



# MICROSOFT AS A MICROCOSM

## Intersections of Controller Design and Gamer Identity

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# "GOLDEN HANDS"

Microsoft designed the Xbox One controller (later called the Wireless) for those with "golden hands."

or those "hardcore enough" to be "intimately familiar" with the controller and be competitive.

... It ranks in the least subtle callouts to Gamer.



# GAMING PERIPHERAL SCHOLARSHIP

## Blomberg (2018)

“Despite claims to the importance of the controller for the video game experience, the nature of its contribution still remains to be detailed.”

## Bagnall (2017)

Representation and critical critique within games was “undermined by the contradictory logics of controllers” that had been designed for a very specific body.

## Parisi (2015)

“Through [the design process], controller designers express preferences for a particular demographic, body types, gender, and even genre.”



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is gamer identity reified through hardware design and depiction?
2. In what ways have depictions of controller use and mastery supported understandings of gamer identity and in-/out-groups within gaming culture?
3. How do experiences with controllers differ amongst groups?
4. What recommendations can be generated for a more inclusive controller design process, based on the data available?



# DATA COLLECTION

1. industry documents and narratives
2. interviews with marginalized players
3. 142 issues of *Game Informer*
4. survey with 300 participants



# WOW THAT'S A LOT OF DATA

Don't I know it.

This presentation is focused on:

- RQ3: How do experiences with controllers differ amongst groups?
- Survey data (well, some of it)



# SURVEY DISTRIBUTION & DESIGN

## Twitter (pre-X)

October 2022, I distributed the survey on Twitter.

Received 300 responses in 72 hours and closed the survey.

## Quantitative ?s

Quantitative questions asked participants to rate controllers on a sliding scale of 1 to 100, with 1 being extremely negative and 100 being extremely positive.

## Microsoft Portion

Though participants rated every controller for Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony, not all data is used here.

Focusing on the 255 Microsoft responses.



# INITIAL POPULATION SPLITS

## Gamer Identity

meets every demographic marker: white, cishet, able-bodied, young

## Cismale (non-gamer)

cismale responses that did not meet every demographic marker for Gamer Identity

## Women & Marginalized

non-Cismale responses





# FINAL DATA SPLITS

Women & Marginalized

non-cismale responses

Cismale

cismale responses

\* binary groupings often erase nuance.  
future plans are to incorporate more splits  
and collaborate with those outside my  
expertise.

# SURVEY DATA: COMFORT

Controller	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	87	42.14	28	37.75	-4.39
Controller S	73	64.85	17	60.94	-3.91
Xbox 360	158	79.27	74	66.77	-12.50
Wireless	137	85.00	57	76.82	-8.18

# SURVEY DATA: FRUSTRATION

Controller	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	87	53.54	27	51.67	-1.87
Controller S	72	56.96	17	60.88	3.92
Xbox 360	149	65.07	74	54.59	-10.48
Wireless	131	64.71	57	58.60	-6.11



# SURVEY DATA: EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Controller	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	85	57.13	26	52.38	-4.74
Controller S	74	67.64	16	67.06	-0.57
Xbox 360	155	76.13	74	67.77	-8.36
Wireless	134	77.59	57	72.86	-4.73



# SURVEY DATA: USABILITY

Controller	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	85	51.65	28	45.75	-5.90
Controller S	74	72.24	17	68.76	-3.48
Xbox 360	159	84.64	75	74.20	-10.44
Wireless	136	87.06	58	82.09	-4.97

# WOMEN & MARGINALIZED PARTICIPANTS LAG BEHIND

Comfort	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	87	42.14	28	37.75	-4.39
Controller S	73	64.85	17	60.94	-3.91
Xbox 360	158	79.27	74	66.77	-12.50
Wireless	137	85.00	57	76.82	-8.18

Frustration	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
The Duke	87	53.54	27	51.67	-1.87
Controller S	72	56.96	17	60.88	3.92
Xbox 360	149	65.07	74	54.59	-10.48
Wireless	131	64.71	57	58.60	-6.11

E.R.	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
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Usability	Cismale		W&M		Gap
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
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# TOTAL IMPROVEMENT SCORE (TIS) DUKE > WIRELESS

Controller	Cismale	W&M	
	Total	Total	Difference
Comfort	42.86	39.07	-3.79
Frustration	11.17	6.93	-4.24
Emotional Response	20.46	20.48	0.01
Usability	35.41	36.34	0.92



# GOLDEN HANDS ARE PERSISTENT

“We were told, ‘Fine, go ahead and invest in this space, but make sure you review and counter-review everything. Make sure you build prototypes up front. **Make sure you get them tested with golden hands.**”

- Zulfi Alam

Xbox General Manager for Accessories



# SEBILE – THE NEW XBOX CONTROLLER

The world's best controller, now playing on a screen near you

## Ubiquity

### Play Anywhere

- Xbox Wireless 2
- Direct-to-Cloud
- Bluetooth 5.2

### Seamless Pair & Switch

- New mobile app features:
  - See paired devices & cloud
  - Manage devices & accessories

## Immersion

### Feel the Game

- Precision haptic feedback
- VCA haptics double as speakers
- Accelerometer
- Quieter buttons & thumbsticks



## Sustainability

### Do Good, Feel Good

- Rechargeable & swappable battery
- Recycled materials and less resin
- Repair and disassembly

### Durable & Reliable

- New modular thumbsticks
- Improved longevity
- Continued build improvements

## Approachability

### Engage & Delight

- Lift to wake

### Familiar Xbox Feel

- Same ergonomics as Merlin
- Same layout & activation forces
- SE/LE/XDL options as expected

# NEW CONTROLLER?



# SURVEY FINDINGS

Controllers are the invisible gatekeepers that subvert increased representation within games because they determine not only who is allowed within the space, **but who is allowed to thrive within the space.**

They place a barrier on entrance into the community, defining in-groups and out-groups through their design. Gamer identity persists—at the most integral part of console play.



**THANK  
YOU**