



MATT ALBRECHT

@BOOKISHMATT

SUBVERTING TOXIC LET'S PLAY CULTURE

*Inclusivity, Safe Spaces, and
Fourplay Show*

SUPER HANDY INDEX SLIDE

1

Let's Play Culture's Inclusivity Problem & How it's Improving

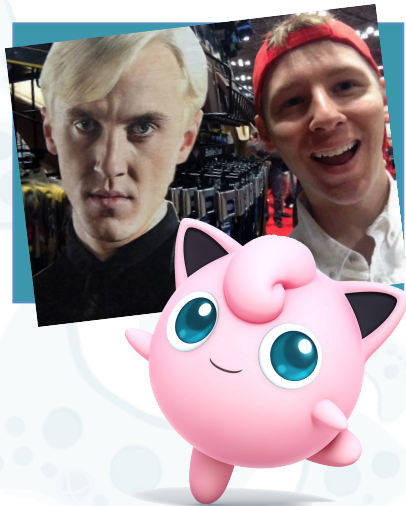
- Rooster Teeth, Pewdiepie, competitive fighting game channels on Twitch
- Who's paving the way for safer, more inclusive spaces

2

Inspiration for My Own Let's Play Channel, Fourplay, & Guiding Principles

- History of my involvement in games enthusiast writing
- My philosophy for inclusivity, accessibility, and camaraderie

MY GEEK CREDENTIALS



- I've played THOUSANDS of games
- My Xbox 360 Achievement score is embarrassingly high
- I broke a 10-year addiction to Diablo 2 only by getting EVERYTHING in the game
- My proudest Magic the Gathering deck has a Primer thread on MTG Salvation with 21 pages of discussion
- I mained Jigglypuff in Smash Brothers Melee long before it was cool and posted on SmashBoards for 8 years
- I've been a Rooster Teeth fanatic since the very beginning, 2003, passing around episodes at LAN parties



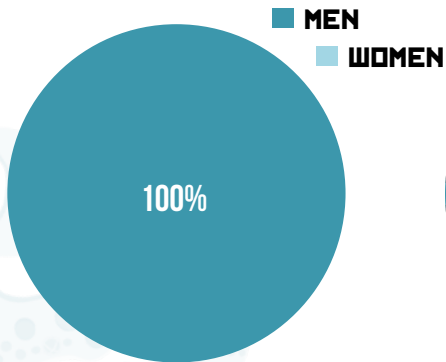
LET'S PLAY CULTURE'S INCLUSIVITY PROBLEM & HOW IT'S IMPROVING

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACHEIVEMENT HUNTER, ROOSTER TEETH'S LET'S PLAY EXPANSION



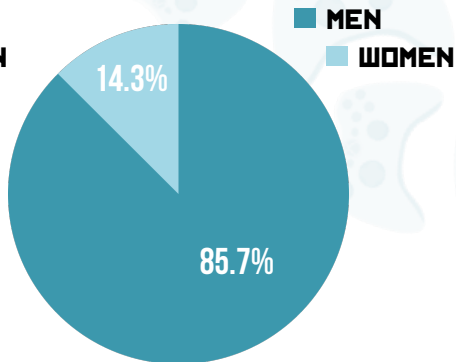
- **2008:** Achievement Hunter formed by Geoff Ramsey and new employee Jack Pattillo
- **2012:** AH began creating regular Let's Plays, particularly in Minecraft and Grand Theft Auto
- **March 2012:** Achievement Hunter's core team of visible members comprised 6 men
- **February 2014:** Lindsay Jones featured in her first Let's Play, Episode 49 of Vs.
- **Present Day:** Lindsay Jones is a regular cast member, featuring in Let's Plays episodes and Vs.

VISUALS ARE FUN



ACHIEVEMENT HUNTER

Pre Feb. 2014



ACHIEVEMENT HUNTER

Post Feb. 2014

STAY CLASSY, ACHEIVEMENT HUNTER

**Being inclusive means more than just adding women to the team,
and Achievement Hunter hardly operates under inclusive principles**

Why I'm often embarrassed to share AH with others:

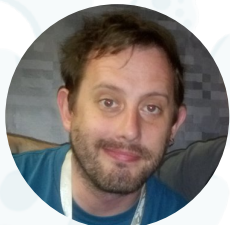
- The punchline of many lazy homophobic goofs boils down to “don’t we all agree that male-on-male sex is absurdly funny?”
- Ray, as a Puerto Rican, is routinely “othered” and participates in the self-deprecating humor about his race as if to constantly apologize for not being white
- Gavin, as their British resident, is routinely bashed for his pronunciations and merely being non-American
- Geoff’s fondness for the word “cunt” is rivaled only by the rest of the team’s fondness for “bitch” and “pussy”
- All of the male members routinely have objectifying conversations about women’s bodies
- Rape jokes are almost an integral part of Achievement Hunter culture
- The cast members are openly derisive about the concept of “triggering” language, particularly about frequent suicide goofs

Ultimately: Many goofs are targeted at an assumed Straight White American Male audience who thinks Social Equality is a joke

**These traits are treated as “the norm” or “default” while everyone outside of
“the norm” is openly derided, a common cultural trope.**

“CONNECT THE HOTS” CONTROVERSY

Note: The Let's Build video in which this “game” is explained was removed amid massive fan outrage (but it's been re-uploaded by other fans)



Geoff Ramsey

“Do you know what Connect the Hots is, Ryan? Alright, Gavin and I have a rule [...] where, if we’re driving to work, and when we see a hot chick, we have to follow her at a very slow and deliberate and creepy pace until we see another hot girl, and when we see that girl we have to switch and follow that hot girl. And we keep this going until we run out of hot girls. And since we live pretty close to the college, we can get distracted for—how long would you say, Gavin, like, 20 minutes? [...] It’s probably the best game we’ve ever made.”

LADIES OF ROOSTER TEETH

Community Manager Barbara Dunkelman asked this in the “Ladies of Rooster Teeth” group on January 5th, 2015:

“I'm working on brainstorming for something, and wanted to reach out to the ladies of our community (and what a perfect place to do so!) Rooster Teeth makes a lot of different content now and I wanted to get your opinions- what do you like about our content? What do you think we're missing in our lineup? What type of shows would you want to see us make that we don't already?”

(Talking more about this at the Rooster Teeth PAX South panel, Barbara clarified that she'll be the first female director at Rooster Teeth)

According to Quantcast, only **12%** of Rooster Teeth's audience is female...a huge missed opportunity for more fans

She also expressed awareness of the outcry from many women of the community who are overwhelmingly asking for:

- Much more female representation in live productions
- An end to general misogynistic conversations and goofs
- An end to rape jokes

THE SLIDE ABOUT PEWDIEPIE



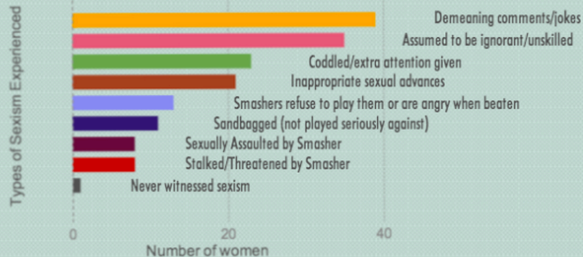
Regarding criticism of making rape jokes, PewDiePie apologized and committed to no more rape jokes as of October 2012 (emphasis mine):

“This has been my take on jokes so far as well, they aren’t directed towards anyone and aren’t meant to hurt anyone either. That’s just something I’m not interested in.
I listen to my viewers and if people think I say something bad, I actually take it in and change.
I never seen anyone complain about making rape jokes before so it’s never been an issue until lately it’s been blowing up like its a “huge deal”.
Either way I just wanted to make clear that I’m no longer making rape jokes, as I mentioned before I’m not looking to hurt anyone and I apologize if it ever did.”

According to Quantcast, **37%** of PewDiePie’s audience is female, nearly 3X the amount of Rooster Teeth’s female audience, though Maker studio estimates put PewDiePie’s female audience closer to **50%**

PROGRESS IN THE FIGHTING GAME COMMUNITY ON TWITCH

What kinds of sexism have women experienced in the community?



Casual misogyny and cavalier attitudes about rape were a dominant part of both the online and offline competitive Smash Brothers Melee scene for many years. But vocal critics in the community began speaking out about their treatment and, increasingly, more allies are **not tolerating** misogyny and calling it out

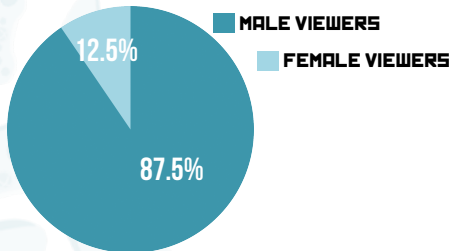
- Twitch's Rules of Conduct take a firm stance against "**Racism, sexism, homophobia, or other hate speech**"
- Prominent Smash tournament channel **VGBootCamp** now regularly disables non-subscribers from being able to use the chat, where racism, sexism, homophobia, and all kinds of malicious trolling abound from non-paying members

GEEK REMIX ON INCLUSIVITY

Geek Remix, a Let's Play channel comprised of two women, is doing great work, including surveying Let's Players about their male/female audience breakdowns with very thoughtful conclusions

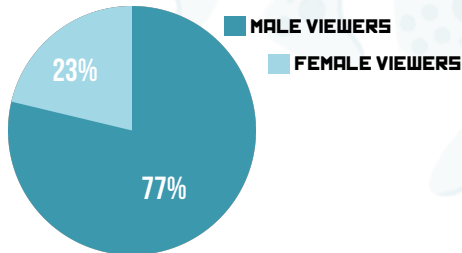
They found that female Let's Players have twice the female viewers on average

**MALE LET'S PLAYERS
ON YOUTUBE**



Lowest = 3% / Highest = 43.5%

**FEMALE LET'S PLAYERS
ON YOUTUBE**



Lowest = 7% / Highest = 69%

THE 5TH EDITION OF THE DUNGEONS & DRAGONS PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

On Sex:

*"You can play a male or female character without gaining any special benefits or hindrances. **Think about how your character does or does not conform to the broader culture's expectations of sex, gender, and sexual behavior.** For example, a male drow cleric defies the traditional gender divisions of drow society, which could be a reason for your character to leave that society and come to the surface.*

***You don't need to be confined to binary notions of sex and gender.** The elf god Corellon Larethian is often seen as androgynous or hermaphroditic, for example, and some elves in the multiverse are made in Corellon's image. You could also play a female character who presents herself as a man, a man who feels trapped in a female body, or a bearded female dwarf who hates being mistaken for a male. Likewise, your character's sexual orientation is for you to decide."*

This was written by James Wyatt, who also wrote the backstory for Magic the Gathering's first ever trans character, debuting in January 2015

TWENTY-SIDED STORE HARASSMENT POLICY

From Vice, reporting on D&D adopting more inclusive principles and how communities are keeping up:

"The Twenty-Sided Store, a gaming spot located in Brooklyn that hosts Dungeons & Dragons sessions, has a strict code of conduct forbidding 'slights against intelligence, gender, sexual orientation, race, etc.' You will actually get kicked out if you're a douchebag."

"Lauren Bilanko, a co-owner of the store, says that the gender makeup of people who come in to play D&D is about 60 percent male and 40 percent female."



twenty sided
store



THE MARY SUE'S HARASSMENT POLICY WORK

The Mary Sue has played a huge part in encouraging geek conventions to create and adopt harassment policies

They crafted the official New York Comic Con 2014 harassment policy:

New York Comic Con has a ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY for harassment of any kind, including but not limited to: stalking, intimidation, offensive verbal comments, physical assault and/or battery, harassing or non-consensual photography or recording, sustained disruption of Panels, signings, and other events, bathroom policing, inappropriate physical contact, unwelcome physical attention in relation to, but not limited to: race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, gender presentation, sexual orientation, age, body size, disability, appearance, religion, citizenship, pregnancy

(To encourage those who are more likely to be harassed on my show, I made YouTube comments approval only. Comments on YouTube and the blog are moderated based on The Mary Sue's policy.)

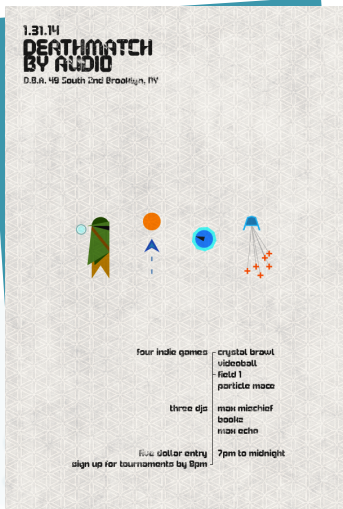




2

**INSPIRATION FOR MY
OWN LET'S PLAY
CHANNEL, FOURPLAY,
& GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

SPRING 2013 - INDIE STATIK



I found a fun opportunity to distract myself from my corporate cubicle'd day job existence via contributions to **Indie Statik**

In finding my writing niche, I quickly decided to leverage my unique location of NYC to **explore the local indie game scene**

I discovered everyone and every games-related gathering via Twitter, searching **"NYC" + "games"** and variants

My niche quickly solidified: ***NYC game dev scene coverage with an emphasis on local multiplayer***

Local multiplayer event coverage: **Deathmatch by Audio, Playcrafting (formerly Games Forum), Come Out and Play**

DECEMBER 2013

- Jared Rosen of Indie Statik **broke the story** of Zoe Quinn's harassment for Depression Quest
- Chris Priestman and Chloi Rad were also **carrying the feminist banner** into battle on a regular basis
- By this point, Feminist Frequency had already released **4 videos** in the Tropes vs. Women series
- A lot of the Twitter conversation from respected games people revolved around **underrepresentation** of women and **harassment** of all marginalized people



Luke Crane
@Burning_Luke



Follow

Why are there so few lady game creators?



Reply



Retweet



Favorite

OKAY, BUT WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT WOMEN IN GAMES?



- I discovered **Code Liberation Foundation** via Twitter, an all-women group of coding teachers trying to encourage more women to make games
- I decided to cover their Second Game Jam, just a week after the Quinn story was published
- I saw an opportunity to spotlight a positive story and a great organization that was empowering women
- I was profoundly moved by what I saw:
 - Attendees were first timers mostly, but the sense of belonging was palpable
 - There were no winners or criticisms, just a structure around celebrating collective creativity and camaraderie
 - Phoenix Perry, Nina Freeman, and Catt Small were very happy to have me there, and I was surprised by their lack of press in general



THE IRONIC COLLAPSE OF INDIE STATIK

- I wanted to enjoy games again rather than focus on the negative aspects of the culture
- So: Fourplay was originally conceived as “Indie Statik Staff Versus” for Indie Statik in January 2013
- But later that month: a very un-feminist scandal with the site founder, which resulted in the editor-in-chief Chris Priestman immediately leaving, and me making the tough choice to do the same
- Started to lose hope in the great escape of games with the mounting harassment against Anita Sarkeesian and many others, resulting in my pieces becoming angrier, more critical, joyless
- No longer playing games, just obsessing about the toxic parts of the culture
- **Games lost the fun**

**Video games
ruined my life.
Good thing I have
two extra lives.**



WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

CONTINUE?
YES/NO

- **Two choices:**
 - Withdraw from games culture
 - Resurrect my Let's Play idea in a new form
- Feminist critique was being tackled in abundance by far more qualified enthusiasts than me
- But I wanted to help in my own way
- I had no home, no base of operations, no banner to carry... so I decided to create my own

**“If they want
‘more inclusive’
LP shows, they
should make
their own.”**

**Often repeated criticism from
many who heard about this talk**

THE NOT-SO-HUMBLE BEGINNINGS OF FOURPLAY



- I decided to reach out to a few dozen of my developer friends (the only gamers I had rapport with anymore) to gauge interest
- After enthusiastic buy-in from nearly 100% of them, I emailed 90 game devs from all around the world who I had a ton of respect for
- I booked up the first 12 episodes in the span of two weeks due to a flurry of eager sign-ups
- The show has hosted 40 unique guests in 6 months at the time of this presentation

SO, JUST WHAT THE HECK IS FOURPLAY?

FOURPLAY

My snazzy one-liner:

"Fourplay is a show hosted by Matt Albrecht spotlighting 4-player local multiplayer gameplay while featuring game creators and game lovers alike."

We play games like TowerFall, Samurai Gunn, Particle Mace, and Worms
The show is filmed in my Brooklyn apartment on a Nickelodeon-style orange futon
Fourplay is the show everyone wants to be on and no one wants to watch

**But more than anything, Fourplay is a pledge and a template for building
better Let's Plays for everyone to enjoy**

INSPIRATIONS FOR FOURPLAY AND FOUNDING PRINCIPLES



Inclusivity



Accessibility



Camaraderie



Secret (Sexy?) Bonus Goals

INCLUSIVITY



I wanted to build an inclusive show from the ground up

- Keeping in mind all that I'd learned from a year+ of listening to others discuss the problems with the culture, I wanted to address the issues with the foundation of a new games space rather than try to retrofit
- Adopt policies that could make everyone participate without fear or discomfort, whether from fellow guests or viewers, a safe space
- I wanted to feature everyone I'd ever known who had been harassed or "othered" and have them on but without tokenizing

ACCESSIBILITY



I wanted to build a show that anyone could be a winner on

- Accessibility became a way of life, featuring games that my non-gamer wife could enjoy seemed like a must
- I wanted to reject any notion of “core games” being the only ones worthwhile of spectatorship
- Show that casual play “esports”, similar to intramurals, can appeal to anyone regardless of skill level

CAMARADERIE



I wanted to build a show to make games fun for everyone again and encourage good sportsmanship

- There are no stakes or prizes, just a moment to hold the Golden Snitch
- Everyone who drinks is encouraged to drink to promote that feeling of playing darts among friends at the bar
- Many guests become friends and/or grow their professional network and I see them supporting one another on Twitter and Facebook

SECRET BONUS GOAL 1



I wanted to build a show that celebrated creators

- Primarily featuring people who work in games and letting them tell their own stories
- Shift away from the selfish persona-driven let's play culture that very rarely credits or mentions the creators
- Give full credits and buy links and emphasize the guest's accomplishments, critique-free

SECRET BONUS GOAL 2



I wanted to make a Let's Play show aimed at busy adults

- Like me, game developer friends didn't have time to play anymore, very eager to schedule in game nights
- Yes, it's a clever excuse to get people over to play with me under the guise of publicity, after years of "I'm too busy" from other friends
- Designed for an audience that misses having a playgroup and wants to relive that by watching a show, the main appeal to me of Achievement Hunter

OTHER INSPIRATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

*Inspired by my wife who works at a non-profit art gallery whose mission is to **elevate under-recognized emerging artists***

***Enthusiastic consent and sex-positivity** a big part of the show*

Cultural Critics

- Leigh Alexander
- Anita Sarkeesian
- Mattie Brice
- Victoria McNally
- Lilian Chen
- Elizabeth Simins

Community Organizers

- Toni Pizza
- Sarah Schoemann
- Phoenix Perry
- Catt Small
- Nina Freeman
- Jane Friedhoff

CARDS AGAINST HUMANITY INCLUSIVITY TEST



Removed “othering” cards to see if the game could still be fun without the more outrageous and uncomfortable moments

If the punchline of a joke assumes inherent humor in born characteristics, the cards were removed, which included the following:

- Cards with a punchline about gender, race, sexuality, and disabilities
- Rape-related cards and cards making light of mass killings were also removed for common trigger reasons

Only 6% of cards were removed from the core deck

To mock Gavin Free a little bit: “What if...”

What if only 6% or fewer of jokes made on Let’s Play channels were “othering” and non-inclusive?

What if the absence of those jokes wouldn’t even be noticed by current fans?

What if a concentrated effort to discourage hateful language from yourself and from your viewers encouraged others to be better and resulted in safer, more inclusive spaces for everyone in games?

CLOSING THOUGHTS



Nobody's Perfect:

Certainly no such thing as a “perfect feminist”

*What matters is that we're listening to others,
trying to do better, and admitting our mistakes*

Toxicity is only an inevitable part of the culture if we're
complicit or apologists

Let's Play channels who consider inclusive practices:

Geek Remix • Backwards Compatible • TheRPGMinx • StreamFriends

SOURCES

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achievement_Hunter

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MenAreGenericWomenAreSpecial>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zxbzx2Ki84>

<https://roosterteeth.com/groups/news/entry.php?id=84135>

<https://www.quantcast.com/roosterteeth.com>

<https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/2580383?hl=en>

<http://pewdie.tumblr.com/post/34309686617/no-more-rape-jokes>

<https://www.quantcast.com/wp/ath%3Ap-74vRiZ03u2gFw-slash-PewDjePie#!demo>

<http://www.twitch.tv/p/rules-of-conduct>

<http://www.twitch.tv/vgbootcamp>

<https://meleeitonme.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/women-in-smash-71.png?w=640>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OlfDKxB-IQ>

<http://www.vice.com/read/dungeons-and-dragons-has-caught-up-with-third-wave-feminism-827>

<http://www.themarvsue.com/comic-con-harassment-policy/>

<http://www.themarvsue.com/nvcc-2014-anti-harassment-policy/>

<http://www.themarvsue.com/comment-policy/>

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/cc?keV=0Ag7hPoV7IT4DdFFfdFIgRkhhmczdoMVbLSIFLVHc4YUE&usp=sharing>

<http://letsplaysocialjustice.tumblr.com/>