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<center>Games , Geek Culture, and Diversity</center>

Over the last few decades there has been an increase of diversity within geek culture. With the changing times the face of geek culture has changed. In fact, the geek subculture has become more accepting and even supported in mainstream media with shows that focus on video games, fantasy, and science fiction. The straight white middle class male is no longer the main targeted audience or demographic when it comes to marketing Geek culture. For this essay, we are going to look at the gamer subculture under geek culture as rhetors like Extra Credits and Anita Sarkeesian use different medium to display a need for diversity and ways that diversity can be used in media specifically games. This essay will explore Extra Credits and Sarkeesian's use of rhetorical concepts through their videos. Also we will explore tumblr as a cyberpublic and hybrid public involving gamer subculture.

Language

When talking about the rhetoric of diversity in worldbuilding, language is important. The different terminologies and jargon used are explored in different manners for the sake of argument and exploration. Under language an important rhetorical concept to explore is **public vocabulary** and its usage under the rhetoric of worldbuilding and diversity. In Rhetoric in Civic Life, public vocabulary means "culturally established and sanctioned" terms that compose people's taken-for-granted understanding of the world (Fritch, Palczewski and Ice 51). An example of this in the book was words like "equality" and "justice" were related to civil rights. The vocabulary was also used as a way for enacting and calling on social change.

The artifact used to understand this component is the Extra Credits video: *Diversity*. The video is about how diversity is important to creating well crafted, culturally sensitive, and well thought out story and characters in games. In the video the important vocabulary words used in the video are: stereotypes, token characters, gender roles, sexuality, sexism, classism, race, and diversity. Other vocabularies used were: worldbuilding, characters, and storytelling.

The first example we see of this is at 0:46 to 1:00 of the video. The speaker lists the different topics or public vocabulary that they were going to go in-depth about. As a way of highlighting their importance, the speaker labels each public vocabulary word as a "Future Topic". This is important because the rhetors are highlighting the important public vocabulary related to their community.

Public vocabulary used in the video is important because it helps change the mindset of the audience that it is talking to. It also gives the audience a different way of understanding the world. The word stereotype is important in this video because it highlights one of the problems seen in game designs. No one wants to be a part of something that is stereotypical so the use of the word makes the audience not want to associate with things that are stereotypical. Anita Sarkeesian does this a little differently as she doesn't highlight or even label her public vocabulary. Instead Sarkeesian uses imagery to provide an example or give a face to the public vocabulary used.

Image

A **visual culture** is a culture that is "distinguished by the ubiquity of visual forms of communication that appear in multiple media outlets at the same time" (63) such as: television, the Internet, and magazines. This is important to understand because we, as an audience, are influenced by the symbols and images that we see around us.

When talking about image or visual rhetoric, the first thing that needs to be understood is that the usage of symbols is a reflection of how we interact with our peers, interpret the world, give meaning to the world, and also how we communicate with those around us.

In the case of Sarkeesian's videos, she uses video game images as a way of providing examples about the different topics that involve feminism and the media. To fully understand her use of imagery the audience needs to look at the visual aesthetics that are in use. **Visual aesthetics** is basically what makes up an image. The five components of visual aesthetics are: content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content. For Sarkeesian's videos three components that can be used to analyze her use of images are content and expressive content.

For example, her use of content can be seen at 2:56 to 2:58, Sarkeesian first shows an image of a female character who was supposed to be the strong protagonist to her own game to highlight the public vocabulary word "Protagonist". And it is recognized by those who are a part of geek culture and media. Her expressive content is her emphasis that this protagonist is strong and heroic and the opposite of the image she uses later. Another example of content is at 2:59 to 3:09, Anita Sarkeesian uses a picture of a female character weakly in the arms of a male character. She uses this image to highlight the fact that this would be protagonist is now a passive victim in her own story. This is here expressive content.

The use of imagery and image aesthetics is important because it gives the audience an idea of what the rhetor is trying to say. We see another example of this through Sarkeesian's way of using narrative to help further give us an idea about feminism and gaming.

Narrative

Narrative, as described Rhetoric in Civic life, is "the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other." (118) Narrative describes the events that happen or at least give us some understanding of what happened. As said in Rhetoric in Civic Life, "it is not the event itself." In *Damsel in Distress*: Part 1 video, Antia Sarkeesian tells the story about a video game called Dinosaur Planet which involved a female protagonist named Crystal as she fights to save her home. The rhetor, Sarkeesian, then explains that the game was

never finished and in fact, the protagonist from this unfinished game was placed in another game where she became the damsel in distress. She then goes on to give the history of the damsel in distress trope.

This is an example of **representative anecdote**. A representative anecdote is a narrative that summarizes a person, thing, or situation. (137) Sarkeesian gives her audience and understanding on the idea of how problematic the damsel in distress troupe is. The use of narrative, imagery, and language are important because they help create two other concepts involved with rhetoric: exigence, argument, and ideology.

Exigence

An **exigence** is an "imperfection marked by urgency," (203).   An example of this is in the *Damsel in Distress* video where Sarkeesian points out that "the damsel in distress [troupe] is not just a synonym for 'weak' instead it works by ripping away the power from female characters…" (Sarkeesian and McIntosh)Sarkeesian uses exigence as a way of displaying a problematic use of troupes in the video game subculture. In fact she emphasizes this problem by addressing it in depth through a three part video series on the damsel in distress troupe.

Ideology

Ideology is our thoughts, perception, and understanding of the world in a society that guide our behavior. (23) This makes up what we believe as acceptable behavior, morals, and common knowledge. A great example of this is in the Extra Credits video *Diversity*. At 1:35 to 1:42 the rhetor says that "…if the games advertises 'jiggle physics' as a selling point, it probably belongs on my 'nope pile' list." (Extra Credits)This line is important because it basically highlights the rhetor's understand of acceptable behavior. It also means that this ideology will shape the rest of the rhetor's rhetoric and argument.

Argument

Argument is defined as reasoned discourse that seeks to persuade by presenting support for a position. (91) In Rhetoric in Civic life argument can also refer to something one makes or something one engages in. The Extra Credits video *Diversity* is the former in which the speaker makes an argument for diversity in games. From 5:00 to 6:33, Extra Credits' argument is that game designers are limiting themselves in the stories that they tell and diversity can open a bunch of new doors for them. Another argument made in the video is that stereotypes does not help the problem but instead are also part of the problem.

The video supports this argument by showing examples of games and characters who are examples of idea diversity creations and pandering stereotypes that are part of the problem. Ideology and Argument make up a big portion of a rhetor's rhetoric, but it doesn't give them a presence as a rhetor. Or rather, there's nothing that relates them to their audience other than the knowledge and possibly their limited view point under ideology. That's where ethos and social power come in.

Ethos

Anita Sarkeesian is a media critic, blogger, and feminist activist famous for her video blog "Feminist Frequency". Sarkeesian is also famous for starting a kickstarter to help fund her video blog "Feminist Frequency". The feminist activist also made her way to fame off the video "radical feminist" shaming the media for its portrayal of feminist as radical, man hating, belligerent women. She is an important rhetor because she is a rhetor who uses ethos as a way of gaining a presence with her audience.

Ethos is defined as "that which is 'in the character of the speaker'" also "the character of a rhetor performed in the rhetorical cat and known by the audience because of prior interactions." (152) Anita Sarkeesian fits this description because she is known for her discussions and talks on feminism and game design. Also she uses ethos as a way of convincing the audience that her arguments are sound because she is a credible source of information. Another example of her ethos can be found that she has won a few awards because of her topics about women in the media. In the book Rhetoric and Civic Life "ethos is

developed both prior to and within a rhetorical act." (152) Meaning that Sarkeesian's years of focusing on her topics and her works with media and social media before becoming famous for her videos also is a part of her ethos which contributes to her "Social Power" .

Social Power

Social Power "is the influence that people possess within a particular structure, and that enables them to induce others to act." (163) In Anita Sarkeesian's case, she was able to use her social power to help fund a Kickstarter to fund her blog "Feminist Frequency" and have a platform to talk about her harassment and the harassment of other women in video games

Anita Sarkeesian demonstrates two things that every rhetor needs to create change: social power and ethos. Without ethos, anyone arguing for a specific side or viewpoint wouldn't have a platform to stand on. As the common saying goes "a man is only as good as his word". In relation to rhetoric, it means that your word is a part of your reputation. And without that good reputation or social power it is easy to dismiss a rhetor's argument.   With rhetoric formed and social power backing the rhetor, the rhetor is now able to address an audience.

Audience

An **audience** is anyone who reads, listens, and sees a symbolic action. (179)They may be the targeted audience or someone who over hears an argument. An audience is important to rhetor, because they have the ability to enact change or engage in civic discourse about a particular subject. The relationship between the rhetor and the audience is called identification.

Identification is defined as "a communicative process through which people are unified on the basis of common interests or characteristics." (181) For example, Extra Credits identification would be in the multiple viewers that watch videos and subscribe to their channel on YouTube. Identification also the rhetor to connect to a broader range of people instead of those that look, sounds, and has some if not all

the same characteristics as themselves. Now that the rhetors have been able to make their voices known, the cyberpublics and hybrid publics have a chance to voice their own opinion. Tumblr is an example of how cyberpublics and hybrid publics work.

Cyberpublics

As simply described in the "What is Tumblr?" time magazine article, Tumblr is "part microblogging, part social networking." (Aamoth, N.P.) (Tumblers or bloggers are able create their own blogs, post pictures, writings, and other artifacts that either relates to themselves (the tumblers) or within a situation (example: The Ray Rice incident). A community is formed with multiple bloggers (or tumblers) follow each other and have a common interest in a subject (video games). This community is the first example of cyberpublics.

Cyberpublics, as described in the Rhetoric in Civic Life textbook, "are the publics formed or strengthened through the use of the Internet and social media." **(257)** Tumblr, is a prime example of cyberpublics because it has the ability to create different communities under one website. So on a basic level, one gamer can talk to another gamer about their favorite video game. On a more complex level a group of gamers can address what they do and don't like about a particular video game or subject surrounding that video game. Bloggers are now able to follow other bloggers, compare notes, and even form groups around different topics, and specifically for this essay video games, diversity, and geek culture. They also have the ability to send information at a faster speed to one another to generate a larger more knowledgeable audience. This also leads to the formation of hybrid publics.

Hybrid Publics

Hybrid publics are described as publics "that do not choose between civic identity and deliberative politics, but instead recognize that both can exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship." (242). Meaning that a community that focus on video games and diversity recognizes that they have to

address the problems with policies that work against diversity in video games, also act to improve policies in their favor, and also create an identity for themselves and the growing community around them.

A specific example of cyberpublics is the Tumblr blog "Gaming Feminism" as it both follows game development blogs, as well as follow and interacts with other feminist blogs. It is also an example of being part of hybrid publics because it addresses the need for societal intersection in games as well as addressing games as a past time. So what does this have to do with the rhetorical concepts?

The rhetorical concepts gives a full picture of what rhetors use to make their arguments stand out and strong without providing a right or wrong answer for it. Exploring the rhetorical concepts also helps in dissecting the different layers and artifacts used in rhetoric specifically in gamer subculture and diversity. They also create a concrete platform for rhetors to stand on when presenting their arguments to a community. Finally, it gives those without a background in rhetoric a clearer understanding of how rhetoric works.

Works Cited

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