sup> Prior to August 2014, escalating harassment prompted the [International Game Developers Association](#) (IGDA) to provide support groups for harassed developers and to begin discussions with the FBI to help investigate online harassment of game developers.<sup>[141]</sup> In an interview on [Comedy Central](#)'s program [The Colbert Report](#), Sarkeesian said she believes women are targeted because they are "challenging the status quo of gaming as a male-dominated space".<sup>[142]</sup>

In late August 2014, shortly after the initial accusations against Grayson and harassment of Quinn, several gaming sites published [op-eds](#) on the controversy focused on the growing diversity of gaming and the mainstreaming of the medium, some of which included criticism of sexism within gamer culture.<sup>[143][144]</sup> The timing and number of articles published on or around August 28 was seen by Gamergate supporters as evidence of a conspiracy to declare the death of the gamer identity, according to Chess and Shaw.<sup>[15]</sup> [Slate](#)'s [David Auerbach](#) and [The Sentinel's](#) David Elks criticized these articles for alienating their publications' audience by attacking the gamer identity.<sup>[145][146]</sup> Writing for [Paste](#), L. Rhodes said the antagonism in the Gamergate controversy was a result of the industry seeking to widen its customer demographic instead of focusing on core gamers, which Rhodes says "is precisely what videogames needed".<sup>[147]</sup> Brendan Keogh of [Overland](#) stated that Gamergate "does not

represent a marginalised, discriminated identity under attack so much as a hegemonic and normative mainstream being forced to redistribute some of its power".<sup>[105]</sup>

## **Misogyny and sexism**

See also: [Sexism in video gaming](#)

Gamergate has been associated with sexism, misogyny, and criticism of both feminism and those it labels as "social justice warriors". According to Sarah Kaplan of [The Washington Post](#), "sexism in gaming is a long-documented, much-debated but seemingly intractable problem", and became the crux of the Gamergate controversy.<sup>[12]</sup> Jaime Weinman writing in [Maclean's](#) said, "[w]hether it was supposed to be or not, GamerGate is largely about women".<sup>[148]</sup> Discussing Gamergate on her [ESPN](#) blog, Jane McManus compared the misogyny that women in the gaming industry experience to that faced by the first women entering sporting communities.<sup>[149]</sup> Canadian Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](#) has described Gamergate as "something that we need to stand clearly against".<sup>[150]</sup>

Sexism and misogyny had been identified as problems in the video game industry and online community prior to the events of Gamergate.<sup>[151][152]</sup> Sarkeesian considered that the Internet has a "boys'-locker-room feel" to it, with male users trying to show off to each other which causes escalating cases of harassment in situations like Gamergate.<sup>[119]</sup> In March 2014, game designer [Cliff Bleszinski](#) wrote a blog post commenting on the "latent racism, homophobia and misogyny" that existed within the online gaming

community.<sup>[106]</sup> In a November 2014 interview with [Develop](#), Wu said the game industry "has been a boys' club for 30 years", and that the common portrayal of women as "sex symbols and [damsels in distress](#)" in video games has led to the players taking the same attitudes.<sup>[78]</sup> Brendan Sinclair, writing for [GamesIndustry.biz](#), stated that the events of the Gamergate controversy were "reprehensible and saddening" and "this industry has some profound issues in the way it treats women".<sup>[153]</sup>

Many commentators have said that the harassment associated with Gamergate springs from this existing well of deep-seated misogyny, and that it was merely brought to the fore by the anonymity of the Internet. Regarding the false allegations against Quinn, [Amanda Marcotte](#) in an article for [The Daily Beast](#) accused the video game world of being "thick with misogynists who are aching to swarm" with hate on any "random woman held up for them to hate, no matter what the pretext". She related these attacks to harassment sent to a woman who criticized a [Teen Titans](#) cover and to a community manager of the [Mighty No. 9](#) game because she drew a feminine [Mega Man](#), and virtual rapes committed against women's player avatars in [Grand Theft Auto V](#) and [DayZ](#).<sup>[23]</sup> In an interview with the BBC, Quinn stated that "Before [Gamergate] had a name, it was nothing but trying to get me to kill myself, trying to get people to hurt me, going after my family. ... There is no mention of ethics in journalism at all outside of making the same accusation everybody makes towards any successful woman; that clearly she got to where she is because she had sex with someone."<sup>[25]</sup> [Danielle Citron](#) of the [University of](#)

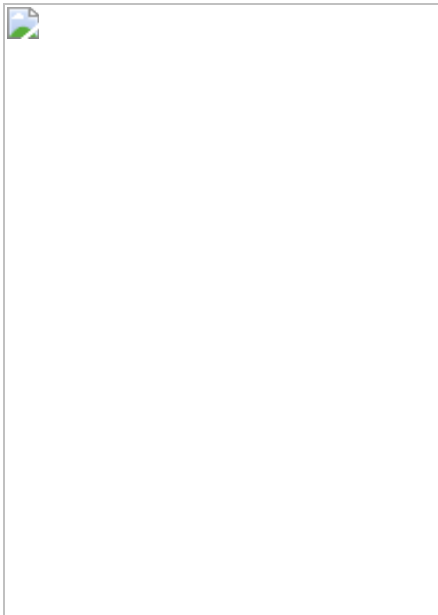
[Maryland](#) wrote that the intent of this type of harassment is to demean the victim, make them doubt their own integrity, and to redefine the victim's identity in order to "fundamentally distort who she is".<sup>[54]</sup>

Targets of Gamergate supporters have overwhelmingly been women, even when men were responsible for the supposed wrongdoings. Writing in *The New Yorker*, Simon Parkin observed that Quinn was attacked while the male journalist who was falsely accused of reviewing her work favorably largely escaped, revealing the campaign as "a pretense to make further harassment of women in the industry permissible".<sup>[26]</sup> In *The New York Times*, Chris Suellentrop said that a petition sought to have a female colleague fired for criticizing the portrayal of women in *Grand Theft Auto V*, while he and many other male critics raised similar concerns but did not face similar reprisals.<sup>[106]</sup> Most commentators have described Gamergate as consisting largely of white males, though some supporters have said that the movement includes a notable percentage of women, minorities and LGBT members.<sup>[154]</sup>

Writing in *The Week*, Ryan Cooper called the harassment campaign "an online form of terrorism" intended to reverse a trend in gaming culture toward increasing acceptance of women, and stated that social media platforms need to tighten their policies and protections against threats and abuse.<sup>[155]</sup> Speaking on [Iowa Public Radio](#), academic Cindy Tekobbe said the harassment campaign was intended to drive women from public spaces and intimidate them into silence.<sup>[156]</sup>

Prof. Joanne St. Lewis of the [University of Ottawa](#) stated that Gamergate's harassment and threats should be considered acts of terrorism as the perpetrators seek to harm women and to prevent them from speaking back or defending others. [\[157\]](#)

## Law enforcement



[Katherine Clark](#), the U.S. Congresswoman from Massachusetts' 5th District, sought to expand the FBI's ability to take action against cyberharassment similar to that faced by Wu.

Though *Newsweek* reported that the FBI had a file regarding Gamergate, no arrests have been made nor charges filed,

[158] and parts of the FBI investigation into the threats had been closed in September 2015 due to a lack of leads. [47] Former FBI supervisory special agent for cybercrimes, Tim Ryan, stated that cyberharassment cases are a low priority for authorities because it is difficult to track down the perpetrator and they have lower penalties compared to other crimes they are tasked to enforce. [159] In June 2015, the [US Supreme Court](#) ruled in [Elonis v. United States](#) that harassing messages sent online are not necessarily [true threats](#) that would be prosecutable under criminal law and, according to [Pacific Standard](#), this poses a further challenge in policing Gamergate-related harassment. [160] However, the Court's decision also suggested that if threats made over social media were found to be true threats, they should be treated the same as threats made in other forms of communication. [83]

Wu has expressed her frustration over how law enforcement agencies have responded to the threats that she and other women in the game industry have received. [161] On public release of the FBI's case files on Gamergate, Wu said she was "livid", and that "Only a fraction of information we gave the FBI was looked into. They failed on all levels." [162] The lack of legal enforcement contributes towards the harassers' ability to maintain these activities without any risk of punishment, according to Chrisella Herzog of [The Diplomatic Courier](#); at worst, harassers would see their social media accounts suspended but are able to turn around to register new accounts to continue to engage. [72]



U.S. Representative [Katherine Clark](#) from Massachusetts wrote a letter to the [House Appropriations Committee](#) asking it to call on the [Justice Department](#) to crack down on the harassment of women on the internet, saying the campaign of intimidation associated with Gamergate had highlighted the problem.<sup>[163][164]</sup> Clark also hosted a Congressional briefing on March 15, 2015, along with the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus to review issues of cyberstalking and online threats; during the briefing, Quinn spoke of her experiences with Gamergate, which an executive director of the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) described during the hearing as "an online hate group ... which was started by an ex-boyfriend to ruin [Quinn's] life".<sup>[165]</sup> On May 27, 2015, the [United States House of Representatives](#) formally supported Clark's request for increased measures to combat online abuse against women, explicitly pressing for more investigations and prosecutions by the Department of Justice.<sup>[166][167]</sup> On June 2, 2015, Rep. Clark introduced H.R. 2602, the "Prioritizing Online Threat Enforcement Act of 2015" to Congress. The bill would allocate more funding for the FBI to employ additional agents to enforce laws against [cyberstalking](#), online criminal harassment, and threats.<sup>[168][169][170]</sup> Later, in June 2017, Rep. Clark introduced the "Online Safety Modernization Act of 2017" with co-sponsors Reps. [Susan Brooks](#) (Indiana) and [Pat Meehan](#) (Pennsylvania), which combined several of Clark's previous bills. The bill focuses on penalizing "cybercrimes against individuals", including doxxing, swatting, and [sextortion](#), as well as granting \$20 million for law enforcement training to help tackle such crimes, and \$4 million to establish the National Resource Center on

Cybercrimes Against Individuals as to study and collect statistics and information related to these crimes. [\[171\]](#)[\[172\]](#)

## Gaming industry response

The harassment of Quinn, Sarkeesian, Wu, and others led prominent industry professionals to condemn the Gamergate attacks for damaging the video gaming community and the public perception of the industry.<sup>[104]</sup><sup>[173]</sup> *Vanity Fair*'s Laura Parker stated that the Gamergate situation led those outside of the video game industry to be "flooded with evidence of the video-game community as a poisonous and unwelcoming place", furthering any negative views they may have had of video games.<sup>[174]</sup> Independent game developer Andreas Zecher wrote an open letter calling upon the community to take a stand against the attacks, attracting the signatures of more than two thousand professionals within the gaming industry.<sup>[123][137]</sup> Many in the industry saw the signatures "as proof that the people sending vicious attacks at Quinn and Sarkeesian weren't representative of the video game industry overall".<sup>[175]</sup> Writing for *The Guardian*, Jenn Frank described the tactics used in the harassment campaign and the [climate of fear](#) it generated through its attacks on women and their allies, concluding that this alienating and abusive environment would harm not only women but also the industry as a whole.<sup>[176]</sup> Frank herself received significant harassment for writing this article, and announced an intention to quit games journalism as a result.<sup>[79][145]</sup> Games designer Damion Schubert wrote that Gamergate was "an unprecedented catastrof\*\*k [*sic*]", and that silencing critiques of games harms games developers by depriving them of feedback.<sup>[177]</sup> Several video game developers,

journalists, and gamers from across various gender, racial, and social backgrounds adopted new Twitter hashtags, such as #INeedDiverseGames, #StopGamergate2014 and #GamersAgainstGamergate, to show solidarity with the people targeted by the harassment and their opposition to the reactionary messages from Gamergate supporters.<sup>[178]</sup>  
<sup>[179]</sup>

The [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) characterized Gamergate as a "magnet for harassment", and notes the possible financial risk for companies dealing with it on social media platforms.<sup>[180]</sup> The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) issued a statement condemning the harassment, stating that "[t]here is no place in the video game community—or our society—for personal attacks and threats".<sup>[181]</sup> ESA president Mike Gallagher, speaking at the June 2015 Electronic Entertainment Expo, clarified that the ESA did not become more involved as they felt it was an argument that was outside their industry and their involvement would have been disruptive, but praised the efforts to counter harassment that will benefit the industry in the future.<sup>[182]</sup> At [BlizzCon](#) 2014, [Blizzard Entertainment](#) president and co-founder [Mike Morhaime](#) denounced recent harassment; blaming a "small group of people [who] have been doing really awful things" and "tarnishing our reputation" as gamers. He called on attendees to treat each other with kindness and demonstrate to the world that the community rejects harassment. His statements were widely interpreted as referring to Gamergate.<sup>[183][184][185]</sup> CEOs of both the American and European branches of [Sony Computer Entertainment](#), [Shawn Layden](#) and Jim Ryan respectively,

said the harassment and bullying were absolutely horrific and that such inappropriate behavior would not be tolerated at Sony.<sup>[186][187][188]</sup> The Swedish Games Industry issued a statement denouncing the harassment and sexism from Gamergate supporters.<sup>[189]</sup>

Responses to Gamergate have encouraged the video game industry to review its treatment of women and minorities, and to make changes to support them.<sup>[190][191][192][193]</sup> Intel, following its accidental involvement in Gamergate, pledged more than \$300 million to help support a "Diversity in Technology" program with partners including Sarkeesian's Feminist Frequency organization and the IGDA, aimed at increasing the number of women and minorities in the industry. Intel CEO [Brian Krzanich](#) stated in announcing the program that "it's not good enough to say we value diversity, and then have our industry not fully represent".<sup>[194][195][196]</sup> [Electronic Arts](#) (EA) COO [Peter Moore](#) said the controversy made EA pay more attention to diversity and inclusion, telling [Fortune](#) "[i]f there's been any benefit to Gamergate, ... I think it just makes us think twice at times".<sup>[197]</sup> Speaking about Gamergate harassment to the [Seattle Times](#), [IGDA](#) executive director Kate Edwards said, "Gaming culture has been pretty misogynistic for a long time now. There's ample evidence of that over and over again... What we're finally seeing is that it became so egregious that now companies are starting to wake up and say, "We need to stop this. This has got to change."<sup>[198]</sup>

In response to a perceived [conflict of interest](#) between game developers and journalists, *Kotaku* and *Polygon* adopted

policies of prohibiting or disclosing [Patreon](#) contributions to game developers respectively.<sup>[9][17]</sup>

The [Electronic Entertainment Expo](#) 2015 included markedly more female protagonists in these new games, as well as more visible presence by women at the event. Some commentators characterized this as a response to Gamergate and a rejection of the misogynistic Gamergate harassment.<sup>[199][200][201][202]</sup>

The game [Batman: Arkham Knight](#) references Gamergate with hashtag, #CrusaderGate, which the [Riddler](#) uses to unsuccessfully try to rally the Internet against Batman; bemoaning its failure, the Riddler describes those who use the hashtag as "idiotic and easily roused rabble".<sup>[203][202]</sup>

## Gamergate representation in media

"[Intimidation Game](#)", an episode of the crime television series [Law & Order: Special Victims Unit](#), portrays a fictionalized version of the Gamergate controversy, including a character whom some observers said resembled Sarkeesian and whose story seemed based on those of women subject to the harassment campaign.<sup>[204][205]</sup> The 2015 documentary film [GTF0](#) analyzed issues of sexism and harassment in video gaming. The film's director, Shannon Sun-Higginson, stated Gamergate was "a terrible, terrible thing, but it's actually symptomatic of a wider, cultural, systemic problem".<sup>[206][207]</sup> The Gamergate situation was covered as part of a larger topic of online harassment of women in the June 21, 2015, episode of [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver](#).<sup>[208]</sup> The impact of the Gamergate controversy on Brianna Wu was the subject of the March 16, 2016, episode of [The Internet Ruined My Life](#).<sup>[209]</sup>

## Reducing online harassment

In January 2015, Quinn and Alex Lifschitz created the [Crash Override Network](#), a private group of experts who provide free support and counsel to those that have been harassed online, including as a result of Gamergate, and to work with law authorities and social media sites in response to such threats.<sup>[210][211]</sup> Software developer Randi Harper founded a similar group, the [Online Abuse Prevention Initiative](#), a non-profit organization that also seeks to provide aid to those harassed online.<sup>[212]</sup>

Anita Sarkeesian was named as one of *Time* magazine's list of the 30 most influential people on the Internet in March 2015, and later in the magazine's Top 100 Most Influential People of 2015, citing her role in highlighting sexism in the video game community in the wake of the Gamergate controversy.<sup>[213][214]</sup> She was also highlighted as one of *Cosmopolitan*'s fifty "Internet's Most Fascinating" in a 2015 list due to her efforts to curb online harassment.<sup>[35]</sup>

An on-line abuse panel (itself the subject of controversy) at the 2016 [SXSW](#) festival said that there was no technological solution to the problem of harassment given human nature;<sup>[215]</sup> although policy changes have been made, the larger issue is more societal than platform-specific.<sup>[216][217]</sup>

Referring to the discussion at SXSW in a speech for [Women's History Month](#), [President of the United States Barack Obama](#) said that "We know that women gamers face harassment and stalking and threats of violence from other players. When they speak out about their experiences, they're



attacked on Twitter and other social media outlets, even threatened in their homes."[\[218\]](#) Obama urged targets of harassment to speak out, praising the courage of those who had resisted online harassment. "And what's brought these issues to light is that there are a lot of women out there, especially young women, who are speaking out bravely about their experiences, even when they know they'll be attacked for it".[\[218\]](#)[\[219\]](#)

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