

Dakota Bridges

Bowling

Comp 2

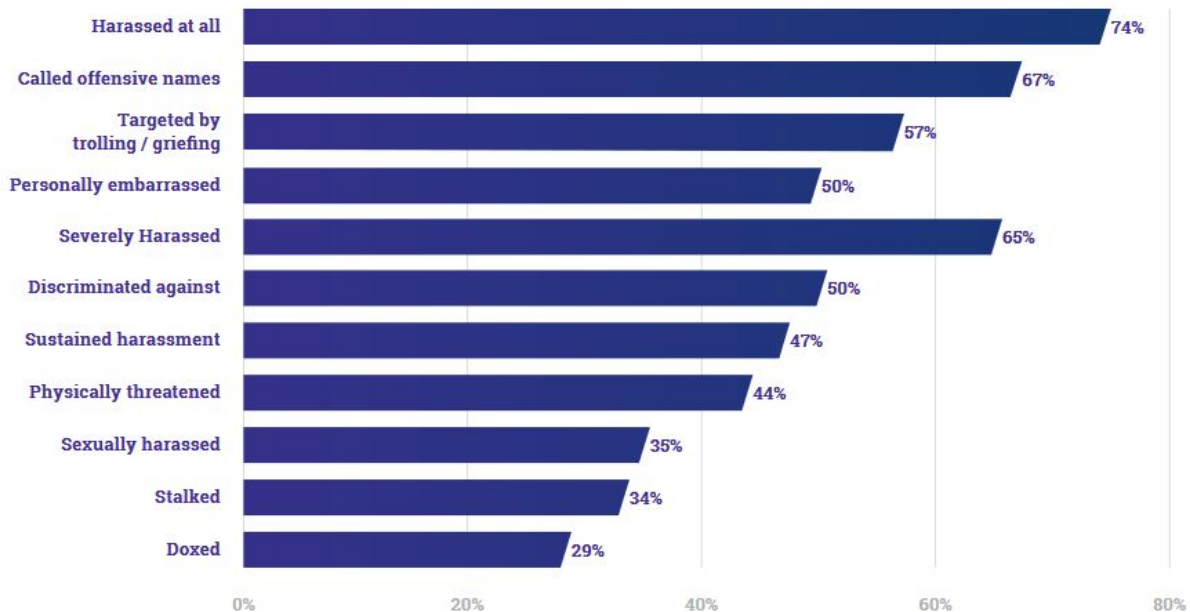
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Proposal Argument: Online Gaming Toxicity

With nearly 70 percent of Americans playing online video games, what originally started out as a casual hobby is now engaged in by a majority of the population. Especially in the current state with the global pandemic, it would be safe to assume that these numbers are even higher currently than before. While online video games are a great way to interact with people and fulfill a sense of belonging for many people, problems arrive stemming from the anonymity of interacting online. Any behavior such as cyberbullying, cheating, harassment, and griefing fall under a blanket term called toxicity.

A surprising number of people who play online games say they have encountered some forms of toxicity. From TechTimes.com who did an online survey “The results show that 74 percent of the respondents say they've experienced some form of harassment while playing online games, and 65 percent reported experiencing "severe harassment," such as physical threats, sustained harassment, and stalking.” (Balana). A lot of this stems from the idea that everyone is anonymous and there are virtually no repercussions from acting in certain ways. Through online toxicity it could damage the psychological wellbeing of not only the people being harassed but also the person engaging in the harassing as well. During a study conducted on the effects of social exclusion during online gaming, they concluded that a decrease in feeling of belonging increases hostile cognitions which translates into aggressive behavior. (Birk).

These feelings then translate over into out of game actions, such as becoming more hostile with those around them.



The graph above shows the percentage of players that reported toxicity in their online games.

Game developers, publishers, and distributors alike have actively engaged in attempting to curb toxicity in online gaming. Peer reviewing and reporting systems have shown favorable results in the past. But the problem still remains of how to lower the amount of players exhibiting toxic behavior online. While most online games offer reporting systems that give a user the ability to report their teammates, one such solution that hasn't been explored thoroughly is rewarding players for reporting toxicity. The reason why this solution could work is because it incentivizes players to report unsportsmanlike or inappropriate behavior they observe even if it isn't directed personally towards them; otherwise it is found that most players will just avoid it.

These rewards could be in the form of unique in game cosmetics and other bonuses. In Hao Wang and Chuen-Tsai Sun's paper on Game Reward Systems it is shown that rewarding players for completing goals in the game provides a positive player experience. This philosophy could be the model for trying to combat online toxicity. For example if you have reported a player for toxicity and a few weeks later they end up getting banned from the game for it the player then would receive a reward.

A possible refutation for this argument is that players could just report everyone in their games or the possibility of making dummy accounts. As for the latter option no system is perfect and that is a valid concern. But in the case of the former as long as there is a team of people that are moderating over reports that come in (which is standard in most games) the margin of error could be significantly low. There is no way to completely erase negative behavior in online gaming as is with the real world. But the suggested solution could be a step into lowering the amount of negative experience players have when they play games.

In conclusion, the amount of toxicity and negative behavior that people experience in online games is a staggeringly large amount. Most of the reported behaviors would be considered reprehensible in real world scenarios and as such should not be normalized in any setting. While some games promote and reward the spread of positive engagement, none actively reward the reporting of the negative players. This would allow players to still experience a positive reward system and create a sense of fulfillment in games. The proposed solution would incentivize reporting instead of causing the bystanders effect that happens normally.

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