

Part of the Game: Hate Speech in Online Gaming

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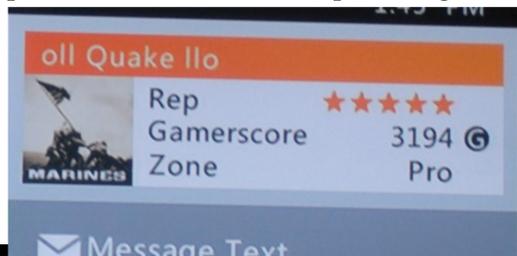
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Abstract

Online gaming communities offer socialization as a form of a new digital third-place. As technology and gaming expands into our modern market even more, how these third-places are regulated and monitored is becoming a new concern. Due to anonymity of the players, usage of hate-speech language is often seen as an accepted norm. Through interviewing players of different demographics and participant observation the frequency of hate-speech is estimated. Focus is placed on how players report how different demographics are accepted, treated, and engaged with along with a focus on game genre and platform. The assumption is that non-white, non-male, and non-heterosexual will report higher amounts of experiencing hate-speech in online game settings, and that game genre also a component of what triggers the use of hate-speech. The preliminary results shows that either genre or race plays a role in how often players report the use of hostile speech.

Introduction

The video game industry has long since had a market focus to a male audience. This has created a subculture in the video games that caters to the white-male experience. An unintended consequence has been creation of a hostile game culture that fosters the use of discriminatory behavior. This research aims to gather information through interviews and observation of players on their opinions and experiences with online hate-speech in game settings.



GAME MANAGER

Game disconnected: you have been banned from this server. Stated reason: no girls allowed

Reconnect

Close

GAME MANAGER
Error

Research Question

Research Question

What kind of experience do people in historically marginalized groups experience in online game settings?

Literature Review

- The Online Disinhibition Effect outlines six factors that contribute to toxic behavior online. (Suller, 2004).
- Online games meet Oldenburg (1999) criteria for defining a new “third place” of sociability. (Steinkuehler, 2005).
- Game genre contributes to gender assumptions and perceptions of players in games. (Eden et al., 2010).

Methodology and Limitations

Methods

- Mix Methods
- Participant Observation
 - Monitoring Gameplay in public servers with focus on frequency of hate-speech usage.
- Semi-Structured Interview
 - 10 ~ 20 Minutes
- Recruited through snow balling methods and personal social networks
- 10 Undergraduate Students
 - 19-23 age
 - 6 Females
 - 4 Males

Limitations

- Findings cannot be generalized
- Is not statistically verifiable.
- Due to technical difficulties, half of the interview recordings were lost*.
- Too many possible variables to analyze at this time.

Results*

Q: How Often Do you Witness Hate-Speech when you play online?

- African American Woman Console (First-Person-Shooter) Player (Miranda): *“I would say...more than 20...more than like 50 times in a party depending on how long I’m playing. Like, it’s a lot, especially if like it’s a certain time in the day and a lot of people are playing, then it’s more frequently, cause whether they’re just talking to each other they’re talking to people they don’t even know, it’s just kind of random. Just, I’d say about 20 to 50 times a day in online gaming.”*
- White Woman Computer (Role-Playing-Game) Player (Natalia): *“I maybe only play once or twice a week and I only hear that kind of language maybe 40 times a year really.”*
- White Male Computer Player (Shawn): *“Depending on the game I would say it’s not very often, I mean if you pick the right game. 25% of the time?”*

Q: Do you feel like members of discriminated groups (women, PoC, and sexual minorities) are accepted in Online Game Settings?

- African American Woman Console Player (First-Person-Shooter)** (Sarah): *“I don’t feel welcome as a person and a player in online games due to me being a woman.”*
- White Male Computer (Role-Playing Game) Player** (Nathan): *“Games like WoW (World of Warcraft) make me feel welcomed as both a person and a player because the game tends to lend itself to respecting people that way through the guilds and clans.”*

Q: Does the use of hate-speech in online games affect your experience while playing?

- White Woman Computer (Role-Playing-Game) Player (Britney)***: *“It did... especially the word ‘retard’ bothers me (...). I essentially rage quit the raid at that point because I’m not willing to play with people who use those words. Log off.”*
- White Woman Computer (Role-Playing Game) Player (Courtney)**: *“That kind of language does not affect me, I just tone it out or ignore them. Either that or call them out on it.”*

Discussion

Based on the coded results of the interviews, and partially of the game servers that I have participated in, the amount of hate-speech a player may experience can be related to what console or what genre that players uses. Computer players report minimal amounts of viewing hate-speech as well as a minimal impact when it is used. Console players report commonly viewing hate-speech usage but a minimal impact on their experience playing. These players also reported that they had developed ways to cope and ignore other players that use hate-speech language. A racial and gender bias may also be in affect, as white-male players report the usage of hate-speech in online games to be “not serious”, yet an African-American woman player reported it to be very serious racism and sexism towards non-white, male players. In conclusion, genre and console seems to factor more into what fosters hate-speech in online game rather than individual player demographics. Further research is required however.

Areas for Further Research

Further research requires controlling for the various variables of online gaming. This would require measuring responses based on separate genres, measuring based on how users play the game (console or computer), and measuring even demographic representation. This data will need to be gathered through quantitative methods in order to generate a statistically verifiable conclusion. Participant observation methodology may continue to be a primary method of data collection but a data pool that covers a wider range of online game genres, along with separate observations for console online gaming and computer online gaming.

Citations

Cite your sources

*: All responses given are listed under pseudonyms

** : Interview recordings were corrupted, paraphrasing based on memory notes.

***: Participant had emotional context for response based on family history.