The Presentation of Sexist Toxicity in Multiplayer Video Games

Women have been the target of toxicity and harassment throughout history. However, within the video game community, it has become such a normalized experience, it was curious as to how sexist toxicity is presented in multiplayer video games. This research will explore the presentation of sexist toxicity and how it develops and has become integrated into the gaming experience in video games, especially multiplayer video games where gamers must interact with each other for better game performance.

Toxic behavior is defined as "when players break co-existence rules, acting in antisocial ways […] brings forth anger or frustration on other players, leading to a bad game experience" (Neto, Yokoyama, & Becker, 2017, p. 26). Sexist toxicity in video games is more specifically defined as "sexist jokes, sexist insults, unwanted sexual advances, rape jokes, and comments about female players' appearances" (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 128).

Based off of these two definitions, two types of sexist are predominantly present in multiplayer video games: benevolent sexism and hostile sexism (Kordyaka, et al., 2022, p. 2). Benevolent sexism is a form of patronizing toxicity where female gamers are harassed solely based off of the fact they are female. This is the most common form of sexism in multiplayer video games and happens due to the stereotype that women have lower game-related knowledge and skills. Within multiplayer video games, male gamers see female gamers as an opportunity to "help out" as well as show off their game skills and knowledge (Kordyaka, et al., 2022, p. 6). On the other hand, hostile sexism is a more aggressive form of toxicity and is a predictor of sexual harassment and dark personalities such as machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 130). These two forms of sexism are a way to categorize the presentation of toxicity in video games. The most common way sexist toxicity is heard is through multiplayer video game voice chats. Despite females making up 41% of all multiplayer video game gamers, they receive three times more toxic comments in voice chats than male players do (Easpaig, 2018, pp. 121-122). In order to avoid toxicity delivered through voice chats, it's reported that female gamers either hide their gender, pretend to be male, or claim to be using a bad or broken microphone to avoid speaking at all (Easpaig, 2018, p. 123). However, communications are an important aspect of multiplayer video games, and both toxic communications and avoiding giving communications hinder the gaming experience and make competitive multiplayer video games more difficult to win which can lead to bad game experiences for everyone.

Now that the types of presentation of sexist toxicity have been defined, it can be explored as to why the toxicity happens in the first place and why it has become so normalized. One of the reasons toxicity towards women is present within video games is the common stereotype of a gamer being white, heterosexual and male (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 129). Another is the male's low expectation of female game performance solely based off of gender (Kordyaka, et al., 2022, p. 3). With both of these factors combined, male hostility towards female games has become normalized to the point where it is seen as part of the video gaming homosocial experience (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 128). This normalization of sexist toxicity being a casual experience hence encourages new male gamers to follow the normality of harassment towards those who do not fall under the stereotypical gamer. Another major reason why sexist toxicity takes place within multiplayer video games is due to female representation in the video game, which can be split into two factors: the sexualization of female characters and the significance and placement of female characters in the game storylines. Both of these factors contribute to the "sexist gender politics of

the games" and expresses how game content and design plays is an important role for the representation of women in society (Easpaig, 2018, p. 121). Hence, female misrepresentation in video games reflects onto societal reality, and hence the normalization of sexualizing females in video games is seen as acceptable by male gamers both online and offline. Lastly, sexist toxicity is normalized due to the endorsement by certain women. An opposing view of sexist toxicity is that it is not a gendered phenomenon due to the "Queen Bee phenomenon" where female gamers are "motivated to harass other gamers to defend their social status among fellow male gamers" (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 132). Male gamers can be encouraged to harass and deliver sexist comments towards women when they see a woman do it herself. This contradicts the idea that only men present toxicity towards women. Therefore, all of these factors combined have lead to the development and normalization of the presentation of sexist toxicity in multiplayer video games. Lastly, a contributor to sexist toxicity is the gamer identity label. The gamer identity label states that only playing certain games and conforming to a certain type of behavior, mostly commonly heterosexual masculinity, is what defines a gamer (Tang, Reer, & Quandt, 2019, p. 133). Not conforming to this specific identity, or playing "more feminized" games such as casual games, excludes a person from being called a 'gamer' by the gaming community. This leads to the general harassment of people who don't fall under this specific stereotypical identity.

In conclusion, the three pieces of literature support the argument of the normalization of the development of sexist toxicity in multiplayer video games and how it is presented. Two forms of sexism in video games were identified to explore the ways they are presented. The pieces of literature helped identify the causes of sexist toxicity development and the multiple factors that contribute to its development. Finally, the integration of sexist toxicity in both multiplayer video games and the gaming community affect all sorts of players, leading to a bad game experience for everyone, as well as the normalization of sexism both online and offline.

References

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