Playing "Safe" and Troubling Youth

An Esports Literature Review

June, 2021

Acknowledgements

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world. Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal and none is other.

Our Mission

Egale works to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy.

Our Vision

Egale's vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

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Introduction

Esports and 2SLGBTQI Youth in Canada

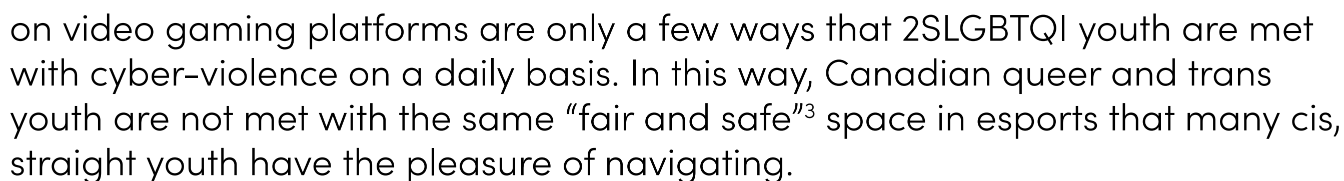
Esports, or electronic sports, are formal video gaming competitions (Rogers, 2019). While the origin of competitive gaming traces back to a simple two-player video game in 1958 (Larch, 2019), the esports industry[1] as it exists now is a large scale international market and social phenomenon. It currently garners over $1 billion in global revenue each year with its players competing for championship titles and cash prizes in prize pools of up to $34.3 million (Amad, 2019; Stubbs, 2020). In addition to its many professional and casual players, there are over 400 million esports audience members globally (Ayles, 2019). Among these millions of viewers are 1.5 million Canadians who watch esports at least once a month, with viewership and revenue numbers only expected to increase (Amad, 2019).

Though esports participants benefit from the capital, social (Kaye et al., 2017; Merry et al., 2012; Travers et al, 2020) and physiological benefits of video gaming (Adachi & Willoughby, 2013; Clemenson & Stark, 2015; West et al., 2017), the industry is still rife with violences that have material and discursive implications for its players and viewers. While youth from around the world turn to gaming for emotional sublimation, escape, and leisure (Walsh, 2014), the esports industry continues to create teams comprised mainly of White, cis, straight boys and men (Taylor, 2012; Taylor, 2018). The lack of wage parity between men and women that play esports professionally and the overwhelmingly low ratio of women playing professionally reveal the multiple ways that gender operates and how it is policed in esports (Taylor, 2018). Looking at the broader gaming community, several gaming fan favourites and their followers have also been linked to terrorism (Romano, 2019), violence from incels ("involuntary celibate" men who claim that they do not have sexual or romantic partners despite their efforts) (Hoffman et al., 2020; McKinnon, 2018), racism (Hokka, 2020), homophobia (Bell, 2019), and transphobia (Sacco, 2020) – all modes of violence that structure power in favour of White, cis, straight men.

Unfortunately, the multiple modes of violence within the esports culture and industry harm 2SLGBTQI youth who are nevertheless present as industry workers, audience members, casual gamers, and professional esports players. In Canada, 15% of hate crimes that are cybercrimes target the 2SLGBTQI community,[2] with 74% of online hate marked by violence for trans youth (Armstrong, 2019). Experiences of cyberbullying, aggressive trolling, and doxxing

1 Definition of what constitutes "esports industry" is located in following section, "Major Terms."

2 We mainly unpack this term in the second part of the literature review. A brief investigation into the term "community" can be found in the sub-section entitled, "Behaviour."



on video gaming platforms are only a few ways that 2SLGBTQI youth are met with cyber-violence on a daily basis. In this way, Canadian queer and trans youth are not met with the same "fair and safe"[3] space in esports that many cis, straight youth have the pleasure of navigating.

Yet, queer and trans youth in Canada continue to venture into gaming and esports as a source of leisure and pleasure on a daily basis. Two Spirit, queer, and trans youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto make use of the free Internet provided at the Apple Store and the library to play video games like *Call of Duty* (Walsh, 2014). The formation of "Toronto Gaymers" in 2007 continues to provide LGBTQ+ "geeks and gamers of all stripes" gathering spaces and a social network for community and play (Toronto Gaymers, n.d.). Additionally, Kingston-born *StarCraft II* and *Dota 2* player Sasha Hostyn, otherwise known as Scarlett, is one of the most accomplished women in esports (McGrath, 2014). In 2016, she held the Guinness record for the highest career earnings for a woman in competitive video gaming, a record she still holds with a career total of over $300, 000 (Esports Earnings, n.d.; Kelly, 2016). As such, queer and trans life online is marked by both pleasure and danger. We believe it is necessary to not only investigate what violence and pleasure look like in esports, but what they mean for queer and trans youth participating in these spaces.

Esports involves ongoing and simultaneous engagement from players on forums, communication platforms, gaming platforms, and in tournament spaces all across the world. Because of this ever-changing and ephemeral condition of esports, it is impossible to "place" violence or engagement into a physical location. In this regard, the esports industry must be approached as a technoscape (Appadurai, 1990), a transmission site of global flows of capital, culture, people, and ideologies.

Since youth are some of the primary players negotiating and navigating this space, we also must interrogate what the term "youth" means and what particular ideologies of youth assume. When we say "youth," we are not talking about youth as subjects. Instead, we investigate "youth" as a figuration – a discursive, ideological, and visual assemblage that bears many meanings. In particular, narratives of youth in esports often posit them as powerless victims of violent behaviour like cyberbullying and trolling. In this regard, it is crucial to trouble the term "youth" to situate 2SLGBTQI youth in esports and also grapple with their nuances lives and experiences online.

In troubling the term "youth" and in conceptualizing the esports industry as a technoscape, we can begin to understand the experiences of 2SLGBTQI youth

3 Rhetoric commonly found within eSports policies. This is elaborated upon in the section, "Unpacking Regulation."

within the unique geographical, temporal, social, and spatial boundaries of esports. By placing these transient ideas in conversation with one another, we can begin to examine how meanings and maintenance of violence and safety are currently mobilized within esports and understand how violence and safety impact the lives of 2SLGBTQI youth. By “messing” with these terms, we will be able to map out how “safety” online can also be violent and to what extent current regulation is helpful to queer and trans youth.

The objective of this literature review is to map out the terms that are sutured to the experiences of 2SLGBTQI youth participating in esports. By closely examining what it means to be violent and safe, clarifying the stakes of regulation in esports, and noting potential accountability practices for esports participants and industries, we seek to illustrate what 2SLGBTQI youth contend with in the world of competitive gaming.

Major Terms

Betas: Within the incel lexicon, they are the 80% of men who are not alphas or Chads. Alphas or Chads are described as the 20% of men who attract 80% of women, whom they refer to as Stacy’s.

Criminalization: Process of making illegal particular actions, behaviours, or practices. This process specifically targets poor, disabled, queer, trans, and racialized people.

Doxxing: Non-consensual distribution of personal information through cyberspace. This form of violence is often used to threaten and attack women, 2SLGBTQI people, and racialized people (Ruberg et al., 2019).

Esports: Electronic sports, commonly referred to as esports, are formal video gaming competitions most often played in order to win championship titles or cash prizes. These competitions are usually played by individuals on separate sponsored teams at tournaments mostly hosted by leagues or game publishers.

Esports Industry: All members involved in tournaments, game development and publishing, branding, sponsorships, advertising, broadcasting, moderating, and investing, as well as teams, leagues, platforms, fans, journalists, and audience members.

Fake Gamer Girl: Term used to describe girls who “only want a date and can’t really play” (Jenson & de Castell, 2018, p. 735).

Gaming: The broader category of video gaming that esports exists within. Gaming includes non-esports and esports games. Within this literature review,

we refer to “gamers” as casual players that play informally and sometimes competitively amongst themselves and others on game consoles as well as the same platforms that esports are broadcasted on (Esports Observer, 2017). There is a grey area concerning the difference between gaming and esports, as professional esports players also game when not within competition spaces or during situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hegemony: The domination of one group over others, including but not limited to hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic heterosexuality, and queer hegemonies. Hegemonies exist in complicated relationship to each other as the same embodiment can be valorized and vilified within different hegemonies.

Incel: Self-described “involuntary celibate” men who claim they are unable to find sexual or romantic partners despite their efforts and desires. Their deeply misogynistic, transmisogynistic, and misogynoir ideologies, beliefs, and actions on and offline result in violently harming and killing women.

2SLGBTQI: All people with diverse gender identities and experiences of attraction (sexual orientation) including those who are Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, and/or intersex. We use queer and trans interchangeably with 2SLGBTQI throughout this paper as the figuration of youth that we utilize is indebted to the works of queer and trans studies.

Policing: Regulation, surveillance, maintenance, and enforcement of particular ways of being (including actions, behaviours, identities, and practices) by systems of power such as imperial forces and essentialized systemic structures. Gender, sexuality, class, and race are all social constructs used to police people beneath White supremacy.

Racialization: Culturally shaped, complex systemic process of attributing and essentializing race onto particular actions, behaviours, features, ideas, etc.

TERF: Trans exclusionary radical feminist/feminism. This label is applied to those who do not believe trans women are women and do not include them within their feminism, particularly their definition of woman in their fight for gender equity.

Titty Streamer: This term is used to describe women by gamers who perceive them as undeserving of attention and capital because they present their bodies sexually (Ruberg et al., 2019).

Transformative Justice: Political framework that calls on people to invest in relationships, community care, prevention, and accountability as a response

to harm as opposed to intervention by criminal justice, the police, or the state, which all produce further harm and violence for many communities (Mingus, 2019).

Trolling: Type of cyberbullying that purposefully instigates and antagonizes people online. Trolls, users that engage in this behaviour, often have a desired or predicted outcome that is met through these provocations (Thacker & Griffiths, 2012).

White supremacy: Hoarding of power, privilege, and wealth within Whiteness. This is maintained and regulated through systems such as colonialism, capitalism, and orientalism, as well as through social constructs including gender, sexuality, race, class, and disability. Upholding White supremacy (re) produces the further exploitation and oppression of fat, mad, disabled, poor, queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour.

Gaps in Research

Although competitive gaming has been a popular topic within academic and published research, it is necessary for esports research to focus on and provide solutions for those who experience the most harm within the competitive gaming industry. What follows are several significant gaps we have found in esports research, particularly concerning 2SLGBTQI youth:

1. International and national quantitative research about esports, specifically systematic literature reviews, disregard race and place as significant contextual factors in the experiences of youth online.
2. Only a handful of research on esports is published by disabled, queer, trans, and racialized people, who make up a significant part of the esports industry.
3. Existing research of 2SLGBTQI youth in gaming and esports requires an intersectional approach. Race and gender are not mutually exclusive nor are they compounding additions to the categories of queer and trans youth. More research is needed that examines what it means to be racialized and/or disabled as well as queer and trans online.
4. Very little research that examines 2SLGBTQI youth in esports globally. Moreover, esports research that does mention 2SLGBTQI players rarely focuses on the specific experiences of Two Spirit and Black queer and trans youth, particularly trans girls and women, online.

5. Research is needed that investigates the links between trans women, racialized women, and incel violence that occurs in gaming spaces and esports.
6. In need of research that examines the ways that video games articulate trans sex workers solely as victims of various forms of violence and death, as well as what this means on and offline especially for trans women and girls.
7. Lack of esports research located in Ontario specifically and Canada broadly.
8. Esports research continues to treat youth and violence like a monolith. There is much to be gleaned by the multiple forms of violence faced and inflicted by disabled, racialized, queer, and trans players and viewers within this field of research.

For the purposes of this review of literature, we have separated it into two parts. In the Part I, *2SLGBTQI Youth and Online Violence in Esports in Canada*, we focus on the final gap in research mentioned. We begin by troubling the term "2SLGBTQI youth" to situate our investments in this kind of research and allow for a nuanced articulation of what it means to be a queer and trans youth in esports. We will follow this by mapping out the forms of violence that exist in the esports industry at broad and unpack the term safety. In the Part II, *Messing and Mapping Esports in Canada*, we examine how moves towards safety can inadvertently harm queer and trans esports players, clarify what kinds of regulation are being used to protect esports players, and note how esports participants and industries can work towards accountability in the future.

Part I - 2SLGBTQI Youth and Online Violence in Esports in Canada

Troubling Youth

In order to consider how 2SLGBTQI youth experience violence and safety in esports, we must first unpack who "2SLGBTQI youth" are and what this term means. Many organizations and researchers have used age ranges to describe and engage with youth, most describing them as between the ages of 15-24 (WHO, n.d.). Andy Furlong notes that interdisciplinary youth studies attempt "to avoid chronological definitions of youth" to allow for a more capacious understanding of youth cultures (2015, p. 16). This intervention should be of particular interest to researchers working with queer and trans youth because it allows space for the notion of "queer time" (Halberstam, 2005). Jack Halberstam

argues that queer time operates outside of the heteronormative formation of growing up and urges researches to "rethink the adult/youth binary in relation to an 'epistemology of youth'" (2005, p. 2). In thinking outside of age ranges, we are able to look outside of conventional formations of youth cultures and maturity into adulthood that many queer and trans youth are not, and sometimes cannot be, located in (Driver, 2008).

Cassandra Lord makes an important point when working with and considering the issues faced by 2SLGBTQI youth, particularly queer and trans Black youth (2005). She states, "identifying characteristics that define youth is complex, as the category 'youth' has many meanings" (Lord, 2005, p. 16). In the digital space alone, the term "2SLGBTQI youth" is often ascribed to: 1) bullying and its subsequent awareness programs (Public Safety Canada, 2015); 2) coming out narratives and videos (Gray, 2009; Pullen, 2014); and 3) various online subcultures such as drag, zines, and grassroots organizing (Driver, 2008). When these online practices are organized by non-2SLGBTQI youth, they often assume that queer and trans youth operate as innocent victims from online perpetrators of violence. Contrastingly, youth in gaming as well as racialized youth are often associated as perpetrators of violence. So, to understand the experiences of 2SLGBTQI youth in esports, we need to contend with two prominent ideas that are often conflated with notions of 2SLGBTQI youth and queer youth digital cultures: **innocence** and **delinquency**. By breaking up these binaries of youth/adult, innocent/perpetrator, and violence/safety, we begin to make space for the realities of youth as they operate and engage with one another online. By troubling these categories, we open up space for rupture, messiness, refusal, and nuance that allows us to begin answering the question: **What does digital 2SLGBTQI youth life look like beside and despite their troubles?**

The Icon of Innocent Youth

To begin to trouble youth, we must bifurcate the notion of innocence within the category of youth. The mention of innocent youth in youth studies and other forms of scholarship primarily refers to sexual innocence (Gabriel, 2013). Fleur Gabriel argues that the defensiveness over the "natural" innocence of youth is meant to lower the risk "prematurely sexualising children and forcing them to deal with situations beyond their mental capacity to handle" (2013, p. 28). As such, this kind of innocence cannot speak to the experiences of queer youth because they have already claimed sexual and romantic attractions and desires. Kim Hackford-Peer argues that queer and trans youth are deemed innocent in another way (2010). She states that queer and trans youth are rearticulated "as innocent victims of a society that marginalizes them because

of their sexuality and/or gender expression or identity" who "are innocent because they are positioned as not deserving of the negative outcomes they experience as a result of their queerness" (Hackford-Peer, 2010, p. 545). In the digital world, this is mainly exemplified through the cases of vicious and repetitive cyberbullying attacks directed towards 2SLGBTQI youth, which we will elaborate upon in the "Playing 'Safe'" section.

While defense of this innocence seemingly offers youth protection, in actuality, it often puts youth in harm's way (Dyer, 2017; Dyer, 2019). Avoiding topics of gender and sexuality when in conversation with youth because of their supposed "innocence" often reifies or contributes to gender and sexuality-based violence. In this regard, Hannah Dyer asserts that the rhetoric of innocent youth is used as "thinly disguised homophobia and transphobia"(2019, p. 744) particularly in the introduction of 2SLGBTQI content to the Canadian school curriculum. She further argues that innocence runs the risk of "reducing the child to a figure without complexity" (Dyer, 2017, p. 291). Hackford-Peer also states that this notion of innocence suggests that queer and trans youth are powerless, solely occupying positions as victims online. In this way, we cannot imagine queer youth as solely innocent or solely deviant, nor does arguing for their innocence always help their experiences online and offline. The esports industry must defer from this black-and-white conception of youth as innocent and instead contend with the messiness of their digital embodiments.

Racialized Delinquency

Contrastingly, digital youth cultures are also imbued with discussions concerning "troubled" youth (Robinson & Segal, 2020). The term has been used broadly to describe teenagers who exhibit "behavioral, emotional, or learning problems beyond typical teenage issues," (Robinson & Segal, 2020, p. 1) including aggressive behaviour, criminal activity, and "high-risk" sexual and substance-related practices. Over the last few decades, research concerned with video games has often focused on the potential transference of aggressive behaviours from the digital space into the offline lives of young gamers, out of fear of producing troubled youth (DeLisi et al., 2013). In fact, Matt DeLisi and colleagues conducted a study on youth gamers and delinquency, which concluded that youth "playing violent video games and/or having a preference for violent video games is correlated with delinquency and violence" (2013, p. 138).

This fear of delinquency reveals various investments for research concerned with youth in gaming (Gabarino et al., 1986). Defined as "one form of externalizing behaviour problems commonly associated with youth" (Gabarino et al., 1986, p. 182), delinquency often refers to the apprehension of youth by

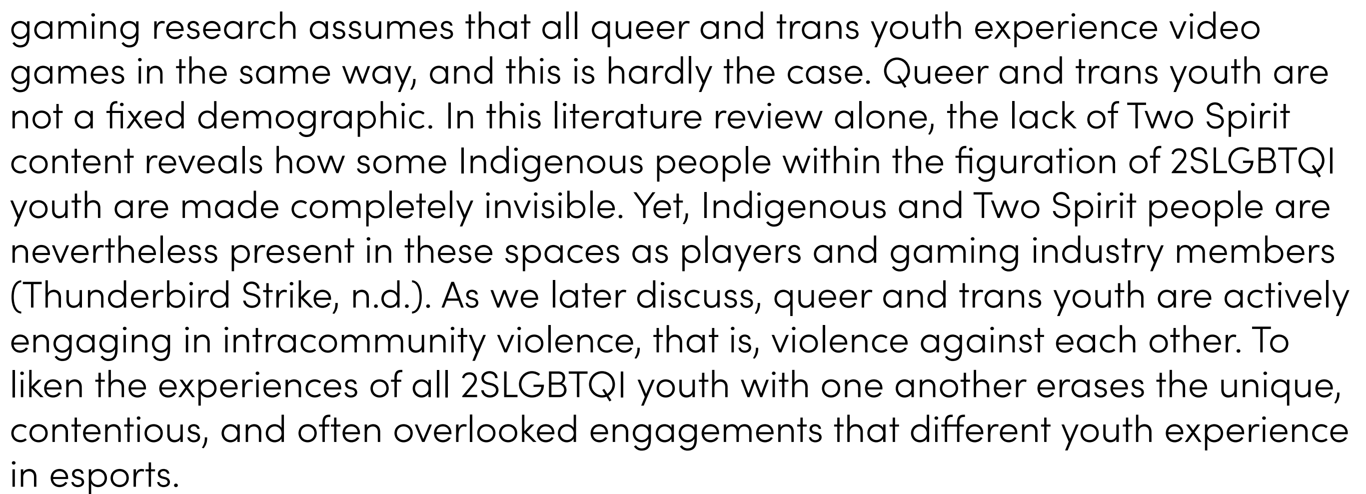
authorities such as the police for engaging in criminal and illegal activities. Studies concerning troubled youth suggest that for parents and guardians, delinquency poses a grave threat to the well-being of their child (DeLisi et al., 2013; Robinson & Segal, 2020). Cyberbullying campaigns, for example, are continuously used as tools to deter parents from raising delinquents (Public Safety Canada, 2015).

To fully examine the experiences of youth online, we must trouble and interrogate the notion of delinquency and its association with youth cultures. In Tera Eva Agyepong's book, *The Criminalization of Black Children* (2018), she reveals that negative images of Black children in American media and texts solidified the notion that White children were figures of childhood innocence. Because of this, Black children were "marked as delinquents before they even formally entered the juvenile justice system" (Agyepong, 2018, p. 5). Agyepong's work suggests that innocence and delinquency cannot be extrapolated from race as they are both culturally constructed and informed. Similarly, the work of Mary Louise Adams states that delinquency in Canada is often blamed on racialized youth (Adams, 1997). For this reason, we must be wary of how the notion of troubled youth, particularly the moral panic over delinquency, is often used to veil a fear of Blackness.

To imagine youth solely as victims or perpetrators of violence does not illustrate or reflect the actual engagements of youth in esports or gaming. As we have examined, notions of innocent and delinquent youth often carry racist connotations which naturalize and essentialize criminality and race. This discursive and epistemological move severely impacts and damages the lived realities of youth of colour, especially Black youth who are consistently treated as adult criminals. As such, the esports industry must be cautious of their move away from and fear towards delinquency as well as their defensiveness of youthful innocence. By troubling their investment in youth as a figuration, the esports industry and researchers can begin to re-examine the category "queer and trans youth" and attend to the complexity of young people's lifeworlds on/offline.

Re-examining "Queer and Trans Youth"

To begin to understand the experiences of youth, particularly 2SLGBTQI youth, in esports, we must first ask: **who are 2SLGBTQI youth?** One answer to this is naming the categories that fall under its acronym: 2SLGBTQI youth are Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning and queer, and intersex. However, researchers need to concern themselves with the nuances and relationships that occur between each of these categories. As aforementioned, gaming research tends to reduce youth into a monolith. In doing so, youth



gaming research assumes that all queer and trans youth experience video games in the same way, and this is hardly the case. Queer and trans youth are not a fixed demographic. In this literature review alone, the lack of Two Spirit content reveals how some Indigenous people within the figuration of 2SLGBTQI youth are made completely invisible. Yet, Indigenous and Two Spirit people are nevertheless present in these spaces as players and gaming industry members (Thunderbird Strike, n.d.). As we later discuss, queer and trans youth are actively engaging in intracommunity violence, that is, violence against each other. To liken the experiences of all 2SLGBTQI youth with one another erases the unique, contentious, and often overlooked engagements that different youth experience in esports.

Additionally, 2SLGBTQI research in gaming lacks an intersectional framework that builds on critical race theory and queer of colour critique. In other words, 2SLGBTQI research need not abandon notions of race, class, disability, and other social locations and processes when examining the digital lives of queer and trans youth. We do not mean to assert these intersections as compounding or additive aspects of queer and trans lives. Instead, we argue that researchers contend with the ways that various intersections overlap, rub against, and inform one another, impacting both the embodiment of youth and their engagements online. By generalizing the experiences of some queer and trans youth as being the experience of all queer and trans youth, we overlook what could be gleaned from disabled, mad, poor, and fat queer and trans youth of colour. We want to note that we do not suggest engaging in this work as a way to tokenize these individuals. Rather, if research concerning the experiences of 2SLGBTQI youth in gaming is to be done ethically and accurately, it must not exclude those who also experience misogyny, ableism, classism, fatphobia, and racism at the intersection of their queerness and transness. If this research is to be done, it must equally account for these violences.

Beyond broadening the definition and scope of 2SLGBTQI youth as rupture, researchers must examine the ways that queer and trans youth destabilize the very categories that construct their identities. By this we mean that researchers must turn to the messy, contentious, contradictory, and tenuous slippages that queer and trans youth occupy such as transmisogynistic lesbians, gay incels, lesbian trans men, and non-binary trans men and women. In examining these embodiments and intimacies, researchers will be able to move beyond a paranoid reading (Sedgwick, 1997), and instead examine the meaning-making work of queer and trans youth. These messy accounts of 2SLGBTQI youth also serve as a rupture from damage-centred research (Tuck, 2009), moving this kind of scholarship into a more capacious and generative retelling of queer and trans life.

Representation vs. Participation

It is evident that the gaming industry understands that homophobia and transphobia are issues for 2SLGBTQI youth in gaming. However, gaming and esports industries often propose an increase in representation as a solution to these violences. Donning rainbow apparel, creating 2SLGBTQI characters in various games, and posting logos in rainbow colours on social media are some of the few moves towards this representation (Harbottle, 2018). In fact, the esports games Overwatch and Apex Legends both received nominations at the 31st annual GLAAD Media Awards, the world's largest 2SLGBTQI advocacy organization, for Outstanding Video Game (Alford, 2020).

Though 2SLGBTQI representation in the media is meant to raise awareness and show solidarity towards this community, we must also pay a closer attention to what representations actually **do.** Stuart Hall's theories of representation posit that the creators and distributors of media representations hold a great deal of power (1997). He states that these powerful creators consistently work to fix meaning onto representations which support their own agendas. As we later discuss, 2SLGBTQI imagery, presence, and symbols in media often rely on portraying trans people solely as sex workers or objects to be killed, damaging stereotypes and harmful archetypes to 2SLGBTQI youth. In this way, we must consider esports, including its representations of 2SLGBTQI people, as a cultural institution that is informed by the values of its media creators who are, most often, wealthy White, cis, heterosexual able-bodied men. Despite its consumption, following Hall, that the impacts of the ongoing production of representation further relegate and enforce dominance over oppressed and repressed groups.

In addition to examining the politics of representation, we need to consider if representation actually helps the **participation** of queer and trans youth in esports. Though gaming and esports are increasingly showing more support for queer and trans people through the representation of 2SLGBTQI characters and statements of league solidarity, as we will outline below, queer and trans youth gamers still experience multiple forms of violence. In fact, **increases in 2SLGBTQI visibility are simultaneously making members of this community, particularly trans people, more vulnerable to violence** (Burns, 2019). Having to deal with violence in its many modes hinders the ability for queer and trans youth to participate in esports. If esports industries want to take these issues seriously, they must also consider how to be accountable to the participation of 2SLGBTQI youth in esports. The following section will act as a mapping practice of the esports industry to illuminate the state of violence in esports, particularly as it relates to queer and trans youth participating in esports.

Playing "Safe" and Rethinking Violence

Before examining the impacts of cyber-violence on 2SLGBTQI youth in esports, it is important to understand what violence is. To establish a working definition of violence, it is vital to turn to those whose quotidian experiences are disproportionately shaped through institutional, structural, and individual violence. In Canada and the United States, Black trans women are among those especially impacted by state-sanctioned violence, policing, and criminalization (Bucik, 2016). The Black trans women and femmes at the Transgender Law Centre encourage us to broaden our definition of violence beyond physical harm, harassment, and discrimination. In order "to understand the multi-faceted experiences of Black Trans Women and Black Trans Femmes we must include violence caused by government institutions… which enforce dominant systems of oppression" (Transgender Law Centre, n.d., Defining Violence section). As such, we must observe how violence is enacted interpersonally, structurally, and institutionally to open space for the experiences of Black trans women and femmes. In addition, transformative justice (TJ) frameworks focus on survivor-centred healing from multiple forms of violence, harm, and abuse (Dixon & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020). Taking the lead from TJ organizers, we must reorient this conversation of violence and its subsequent meanings into a listening practice. This kind of practice understands that various forms of violence mean different things to different people.

Placing these two approaches in conversation with one another, it is clear that the expansive breadth of violence cannot be diminished into a particular category or process. To amalgamate violence into a monolith is a refusal to bear witness to the multiple ways it personally and institutionally harms queer and trans people. To reject these claims is to produce further harm. For this reason, we want to delineate various modes, meanings, and practices of violence that exist in and through cyberspace broadly, and the esports industry in particular. We say "in and through" to reflect technology's amorphous borders. The esports industry is located on online forums, chat boxes, streaming platforms, social media, at tournament venues, gaming centres, meetings, in the home, online, and offline transnationally, constantly and simultaneously. To comprehend the violences produced and reproduced through cyberspace, we must consider technology's overflowing borders, permanency, and ephemeral archive as an assemblage. To begin rethinking and reorienting violence, it is crucial to understand how it's various practices, meanings, and modes overlap, constitute one another, divert, converge, and work in contention. By doing so, we will be able to examine what violence **does** in the esports industry, and, ultimately, what these violences **mean** for queer and trans youth.

Behaviour

One of the most notable forms of violence in esports is the behaviour exhibited between players and viewers. Though chat boxes offer possibilities for connection, community-building, pleasure, and commentary for queer and trans youth, they are spaces marked by violence, particularly cyberbullying (Hainsworth, 2019). Most scholars concur that cyberbullying can be identified by the repetitive and intentional reception of excluding, threatening, aggressive, or "harmful messages by someone who hid their identity" (Abreu & Kenny, 2018, p. 84; Cooper & Blumenfield, 2012) through the use of technology by and towards youth (Public Safety Canada, 2015). While this definition is extrapolated from various international reports, it still applies to Canada where over 33% of gay and bi youth and 50% of older trans youth have been cyberbullied (Statistics Canada, 2016; Veale et al., 2015). 2SLGBTQI Canadian youth in online gaming spaces are more likely to be victims of homophobic name-calling, where cyberbullying is used to oppress 2SLGBTQI and racialized people and maintain social hierarchies (McInroy & Mishna, 2017). Professional Canadian *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO)* player, Stephanie "Missharvey" Harvey goes further to note that cyberbullying in esports is also very prevalent in Canada (Hainsworth, 2019). AnyKey's research addresses this, stating that for women in esports, "'being insulted is a regular part of the job'" (AnyKey, 2019, p. 12). As a result, cyberbullying often leads to queer and trans youth to socially isolate themselves or leave gaming altogether.

Unfortunately, for some 2SLGBTQI youth, cyberbullying can result in even more brutal attacks. Trolling, often classified as a subcategory or mode of cyberbullying, drastically impacts trans women and women of colour. It is characterized by dehumanizing, intentional attacks against individual or groups of gamers to cause a reaction for pleasure, revenge, and thrill-seeking (Cook et al., 2018). Trolling is also prevalent in gaming chat boxes, specifically on the esports platform, Twitch. The Forsen Army, a fan-group of the professional esports player, Forsen, is known for swarming the chat boxes of women on Twitch with misogynistic, transphobic, and fatphobic remarks. Forsen, professional *Hearthstone* player and the group's namesake, is aware and unapologetic about his fanbases' behaviour as it provides him with income and viewership, stating, "I would say that in most cases girls actually enjoy the viewer boost" (Leslie, 2018, para. 24). This violence can and is also instigated by people in the 2SLGBTQI "community." Video game developer, Shepple, and her girlfriend, who gamers identified as TERFs,[4] posted berating and graphic bioessentialist and transphobic comments directed at trans lesbians (Baculi, 2019).

4 Trans exclusionary radical feminists; see "Major Terms" for extended definition.

While *Heartbeat* is not an esports game, these cases serve as an entry point into an opportunity needing to be explored within esports research. The esports industry must consider game developers, audiences, and 2SLGBTQI gamers as capable of reproducing intracommunity violence. Moreover, researchers must begin to trouble this category of "community" that is used so profusely throughout scholarship. The use of "2SLGBTQI community" reduces the nuanced, contentious, and messy intimacies and connections between queer and trans people into a monolith. Using the term "gaming community" produces the same erasure. While we discuss this more in the second part of the literature review, we remain cautious about research's investment in "community" and focus on the ways that queer and trans gamers, in their overlapping and intersecting embodiments, are met with and enact violence in esports.

Of equal importance is how these behaviours are interpreted. When gamers, viewers, and gaming and esports research articulate trolls (players who engage in trolling) as class clowns that cause harm for "lulz," (Olson & LaPoe, 2017) it reframes these users as jokesters rather than abusers. In response to this, Whitney Phillips argues, "'Call it racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia... Calling it trolling just gives the person a rhetorical out'" (Rashid, 2017, para. 16). Here, Phillips makes a clear and critical intervention that we echo and urge the esports industry to contend with. While trolling and cyberbullying are modes through which violence is enacted, the violence itself is not a novel cyber phenomenon. The violence of esports is the production and reproduction of racism, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism. Phillips' call to name the actual violences that are produced as a result of online behaviour can serve as a useful guideline for the esports industry to understand the experiences of and work with queer and trans youth.

Consistent with trolling, doxxing also severely impacts the lives of women, 2SLGBTQI people, and people of colour (Ruberg et al., 2019). This practice consists of confidential information regarding players' deadnames (Curlew, 2019), whereabouts, employment, family, and identification being released to the Internet to be accessed by all without consent. Perhaps the most prominent case of doxxing in online gaming is Gamergate. This gaming group harms women and feminist gamers because they claim that women will cause the "death of the gamer" (Dockterman, 2014), who they believe to be young, White men. The origin of Gamergate began when Zoë Quinn, a game developer, was viciously attacked by gamers after their ex-boyfriend, Erin Gjoni, posted a scathing accusation that they slept with a video game journalist for a favourable review of their game (Illing, 2017). Quinn reflects on the ensuing violence, stating,

> The hackers weren't just posting calls for me to die or talking about what a fat slut I was; they were sharing my personal information: my old address in Canada, cell-phone numbers from a few years back, my current cell-phone number and my current home address… they knew where I was and where my family lived (Quinn, 2017, para. 4).

While Quinn is at the centre of Gamergate's origins, they are certainly not the only person harmed by this group. Other gamers who support Quinn such as Brianna Wu and Canadian-American feminist gaming critic, Anita Sarkeesian, have also been doxxed and violently threatened by Gamergate as well as by incels (see definition in Glossary), "involuntary celibate" men. Taisto Witt explains that the combination of incel rhetoric and doxxing on Quinn's chat logs demonstrates how violence and sexuality are crucial to performances and constructions of masculinity (Jankovsky, 2018). He observes that it is through sex that men can "acquire capital and demonstrate power over femininity" (Witt, 2020, p. 4).

The impacts of doxxing and its subsequent gender violence in esports are substantial. Jessica West's report for the Battered Women's Support Services, *Cyber-Violence Against Women* (2014), reveals that many women, particularly queer and trans women of colour, are punished for their own sexualization. Many women are unable to obtain or advance in their employment, do not receive help from the police or criminal justice system, and are subject to more physical violence after their information has been released to the Internet. As long as playing and watching esports continues to harm racialized, queer, and trans youth, especially girls and women, the esports industry remains complicit to this violence.

Speech

Esports policies tend to focus on speech as the defining source of violence within the industry. Most esports league and tournament codes of conduct, rulebooks, and policies have sections regarding discrimination and harassment that prohibit the use of "hateful speech" (FIFA20 Global Series, n.d.). While this language is used profusely throughout esports policies, it is rarely defined. Blizzard's Forum Code of Conduct divides it's "hate speech" section into 21 categories including racial/ethnic, extreme sexuality/violence, real-life threats, sexual orientation, harassing or defamatory, and spamming or trolling (Blizzard Entertainment, 2020). Others, like the Overwatch League (2020), claim that they want to build "diverse and inclusive communities" (p. 14) in gaming environments "free of harassment and discrimination… based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other class or characteristic" (p. 16). Examples of this kind of language are found within most esports tournament policies, if available, to

regulate violence in formal competitions, and sometimes extend to casual gaming and forums. Twitch and Discord, the two most popular platforms for streaming and communicating in esports, also have their own respective "Community Guidelines" (Discord, 2020; Twitch, 2020). These guidelines outline the behaviour expected of their viewers and players to ensure that everyone has the best experience on their platform.

While these policies ostensibly seek to control ableist, ageist, classist, racist, misogynistic, fatphobic, homophobic, and transphobic exchanges between players, they continue to fail. The recent set of games between esports players Dalauan "LowTierGod" Sparrow, a Black esports player, and Christina "CeroBlast" Tran, a non-binary trans esports player, exemplify the real-life complexity and failure of these policies (Michael, 2020). After losing to CeroBlast, LowTierGod used transphobic slurs and commenced in violent commentary about the invalidity of trans people without surgeries. LowTierGod's transphobic actions resulted in a ban from many FGC (fighting game community) events including Capcom and EVO (Aquino, 2020). Afterwards, LowTierGod revealed CeroBlast's many Twitch streams and Twitter posts in which she used an anti-Black slur. Her anti-Black, racist actions resulted in a ban from Capcom, EVO, and other FGC events (Conlan, 2020). Sadly, the use of slurs towards and by the queer and trans youth are quite common within the esports industry (Bell, 2019). This case demonstrates how intra-minority violence (e.g., between Black players and trans players) can also occur in esports spaces. Commenting on transphobia in esports, Super Smash Ultimate professional player, May "Mystearica" Peterson, states, "Whenever any trans player plays on stream, the chat is always bad" (Bell, 2020, para. 7) because players focus only on her gender or sexuality, as opposed to her skills.

Beyond the use of slurs, violence can be found in the phrases and languages produced out of the esports industry. The lexicon used by incels, mostly through Gamergate (McKinnon, 2018), towards women on gaming platforms and in esports is nothing short of dehumanizing (Ging, 2019), with terms like "feminazis" (p. 646), and other words likening women to disposals for ejaculate being used regularly. Interestingly, the geek and gamer world has also produced a "language of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement" (Ging, 2019, p. 650) that is "uniquely misogynist, heterosexist, and racist" (p. 649) for incels and other men. These languages rely on misogyny, racism, and homophobia to produce terms like "betaf*g" (Ging, 2019, p. 650) and "cuck (a weak man whose girlfriend cheats on him, usually with Black men)" (p. 649) as ways to describe other incel gamers. Pascoe argues that the use of homophobic slurs are not necessarily about sexuality, but about the politics of gender, where using homophobic language is about other players not being man enough (2011). Taylor

nevertheless notes that “as one team owner put it to me about the e-sports scene, ‘The level of homophobia is, like, unimaginable’” (2012, p. 269).

In addition to this language, it is impossible to think about speech within esports and not mention “trash talk.” Trash talk is highly prevalent in esports and is sometimes defended as an integral aspect of online competitive gaming (Cote, 2017). AnyKey’s *GLHF Pledge* (n.d.), a project created out of a partnership between Intel and the Electronic Sports League (ESL), mentions that discrimination can include trash talking when it “focuses on someone’s personal traits instead of on their gaming skill” (Be the Key to a Better Community section). While their “Good Luck, Have Fun” (GLHF) mantra encourages trash talking as an interactive and fun part of competitive play, it is crucial to consider the fine lines between trash talking and violence. In line with Phillips’ comment about trolling, Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell argue that the esports industry attempts to excuse racist, misogynistic, homophobic and other exclusionary speech as “trash talk” (2018). To begin working with queer and trans youth, the esports industry must reject the inclination to dismiss this collaboration of violences beneath the guise of “trash talk” and “hate speech.”

Discourse

Online and offline discourse about esports often utilizes the violent speech and behaviours outlined above to communicate and circulate violent conversations through cyberspace. We have already mapped the ways that misogyny is mobilized in and around esports through speech and behaviour. Two discourses that illuminate the state of misogyny in both gaming and esports are those of the “titty streamer” and the “fake gamer girl.” T.L. Taylor argues that the discursive panic surrounding gamer girls is not an issue of clothing or sexuality, but of body policing. She argues that these discourses maintain the fear of women’s sexuality being used for advantage (Taylor, 2018). Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster also argue that the use of this misogynistic discourse posits women as cheaters who do not deserve success in esports. More importantly, this discourse is used to exacerbate the notion that men and boys who game earn their success morally through merit and legitimacy.

The relentless use of the N-slur by non-Black esports players suggests that racist discourse, particularly anti-Black racism, is also a prominent discursive violence in the esports industry. Black lesbians must navigate an online gaming world that vilifies them for both their queerness and Blackness. As Kishonna Gray states, Black lesbians are “hypervisible and hypervulnerable to the impacts of racialized, heteronormative, heterosexist, patriarchy” in online gaming (2018, p. 293). Nevertheless, Black lesbians in gaming are responding to racist discourse despite the outcome. GamerGate trolls suggest that their use

of racism is "ironic" and satirical," however Aja Romano points out that this is a "deliberate strategy that formed the core of the alt-right playbook," (2020, para. 55) a political group which aims to uphold White supremacy.

Also associated with the misogynistic practices of the alt-right are incels (Romano, 2018). Reading deeply into incel rhetoric in esports actually reveals an assemblage of various forms of violence. Though incel doxxing is mainly perpetrated by cis, straight men, some queer men identify as incels too. Gay men and geeks utilize the discourse of gay allyship to assert hegemony over women (Ging, 2019). On top of the outright misogyny of the language of incels is their use of ableist discourse. The association and combination of the R-slur with women and other players validates the "rationality" of men over the affective harm they cause to women, queer, trans, racialized, and disabled people (Olson & LaPoe, 2017).

One type of discursive violence that consistently harms trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary esport participants and players outside of outright transphobic slurs is the commitment to observe gender differences in esports research, particularly within quantitative analyses of esports. Instead of analyzing the impacts of gender policing, they often reify bioessentialist and sexist notions of gender (Ruberg, Cullen, & Brewster, 2019). Jenson and de Castell argue that revealing gender differences reinforces exclusionary practices that "can and do have an impact on who plays and what they play" (2018, p. 729). The use of male/female and he/she in esports policies and related articles is also often overlooked as a form of discursive violence. Non-binary people are completely erased from the esports industry because they do not exist within the language it uses.[5] If the esports industry is concerned with the participation of 2SLGBTQI youth in esports, it must begin to imagine them within their lexicon and gaming repertoire.

Cumulatively, these discourses suggest one thing: the ideal esports player is the White, cis, and straight man (Gray, 2018). The weaponizing and policing of social constructs like gender and race is, at its heart, the core of all violence in the esports industry. The esports industry must not only examine the ways that violence permeates in complicated ways through discourse, speech, and behaviour, but also treat it as a legitimate source of harm connected to White supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism.

5 Here, we do not claim that all non-binary people use they/them or neopronouns. Instead, we suggest that the language of the binary does not encapsulate those whose gender is not completely embodied, articulated, or informed by these binary categories.

Anonymity

The anonymity of navigating the online world has long been of interest within research, specifically in studies concerning cyberbullying. The aforementioned study of Canadian LGBTQ youth in online gaming spaces argues that aggression by cyberbullies was facilitated by anonymity (Law et al., 2012). Canadian youth find it easier to harm and harass each other in online gaming by virtue of this invisibility and lack of accountability. However, there are other ways that young gamers use this anonymity for violence, as well as for pleasure. Most esports policies mention that gamer names and avatars must remain appropriate in terms of explicit, sexual, and discriminatory content (Steam, n.d.). Steam, a gaming library that often marks the origin of professional esports careers (n.d.), maintains this rule because avatars (profile pictures chosen by players as their identifiers) as well as usernames and gamertags (Xbox, n.d.), are often used by players to showcase offensive, vulgar, or inappropriate content (Steam, n.d.) that ranges from anti-Black (Lee, 2020) to pornographic images. Avatars and usernames are often modified by some players to engage in cyberstalking, a mode of violence that harms mostly women (West, 2014). In response to this, esports platforms have Terms of Service that state that the player must match the biographical information that they submit (Call of Duty League, 2020).

Although these policies work to prevent violence, they simultaneously harm people who find creating online representations of themselves liberating. There is anecdotal evidence that trans people use online gaming to experience their genders in a “safe, non-threatening, non-alienating, non-stigmatizing, and non-critical environment” (Arcelus et al., 2016, p. 21). Curating representations of themselves online can look like trying out new names and pronouns, choosing avatars and pictures that best resemble them, and finding queer community online (Gray, 2018). As such, the esports industry must examine their investments in anonymity, avatars, and gamer names, as it is a space that both constrains and expands the possibilities for queer and trans liberation and embodiment online.

Content

Video games themselves often remain unexamined as sources of violence. The most well-known research regarding violence in video games concerns the internalization of fighting and shooting practices by players and their consequent potential for aggression in real-life (Barlett et al., 2007). While these results are important, it is equally important to consider the ways that racialization and the policing of gender, race, and sexuality are internalized by way of video games. Of particular concern to queer and trans youth are the

ways that sex workers and trans women are depicted in *GTA V* (Rodenberg, 2013). In this particular game, trans women are only imagined as sex workers who are used for their services and immediately killed to retain the players' money or to obtain new cars through glitches (Hernandez, 2020). While these are not esports games themselves, they are streamed and played on platforms such as Twitch, which host esports tournaments and daily streams, on which many esports players and audience members can be found and are likely to watch. Moreover, the ideological interiority of trans women as objects to be killed carries real-life implications, some of which was discussed earlier.

The Toronto van attack on April 23, 2018 is morbidly reminiscent of this *GTA V* scene, with witnesses claiming it looked like the murderer was "playing a video game, trying to kill as many people as possible" (Kassam & Cecco, 2018, para. 12). Alek Minassian was a self-identified incel and self-proclaimed "hard-core gamer" that played esports games daily (Bell & Russell, 2019; Hayes, 2019). His attack resulted in the death of 10 people – 8 of them women. Though we do not claim any causal relationships between these events, we still see the overlapping impacts of incel violence, misogyny, and video game content and how engagements within these circles impact the lives of youth in esports. Imagery that reifies men's assumed entitlement to women's bodies, sex, and the validation of violence as a response to rejection inform and shape the ideologies held by players in playing spaces. This event illustrates what is constantly at stake in the esports industry.

Finally, the lack of 2SLGBTQI content in esports games is, in and of itself, problematic for its exclusion, and points to the larger issue of the overwhelming focus of esports to centre on White, cis, straight able-bodied characters. To be clear, this is not an issue of representation, which often normalizes subjects into queer hegemonies. This is a critique of an industry that consistently upholds and supports men and boys, an intentional and continuous decision that can only imagine queer and trans people, especially trans sex workers, as the targets of violence. Making queer and trans people hypervisible as victims of harm and invisible otherwise maintains the particular social fabric that keeps them hypervulnerable (Gray, 2018). The lack of esports research on 2SLGBTQI youth as well as the lack 2SLGBTQI players and content offers researchers and members of the esports industry fruitful information. If the esports industry continues to disregard 2SLGBTQI, racialized, disabled, and poor people through the various modes and practices of violence outlined above, they remain committed to and accountable for their harm and deaths both on and offline.

To further understand the state of violence within esports, we will continue this literature review's second part with *how* safety and violence are maintained and regulated throughout the esports industry.

Part II - Messing and Mapping Esports in Canada

Playing "Safe"

Violence/Safety

In Part I of this literature review, we examined how the term "2SLGBTQI community" is already fractured and multiple, an aspect of queer and trans life online that researchers must contend with. In reframing this term, we mapped the many modes, meanings, and practices of violence that queer and trans youth experience and enact within esports platforms and playing spaces. Though the cases we outlined in the previous literature review illustrate the proliferation of violence in online gaming and esports, there are also numerous ways that queer and trans esports players negotiate safety and security in these same spaces. In reality, esports is, at the same time as it is violent, a space where queer and trans youth can escape their lived realities, seek pleasure in, and begin to gesture towards "otherwise" ways of being (Crawley, 2016).

Esports is not solely violent nor is it solely safe. For this reason, we must bifurcate the binary of violence/safety in order to understand how both violence and safety co-exist, bleed into, and inform one another. This final portion of this literature review will examine what it means to be safe, who esports players need to be safe from, and who determines what counts as "safe." Next, this section will examine how moves towards safety via esports policy, federal regulation, and community-based regulation can continue to harm queer and trans esports players followed by an overview of accountability and ethics in esports. We will conclude this literature review with a set of questions and provocations that will guide the esports industry in a direction where it can begin to grapple with the question: **What do queer and trans youth in esports want?**

Safety in Esports

The overwhelming cases of violence we laid out in the previous section of the literature review are often met with responses that suggest the need for safety online. This desire for youth safety has led to initiatives like "safe spaces" (Hackford-Peer, 2010), cyberbullying awareness programs and curriculum

(Public Safety Canada, 2015), and policy adjustments across numerous institutions and digital platforms (Hackford-Peer, 2010). It seems that the esports industry is astutely aware of the violences that occur within and throughout their spaces. This is evident in the esports industry's responses to these violences, particularly in regards to 2SLGBTQI players. The esports platform, Twitch, celebrates Pride every year with featured streams of 2SLGBTQI streamers, Pride merchandise, donations to the Trevor Project, and chances for users to earn Pride-themed emotes (2020). Discord, a platform used by esports players to stream and communicate, has an annual Pride fundraiser as well as Partnered Community servers that they encourage users to support during Pride season (2020; 2020) AnyKey, the organization developed between Intel and ESL, has also organized and hosted women-only tournaments that are trans and non-binary inclusive (Amanda Stevens, n.d.). Other individuals, teams, and leagues have similarly used tournaments as a way to raise money for various 2SLGBTQI organizations (Philstar News Global, 2020). While so much is being done to maintain "safety" through these initiatives, it is crucial to understand what it actually means to be "safe" online, particularly as it relates to queer and trans youth in esports.

"Safe" for Whom?

Countless esports platform and tournament policies state that esports environments should be interactive, fun, and, most importantly, safe (Blizzard Entertainment, 2020). However, these same policies and guidelines lack a definition of safety. In its absence, these policies imply that online safety is the ability to navigate esports spaces free from discrimination or harassment based on disability, size, age, religion, race, gender, or sexuality (AnyKey, n.d.), rhetoric commonly found within "positive space" and "safe space" discourse (Ontario Public Health Associaiton, 2011). When the aim of esports policies to build diverse and inclusive communities by prohibiting harassment or discrimination in esports is met with the reality of queer and trans life online, how then can we define safety? Is safety a space free of violence? Is safety having infrastructures in place to protect players who have experienced violence? It seems that, much like violence, the term safety is imbued with many meanings and practices.

When safety is mentioned in esports policy, they often refer to other players as sources of violence. Inter-player violence is certainly prominent as 2SLGBTQI youth are not only subject to violence from incels, trolls, and other gamers, they are also subject to violence from people in their own "community." In doing so, the esports industry assumes that players only need to remain safe from other players. As the previous part of this literature review has demonstrated, violence comes from many sources, from the video games themselves to behaviour to

violent discourse. However, we must turn our attention to the esports industry as an institution that has the power to maintain and perpetuate, with or without intention, certain violences as well.

In their article, "Queer In/Security" (2020), Tallie Ben Daniel and Hilary Berwick argue that we must complicate "... what it means to be safe as an individual body" (p. 130) and further examine the violence produced by "... pinning responsibility for 'safety' on the (vulnerable) individual" (p. 131). Thinking alongside Ben Daniel and Berwick, the violence of the esports industry cannot be limited to an action that is solely embodied, constructed, and felt by esports players. Transformative Justice organizers and activists remind us that in addition to systems and institutions, everyone is capable of producing harm (Mingus, 2019). In the esports industry, this includes everyone involved in tournaments, game development and publishing, branding, sponsorships, advertising, broadcasting, moderating, and investing, as well as teams, leagues, platforms, fans, journalists, audience members, and casual players. In this article, Ben Daniel and Berwick argue that it is vital to consider how the violence against queer people are also aspects of broader systemic structures like settler colonialism, White supremacy, capitalism, and racism. Locating responsibility solely on individuals does not account, address, or redress these other forms of violence that continue to surface and mobilize in esports. In line with our delineation of violence, queer and trans youth involved in esports must consider not only how they enact and maintain individual, structural, and institutional violence, but also how they are constantly in negotiation, living within and beside these longer histories.

Unpacking Regulation

One of the primary ways that safety is maintained in esports is through various forms of regulation. T.L. Taylor (2018) explains that the esports platform, Twitch, is often articulated as a "wild frontier" (p. 217). This is because the fast-paced, constantly adapting broadcasting site is seemingly highly unregulated. However, she instead demonstrates how on esports platforms,

> Forms of governance and management operate at several layers, from the interpersonal to the algorithmic. This is not a unified system or one of shared values across all domains.... Taken together, these varying actors and nodes mitigate otherwise-popular claims about any inherent openness of new platforms, instead highlighting how emergent practices are always embedded in complex systems of governance and regulation (Taylor, 2018, p. 218).

While most understand esports to be a highly unregulated and unruly technoscape, there are actually infrastructures already in place that demonstrate how violence and safety are dealt with. As we start to complicate

what it means to be safe, we must also question and interrogate how safety is utilized within these infrastructures. In particular, we must ask:

1. Who is allowed to be safe in esports?
2. Who determines what counts as "safe" in esports?
3. How is this decided?

These questions deeply inform each other because the authorities who determine what is safe and regulate violence in esports, are simultaneously deciding who receives protection. In order to further examine these questions, we must investigate and explore a collection of esports policies across different gaming and esports platforms, federal regulation, and community-based regulation.

Esports Policy

Esports Policy Accessibility and Reporting

Esports rules, codes of conduct, and policies are the primary esports texts that outline what is regulated and who the regulating body consists of. For the purposes of this literature review, we have limited the scope of esports policies to major esports leagues that operate in Canada and with Canadian teams.[6] In examining esports policy, we pay attention to how "violence can produce, and be produced by, discourses of safety and security" (Ben Daniel & Berwick, 2020, p. 137). As we previously mentioned, esports policies intend to foster safe and inclusive spaces but contain vague definitions of safety. Additionally, of the esports policies that we examined in-depth, many require a deliberate search on their respective websites and cannot be found easily.

Because of the broad scope of esports, regulation by mode of surveillance is hard to maintain. Instead, esports offers players opportunities to report their complaints, grievances, and issues to the necessary authoritative bodies who can then engage in disciplinary action. In esports tournaments, one of the main regulating forces is that of the referee, who is meant to pay close attention to breaches of esports rules and subsequently take necessary action. The Call of Duty Challengers™ Rule Book for 2020 contains a reporting section which states that Team Leaders and Captains can report match issues with recorded proof and referees, chosen administrative officials of the league office, are responsible for disciplining these rule violations (Call of Duty League, 2020). This reporting process is almost identical in every esports tournament policy we examined. Even outside of the tournament space, this is a common theme

6 The esports policies that we focused on were BlizzCon, Call of Duty League, CompeteLeague, Electronic Sports League, Fortnite World Cup, League of Legends World Championship, Overwatch League, Road to the FIFA eWorld Cup, and The International.

throughout most of the esports policies we examined: players are able to report being harmed or violated however, the administrators of the league or tournament will decide whether esports players are safe or not and rule accordingly (Fortnite World Cup, 2019).

Often, these policies are followed by a clause which states that penalties are devised on the sole discretion of the administrators and league officials (CompeteLeague, n.d.). Policies rarely offer the players any solace as to whether administrators know how to work with vulnerable communities or are trained to address situations through an anti-oppressive and intersectional framework. The 2019 League of Legends World Championship Rules corroborate that referees "shall issue rulings in an impartial manner" (p. 24). While this offers some satisfaction compared to policies that do not mention how to report or those that are simply unavailable to the public, it veers in a similar direction as "colour-blind" rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). This kind of linguistic acrobatics works to dismiss integral social constructs, like race, as contextual factors in violent and oftentimes racist, encounters. By disregarding these social constructs, this semantic move is able to defend perpetrators of violence, leaving those harmed with no processes of accountability or opportunities for reparation and justice. In other policies, participants must not make "public statements that call into question the integrity of competence of match referees of Administration" (Call of Duty League, 2020, p. 37), which calls into question the issues of transparency and ethical accountability by the esports industry.

Identification as State Violence and Surveillance

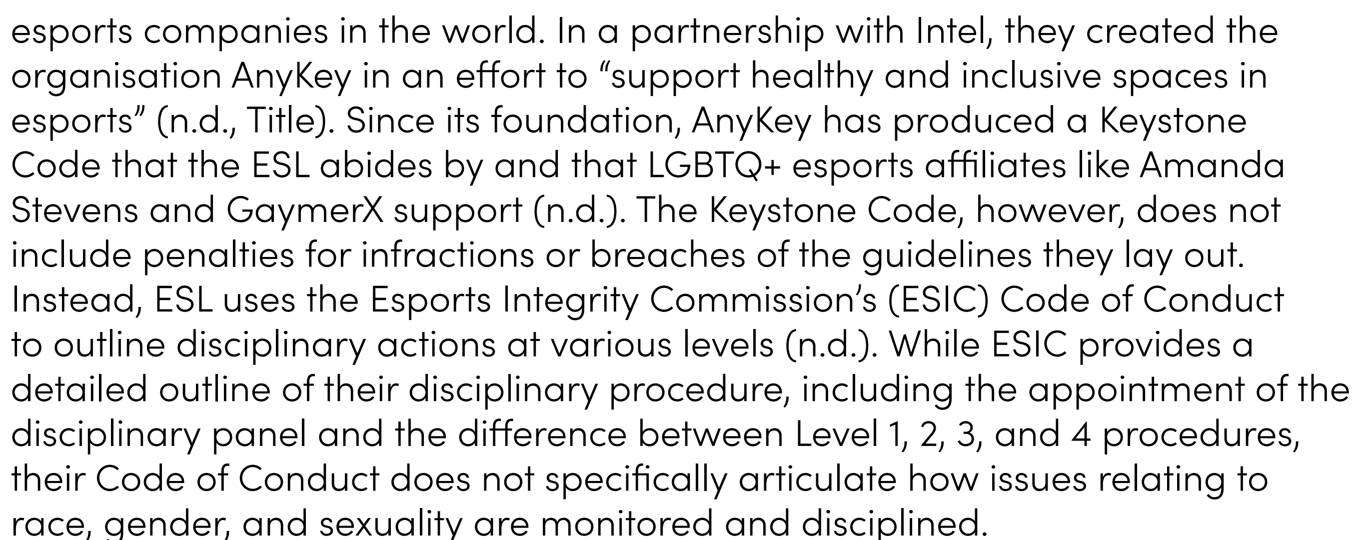
Not only are esports policies authorized and completely controlled by league administrators, but the contents of these policies can also impact youth in esports. One of the most prominent set of requirements primarily concerns queer and trans esports players of colour: government identification. The use of government identification and other documents at tournaments, such as passports, utility bills (FIFA20 Global Series, n.d.), and visas, is actually a hegemonic tool by both the state and esports industries because it monitors queer, trans, and racialized people through nationalism and citizenship (Dryden & Lenon, 2016). To obtain identification, people must be recognized by the state through naming, gender, and citizenship. For international trans players in particular, this can be exceptionally difficult as the process of changing documents is taxing and sometimes impossible without the transphobic requirement of lower surgery (Squires, 2017), reifying the transphobic discourse we mentioned earlier. Moreover, changing documents to match names and gender can pose more issues than it solves. While the designation of the X

gender marker is now available in Canada (Busby, 2017), this poses more difficulty when travelling internationally as the X is often incomprehensible transnationally (Burza, 2019). Accessing passports and proving residency require increased engagements with the state, which can place queer and trans esports players who are refugees, poor, racialized, disabled, and mad in precarious positions with the government and with the police.

Disciplinary Action

The consequences of violating esports rules, policies, and codes of conduct are highly varied and oftentimes ambiguous. Because there is not one set of rules for all esports games, platforms, and competitions, disciplinary actions resulting from infractions are also not singular and vary across games and leagues. For everyday players of games like StarCraft II (SC2) and World of Warcraft (WoW), the Blizzard Forum Code of Conduct lists racial/ethnic-based discrimination, sexual orientation-based discrimination, real-life threats, and harassment as potential violations that can result in temporary bans from forums "depending on severity" (Blizzard Entertainment, 2020, Harassing or Defamatory section.) In the games themselves, Blizzard mentions that there are "restrictions" for various offenses, without going into detail about what that looks like or encompasses. Though harassment and violence are acknowledged in numerous codes and conduct for esports tournaments and casual play, they often do not specify how or lay out what is involved in the process of responding to harm. Similarly, Twitch lists hateful conduct and harassment in-person or off-Twitch as a violation of their policies. Hateful conduct violations can result in "a range of enforcement actions, including and up to indefinite suspension," whereas harassment can result in "[the] account being suspended. Depending on the severity of the offense, harassers may be indefinitely suspended on the first violation" (Twitch, n.d., Hateful Conduct and Harassment section.) While these games, forums, and platforms do mention that there are consequences for violating the rules and policies set in place to maintain the safety of esports players, there is very little specificity and transparency regarding what this process looks like.

For the Call of Duty League, breaching the established rules during competitions can result in "verbal warning(s), written warning(s), suspension(s), loss of side selection for current or future game(s), ban for current or future matches and events, prize forfeiture(s), game forfeiture(s), match forfeiture(s), tournament disqualification, or termination of team license" (2020, p. 41). Much like reporting, the administration is responsible for determining what disciplinary action will be used. In addition, the decisions chosen by the administration are final. The Electronic Sports League (ESL) is one of the largest



esports companies in the world. In a partnership with Intel, they created the organisation AnyKey in an effort to “support healthy and inclusive spaces in esports” (n.d., Title). Since its foundation, AnyKey has produced a Keystone Code that the ESL abides by and that LGBTQ+ esports affiliates like Amanda Stevens and GaymerX support (n.d.). The Keystone Code, however, does not include penalties for infractions or breaches of the guidelines they lay out. Instead, ESL uses the Esports Integrity Commission’s (ESIC) Code of Conduct to outline disciplinary actions at various levels (n.d.). While ESIC provides a detailed outline of their disciplinary procedure, including the appointment of the disciplinary panel and the difference between Level 1, 2, 3, and 4 procedures, their Code of Conduct does not specifically articulate how issues relating to race, gender, and sexuality are monitored and disciplined.

Some esports leagues like the Overwatch League (2018) and the League of Legends European Championship (LEC, n.d.) track disciplinary actions online. Both trackers include who is being disciplined, the team that the member is part of, when the incident occurred, the infraction, and the action that they have taken to rectify the situation. At the time of writing, the Overwatch League reveals that players have been fined $3000 USD for sharing confidential information and the LEC has been fined €5000 for behaviour unbecoming of an LEC Team Manager and delayed team member payments. Though they do require a deliberate search to locate, both trackers are open to all and completely accessible online.

As such, we can see that the criteria for various forms of punitive consequences remain opaque for the most part. Moreover, we see an overwhelming trend of top-down approaches with very little capacity for accountability and transparency and little to no room for the members or players impacted by violations to respond.

Federal Regulation in Canada and Beyond

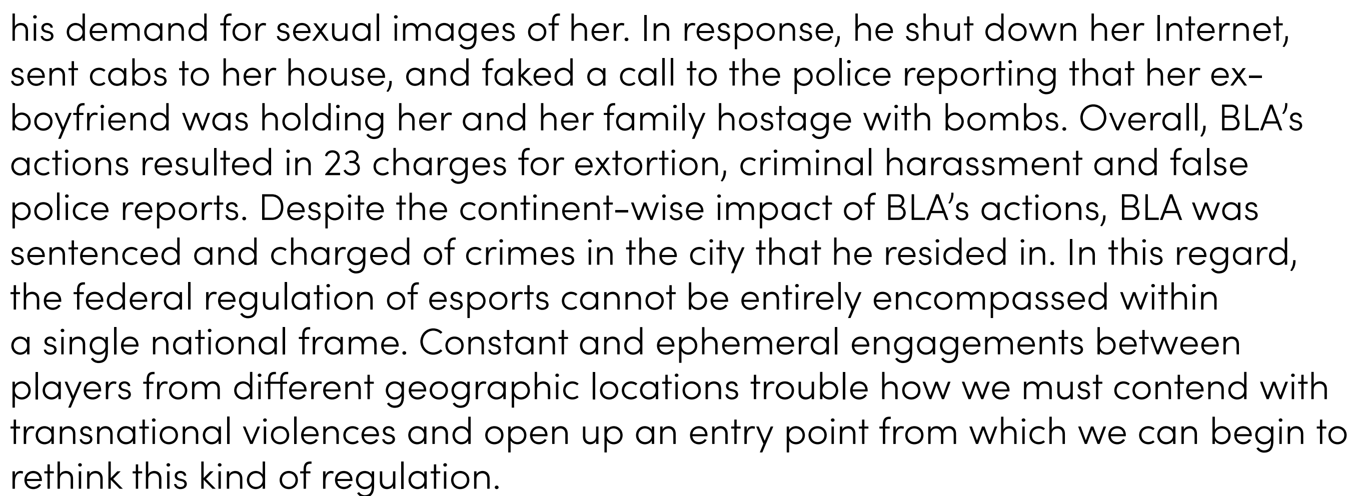
Esports policies constitutes only one way that esports regulates violence and safety. It is also important to consider how safety and violence in esports are regulated on a federal level in Canada. The critical question of online governance, specifically regarding how involved the federal government and federal law are in online regulation, is ensuring that there are meaningful protections for people who have experienced violence online in all its forms. Of course, another crucial issue concerns how people can be protected while at the same time remaining committed to freedom of expression online. Online spaces are a critical part of 2SLGBTQI life, where queer and trans youth can construct and experiment with their identities and find community. Because esports operates on a unique and somewhat unmappable terrain, federal

regulation is not so straightforward in relation to esports. As such, the only kind of federal regulation in esports concerns online hate crimes, which are already established and not specific to esports.

Betsy Rosenblatt outlines the issues of navigating video games and the law (Gard & Townsend Gard, 2017), particularly for queer and trans people, in stating, “Who do you get a restraining order against? The world?” (p. 60). However, there are several existing situations of crimes within esports, most of which involve doxxing and swatting, which are “real crimes.” Briefly, doxxing involves the non-consensual dissemination of another person’s confidential information. Most of this information is then used to further harass and threaten the player being harmed and their loved ones. Swatting, on the other hand, involves “someone calling 911 or filing a false police report that a crime has been committed – a murder or bomb threat, for example – in order to provoke the police to investigate and raid an individual’s house or business” (Gard & Townsend Gard, 2017, p. 60). The name of this behaviour is meant to reflect audiences waiting for SWAT teams to arrive at the homes of the people they are targeting.

In 2008, the FBI released an article entitled, “Don’t Make the Call: The New Phenomenon of ‘Swatting,’” which outlined how 5 swatters impacted over 100 people in more than 60 cities through false 911 calls between 2002 and 2006. These cases were investigated by their Dallas office in collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies as well as telecommunication providers and first response teams and led to the sentencing of all 5 swatters. In J. A. Hitchcock’s book, *Cyberbullying and the Wild, Wild Web* (2016), she outlines several other cases of swatting that have received criminal penalties that have occurred in the United Kingdom and Australia. Hitchcock notes that there is a potential for swatting to be considered a federal crime, stating that, “although California and New Jersey have passed their own anti-swatting laws, a federal law would help, especially if the caller is in a different state from the victim” (2016, p. 74). The unique and ever-changing geographies of esports make it difficult for federal infrastructures to track and regulate violence related to gaming and esports.

In their book, *Video Games and the Law*, Ron Gard and Elizabeth Townsend Gard outline an incident in Canada where a gamer was sentenced for swatting and doxxing (2017). In 2015, a 17-year old gamer and hacker in British Columbia, only identified by the initials BLA, doxed and swatted women who denied his friend requests on the esports game, League of Legends (Shiffer, 2015). His actions, which included bomb threats at Disneyland, Simon Fraser University, and at specific women’s houses, harmed lives all across North America. In one of the cases, BLA retaliated against a woman gamer in Waterloo who refused



his demand for sexual images of her. In response, he shut down her Internet, sent cabs to her house, and faked a call to the police reporting that her ex-boyfriend was holding her and her family hostage with bombs. Overall, BLA's actions resulted in 23 charges for extortion, criminal harassment and false police reports. Despite the continent-wise impact of BLA's actions, BLA was sentenced and charged of crimes in the city that he resided in. In this regard, the federal regulation of esports cannot be entirely encompassed within a single national frame. Constant and ephemeral engagements between players from different geographic locations trouble how we must contend with transnational violences and open up an entry point from which we can begin to rethink this kind of regulation.

Censorable Content

In the cases mentioned above, authoritative figures like referees, administrative members, and law enforcement are responsible for determining what is and is not safe. One of the main concerns around this responsibility is how censorable content is determined. What counts as censorable content? As we stated prior, esports policies mainly illuminate the rules of their spaces without explaining how or why many of their policies are in place. Because administrators and authorities have the last say and are often not transparent about how their decisions are made, this section will look at what is considered "censorable content" and examine what that means for esports players at large.

One of the main patterns that is seen across the esports industry at broad is the censoring of "sexual content." Many esports policies prohibit any explicit sexual content. So, we must ask: What counts as sexual and therefore censorable content? As we discussed in the previous literature review, dress codes are of concern for queer and trans girls and women. Dress codes are often put into place to encourage uniformity and professionalism amongst teams. In addition, it gives teams the opportunity to display their sponsors, teams, and other affiliates. However, the enforcement of dress codes at tournaments as well as on esports platforms reveal "how the platform frames what counts as legitimate content and presence, and how that model at times runs up against actual user practices and desires" (Taylor, 2018, p. 231). The regulation of dress codes works alongside the discourse surrounding "female gamers" that we mentioned in the previous section of this literature review, as they play into the fear of women's sexuality as an immoral and unmerited advantage. This policy, however, has been critiqued for its contradictory investments. While dress codes aim to regulate the sexuality of its players, it often dismisses the fact that "the games themselves display a lot more sexually suggestive themes than most streams" (Mitchell, 2014, para. 17). This critique reveals how this kind of regulation is

deeply tied to notions of gender, sexuality, and intimacy. It is not only the explicit sexual image but fear of what players who produce this image can do that warrants censorship.

For queer and trans people, censorable content poses unique issues. In Taylor's seminal book, *Watch Me Play* (2018), she notes that Robert Yang's titles, which focus on gay identity from the perspectives of bodies, boundaries, respect, and consent, are often censored for their sexual content on Twitch. Yang argues that,

> [Twitch's] goal is to remain vague and hazy so that they can randomly decide what 'too much sex' or the 'wrong kind of sex' is, while carving out special exceptions for large companies or business partners. I'm sure this is good for business, but it's very bad for creative culture (Taylor, 2018, p. 230).

Yang's critique, in addition to Mitchell's comment on sexuality in video game content, reveal how moments of censorship actually work to police race and gender in very particular ways. The fact that sexual content is permitted in video game content (despite the policing of dress codes and video games with different kinds of sex on Twitch) suggests that deciding what counts as censorable is dependent on who is making these decisions. Yang also suggests that these decisions may not be grounded in an ethic of care, but as a fear of liability and monetary proposition that can produce more profit for the esports industry. The fleeting and ambivalent quality of these decisions pose unintended complications for people's sense of safety, well-being, and expression.

In recognizing these issues, the esports industry must be wary of who is most severely impacted by this kind of censorship. Jessica West points out that women are often punished for their own sexualization (2014). However, censoring women online is not a monolithic experience. West points out that,

> Young, White, middle class and assumed to be straight and cis [women] are seen as the closest thing to the 'perfect' or 'most innocent' victim. ... This invisibilizes the experiences of women of colour, older women, working class women, queer and trans women, and other marginalized women who are even less likely to be believed, even more likely to be blamed and less likely to have the resources to fight for justice through the criminal justice system (2014, p. 6-7).

West makes a clear and crucial point. The regulation of sexuality online, specifically as it impacts queer and trans women of colour, has major real-life implications. These women can lose employment and can potentially enter the criminal justice system with limited to no access to support or resources. As such, the esports industry must be attuned to the ways that censorship and regulation, if left unattended to, can reinforce violence and reproduce harm.

Community-Based Regulation

The issues raised within this literature are not novel. In fact, gamers and esports players around the world have voiced their shared concerns over these issues. Instead of waiting for responses or actions by esports decision makers, some esports players have decided to engage in community-based regulation, mostly known as "community management" (Taylor, 2018, p. 221), that is, ensuring that esports players feel like they can participate in esports and its affiliated online spaces. For example, attacks by trolls and other violent players are often overlooked, leaving esports players to their own devices. In the case of trolling, doxxing, and cyberstalking, players who have been harmed find that one immediate solution is to block the other player. Because of the unique spatial and geographic boundaries of esports and gaming, blocking, banning, and suspension are often not enough as a remedy or response to violence. Unfortunately, players have found their way around blocking and are likely to further harm and reach out to their blockers (West, 2014). This has led to the creation of gamer-led safety initiatives (Kelley, n.d.) and other community-building projects (Harvey, 2019).

Many professional gamers, particularly professional gamers who are women, have been involved in advocacy work concerning gender-based discrimination in the esports industry. One such person is Canadian video game developer, professional gamer, and 5-time CS:GO World Champion (Top Twitch Streamers, n.d.), Stephanie Harvey (otherwise known as missharvey), who has long shared her commitment to making esports spaces safe from online violence (Hainsworth, 2019). In 2013, she and other professional women gamers founded Misscliks, an online community that works toward "creating a future where people of all genders can participate in geek & gamer culture w/o fear of prejudice or mistreatment, enjoying acceptance & opportunity" (Misscliks, n.d., About section). Part of her initiatives also include carving spaces that are meant for like-minded players such as RED FUEL Discord. As a player on CLG's CS:GO RED team, Harvey created a Discord channel in December of 2019 stating, "We will strive to be an inclusive community that provides a safe space for all: women, LGBTQ community and men" (Harvey, 2019, Tweet).

As we have previously outlined, esports chats, channels, and conversation spaces are often spaces of violence for queer and trans youth. Esports platforms have sought to respond to this by moderating these spaces. In particular, Twitch has used both humans and technology (usually referred to as "bots") to moderate their chats. Taylor notes that "moderator teams tend to be volunteer organizations" who work as "frontline monitors of behaviour and speech" (2018, p. 219). She further states that

> There is a multidecade history of volunteers stepping up and doing serious work in managing online communities, and companies are increasingly hiring community managers whose job is to do the everyday work of engaging with users and mediating problems (Taylor, 2018, p. 218-219).

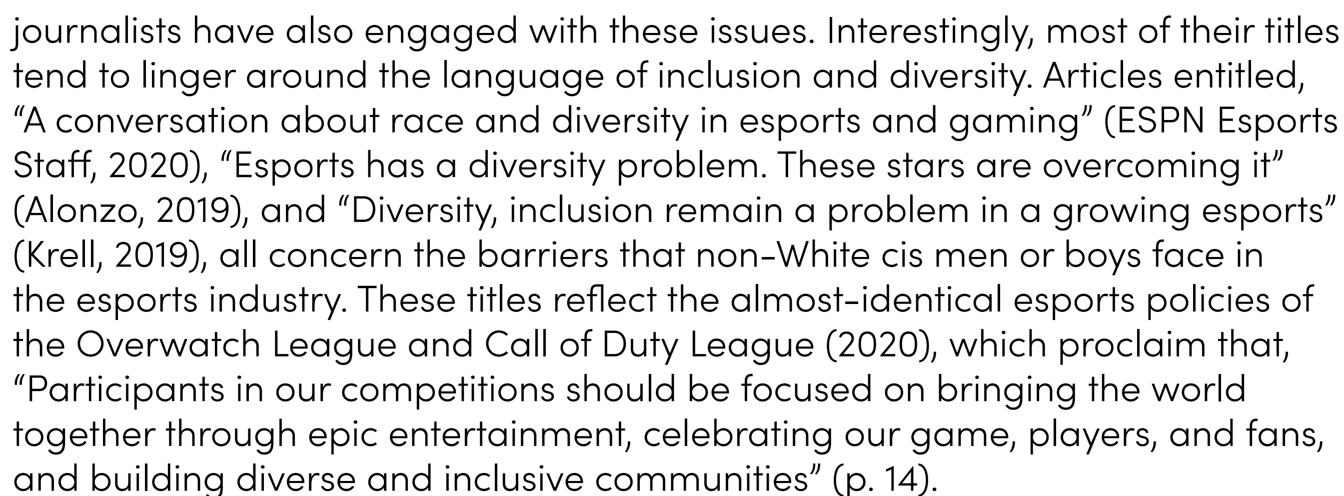
On the other hand, AutoMod, Twitch's most popular bot moderator, contains 4 levels of moderation. Starting from 0 and ending at 4, each level filters messages that involve increasing amounts of the following categories: "discrimination, sexual content, hostility, and profanity" (Twitch, n.d., How AutoMod Works section). AutoMod, however, does not remove users who use this language. Instead, "it merely withholds comments that fall within the broadcaster's chosen moderation settings to be either approved or denied by the broadcaster's moderators" and senders will receive notification outlining this.

Discord, on the other hand, uses two form of communication: voice and text (Jiang et al., 2019). Because of the ephemeral quality of verbal communication, real-time voice chat moderation constitutes its own array of logistical questions and ethical considerations. Jiang and colleagues note that, "Moderators tried to give warnings first but sometimes had to take actions based on hearsay and first impressions. To avoid making elaborate rules for every situation, moderators instead simply stated that they had highest authority" (2019, p. 2). Some of the rules mentioned by these authors include the verbal communication of racial slurs. According to Jiang and colleagues, racial slurs constitute harsher punishments than if these slurs were typed because, "saying it, rather than typing it, is much worse" (2019, p. 8). Here, we see that this volunteer community of moderators has the capacity to decide whether the same act is more racist without a set of community guidelines or anti-racist training. In this way, these "new moderation strategies... are limited and often based on hearsay and first impressions, resulting in problems ranging from unsuccessful moderation to false accusations" (Jiang et al., 2019, p. 1). As such, everyday players are also engaged in community-based regulation in esports with very little infrastructure and little to no compensation.

Accountability and Ethics in Esports

Diversity and Inclusion

The content of this literature review is not new to the esports community. Issues of violence, safety, and regulation are well known and widely publicized topics of conversation in the gaming world. Online articles, blogs, and game forums are filled with personal experiences, reflections, and potential solutions that esports players have come up with over decades. Researchers, writers, and



journalists have also engaged with these issues. Interestingly, most of their titles tend to linger around the language of inclusion and diversity. Articles entitled, "A conversation about race and diversity in esports and gaming" (ESPN Esports Staff, 2020), "Esports has a diversity problem. These stars are overcoming it" (Alonzo, 2019), and "Diversity, inclusion remain a problem in a growing esports" (Krell, 2019), all concern the barriers that non-White cis men or boys face in the esports industry. These titles reflect the almost-identical esports policies of the Overwatch League and Call of Duty League (2020), which proclaim that, "Participants in our competitions should be focused on bringing the world together through epic entertainment, celebrating our game, players, and fans, and building diverse and inclusive communities" (p. 14).

The language of diversity and inclusion is highly praised as a solution to the ongoing issues taking place in esports. What does it mean, then, to call for diversity and inclusion in the esports industry? In Sara Ahmed's book, *On Being Included* (2012), she examines how meanings of diversity are operationalized within various industries to do very specific work. In it, Ahmed calls upon industries to reflect upon what their calls for diversity reveal about the reality of their institutions, stating, "If diversity becomes something that is added to organizations, like color, then it confirms the Whiteness of what is already in place" (2012, p. 33). Here, she notes that calls for diversity and inclusion are often used to insert "people who look different" into already-established, White institutions. In reality, this desire for diversity actually means inserting the images and bodies of queer, trans, and racialized people into institutions without uprooting the issues of gender, sexuality, and race-based violence that are embedded in the institution's foundation.

For queer and trans people of colour, this poses a particular issue. In the first chapter of *Disrupting Queer Inclusion*, Awwad argues that the discourse of queer inclusion is meant to mirror the diversity of "the people" (2015). Awwad quotes Stuart Hall, who says, "It's a fallacy, because there is no such thing as 'the people.' It is a discursive device for summoning the people you want. You're constructing the people, you're not reflecting the people" (2015, p. 23). Awwad also notes Puar's conception of "new homonormativity" and Eng's concept of "queer liberalism" (2015, p. 23), which upholds a promise for recognition, inclusion, and possibility for queer and trans people of colour while neglecting the racial exploitation that undermines this very inclusion. In this way, the use of diversity and inclusion by the esports industry does not actually consider what esports players want. Instead of listening and acting upon what esports players need and desire to participate in esports, the industry constructs an image that reflects who they think can access their space.

Re-approaching Harm

The major question moving forward is: What can the esports industry do now? How can the esports industry move from this discourse of diversity and inclusion into a process of ethical engagement that holds the esports industry accountable for the state of violence in their spaces? The esports industry must grapple with their accountability to the communities they host and profit off of.

This literature review in its entirety discussed how violence and regulation in the esports industry can harm queer and trans youth in esports. Though we have mapped out the current state of violence and regulation in esports, we would like to pose the question: Is there room in esports for something outside of regulation and censorship? This may be difficult to imagine as most gaming models enact top-down approaches to protect their gamers. However, looking outside of these paradigms and into the ongoing organizing around harm at the intersection of queer, trans, disabled, and racialized life may illuminate alternative modes of being with one another that could potentially benefit queer and trans youth in esports and the esports industry itself.

Transformative justice (TJ) organizers understand punitive and top-down approaches to harm as sites of egregious violence (Mingus, 2019). Instead of discipline and domination, “TJ works to build alternatives to our current systems which often position themselves as protectors, while simultaneously enacting the very forms of violence they claim to condemn” (Mingus, 2019, p. 1). By *responding* to harm instead of *penalizing* players, the esports industry will be able to take into account what people who have caused harm and those who have survived harm need. TJ interventions also apply to cases that veer into “criminal” law. At its heart, TJ interventions are abolitionist, which means that they do not rely on the state to keep their communities safe. In this way, it is also crucial to consider how the esports industry can support youth and other online communities and provide them with the tools and space to hold each other accountable.

As we have outlined, community-based regulation infrastructures already exist. One crucial position that is often voluntary is that of the human moderator, who are often not paid for their labour. These positions are the primary source of managing conflict, community, and violence on many platforms and through a number of contexts. Moderators are also people that esports players and audience members can directly contact in light of issues arising. Moreover, moderation work is completed by unpaid volunteers who may have little to no training on topics such as anti-racism, disability justice, anti-oppression, and queer and trans sensibilities. Gaming scholar Claudia Lo suggests that esports moderators need to be recognized for the labour involved in caring

for communities and each other in addition to governing chat and controlling content (Taylor, 2018, p. 219). In this way, moderation teams need to be constructed intentionally and value care within their spaces.

Gayatri Spivak's notion of the "ethical singularity" is of great importance here. Spivak suggests that "ethics" is a call to a relationship where responses flow from both sides (Landry & MacLean, 1996). In this way, each relationship is unique and singular from one another. The difficulty of top-down approaches to violence, specifically in the cases of trolling and being part of an esports competition, is that it never allows the person being harmed to advocate for their needs or respond to the person that has harmed them. In order to move towards accountability and ethics, the esports industry, in all of its facets and beneath all of its monikers, must first understand how to better care for their esports players deliberately and intentionally. The work of this cannot be done alone, though. This work requires working **with** and not **for** esports players. This means not only partnering with 2SLGBTQI, BIPOC, and disabled youth, but letting them lead the conversation and providing resources for them. By listening to what youth want, the esports industry will be able to engage with the lived experiences of queer and trans youth in esports in deeper and more meaningful ways.

Guiding Questions

In this literature review, we mapped out the messy territories of violence, safety, and regulation, particularly as they impact queer and trans youth in esports. Overall, the top-down approaches to violence that we see in esports neglect the question: **What do queer and trans youth in esports want?**

What follows are a set of provocations and activations that can be used as a starting point to guide current members of the esports industry towards accountable and ethical relations to queer and trans esports players. These questions do not mark the end of engaging ethical and accountable work. Instead, we encourage esports industry members to use this as their own mapping device where they can see where they are at and, more importantly, what direction they need to move in.

- **Who** are you in conversation with? Are you working with 2SLGBTQI, BIPOC, fat, poor, disabled, and mad esports players?
- **Who** are you actively listening to? Do you only listen to organizations who represent these communities? Or are you working with folks in these communities?

- **What** kinds of interpersonal, institutional, and systemic violences are occurring within your spaces? What are you currently doing to dismantle these violences?
- **How** are you working to dismantle White supremacy within your organization and within the esports industry at large?
- **In what ways** are you actively engaged in anti-racist and anti-oppressive work in the esports industry?
- **Are** 2SLGBTQI, BIPOC, fat, poor, disabled, and mad people in positions of authority in your industry? If not, why?
- **How** are you being an accomplice to Black and Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQI, fat, poor, disabled, and mad esports players?
- **How** are you meaningfully compensating esports players, consultants, and moderators for their labour?
- Are you letting esports players **lead** conversations regarding violence? How are you stepping back and letting them lead? Are you compensating them for their work?
- Are you letting esports players **lead** conversations regarding solutions to their experiences of violence? How are you stepping back and letting them lead? Are you compensating them for their work?
- **Are** you providing resources to youth in esports that both respond to their needs and prevent further harm? What do these resources look like? (eg., moving budget money away from penalization and moving it towards harm reduction, funding youth-led and community-led initiatives, etc.)
- **How** can you work towards centring care instead of punishment?
- **What** kind of infrastructures can you create that care for, support, and respond to the needs of players who have been harmed?

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