

# Hate in Social VR

*New Challenges Ahead for the Next Generation of Social Media*

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## **INTRODUCTION: ADL AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

The timeless mission of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment to all. The mission of ADL's Center for Technology and Society is to ask the question "How do we secure justice and fair treatment for all in a digital environment?"

Since 1985, when it published its report on "Electronic Bulletin Boards of Hate," ADL has been at the forefront of evaluating how new technologies can be used for good and misused to promote hate and harassment in society. At the same time, ADL has worked with technology companies to show them how they can address these issues and work to make the communities their products foster more respectful and inclusive.

We continue this work today alongside Silicon Valley giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, Microsoft, Reddit, and others.

This report represents a forward-looking review of the hopes and issues raised by the newest ecosystem of community fostering technology products: social virtual reality, or social VR.

## **HOPES AND FEARS FOR THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL VIRTUAL REALITY**

Social VR is an emerging application of virtual reality technology that brings human users together in virtual spaces with other human users for the primary purpose of engaging in social interaction. Users interact in virtual spaces using "avatars", or forms (often, but not necessarily, human-like forms) that users can control to move around in space and interact with environments and other users. While virtual worlds are by no means new, the unique affordances of virtual reality (VR) create a feeling of "really being there" for many users. This sense of reality can make interactions more impactful – in both positive and negative ways.

As in the early days of social media platforms, there is enthusiasm around the idea that Social VR will foster cross-cultural understanding and motivate positive social change. However, there is research and real-world examples of hate, bias, and harassment in Social VR. This report identifies key examples of hate reported in Social VR to date and points out opportunities and cautionary tales for the Social VR industry. This forward-looking analysis is contextualized in prior findings about bias and harassment in video games and online social networking platforms.

Even though the Social VR industry is new, high-profile incidents of bias, hate, and harassment have already been reported. But because the industry is new, there is also a prime opportunity to design platforms and tools that will reduce and prevent harassment in the future. This report lays the groundwork for future analysis of tools and strategies to address hate in Social VR.

## **SOCIAL VR: INDUSTRY OVERVIEW AND TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES**

The Social VR industry is growing rapidly. This is due in part to the recent availability of mass-produced consumer VR equipment, such as high-end headsets for use with personal computers (HTC Vive, Oculus Rift), affordable headsets for use with smartphones (Samsung Gear, Google Cardboard), and stand-alone headsets available for less than the price of a personal computer or video game console (Oculus Go, Lenovo Mirage Solo). Social networking platforms like Facebook, tech giants like Google and HTC, and numerous VR start-up companies have developed new VR-focused social networks, content distribution platforms, and easy-to-use tools for software developers. With the creation and distribution of VR content easier than ever, hundreds of companies are developing VR experiences for use in social networking, gaming (both multiplayer and solo), architecture, design, advertising, healthcare, workforce training, and education.

The industry is predicted to boom over the next few years. Estimates for the entire VR market in 2016 were between \$1 billion<sup>[i]</sup> and \$2 billion<sup>[ii]</sup>, while estimates for VR hardware sales alone are as high as \$1.8 billion in 2018<sup>[iii]</sup>. In five years, the market for VR and semi-immersive augmented reality (AR) technology and content is expected to reach between \$9 billion and \$15 billion<sup>[iv]</sup>. This follows several years of rapid innovation but slow market growth, which some have called a “trough of disillusionment”<sup>[v]</sup>. Games are already a popular use of VR, but social VR, enterprise applications, health and wellness, and more new verticals are expected to grow and drive adoption of the technology. While 2016 and 2017 saw greater affordability of headsets and growing user numbers<sup>[vi]</sup>, more high quality content, less expensive stand-alone headsets, willing investors, and an expansion of applications across several industries are expected to drive growth in 2018<sup>[vii]</sup>.

To date, at least 16 platforms primarily designed to enable social interactions in VR exist. These platforms vary in terms of the interactions they allow. While all allow some level of interaction between individual users, many also offer social activities for users to pursue together, from watching concerts to playing games to collaboratively building worlds to gambling.

## **Major Platforms:**

Platforms recognized as early entrants in Social VR and/or supported by significant research and development resources.

### **Facebook Spaces**

Facebook Spaces is a virtual reality interactive environment for socializing with Facebook contacts. Facebook photos are used to create the user’s avatar.

### **Oculus Rooms**

Oculus Rooms is a Social VR platform for socializing with other users. Users can play games, watch shows and movies, listen to music, and more in groups with friends.

Oculus is owned by Facebook.

## Oculus Venues

Oculus Venues is a Social VR platform focused on entertainment, including concerts, sporting events, and other live events.

Oculus is owned by Facebook.

## Rec Room

Rec Room is a Social VR platform focused on playing social games. Users can play pre-designed games or create their own.

## VRChat

VRChat is a Social VR platform where users create custom avatars, build worlds, and interact with other users.

## AltspaceVR

AltspaceVR is a Social VR platform where users can interact with other people and participate playing games and attending free live events.

AltspaceVR is owned by Microsoft.

## vTime

vTime is a Social VR platform for users to socialize with family and friends a smartphone or VR headset. Users interact in detailed, artistic environments.

## Mozilla Hubs

Mozilla Hubs is a mixed reality social networking platform. The platform runs on WebVR, an open-source, easy to use development kit that can be designed and accessed through computer browsers as well as using VR headsets.

Mozilla Hubs is developed by Mozilla.

## Minor Platforms:

Newer entrants into Social VR and platforms with niche audiences.

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## Sansar

Social VR platform created by Linden Lab, creators of Second Life. Users in Sansar can socialize, host live events, create personalized spaces, and create and sell items in the world.

## BeanVR

BeanVR is a social VR app where users can engage in a variety of activities including games, education, debates, and presentations. Users in VR can speak with users with 2D cameras.

## High Fidelity

High Fidelity connects people from around the world to create and meet in virtual worlds within a platform called The Metaverse.

## TheWaveVR

TheWaveVR is a music virtual reality platform where users can view, host, and attend shows, concerts, and festivals.

## JanusVR

JanusVR turns 2D web pages into 3D spaces. Users can interact with each other in the virtual 3D spaces.

## SlotsMillionVR

SlotsMillionVR is an online casino app that allows the user to play for real money in private casino rooms.

## SVVR

SVVR's Multiverse initiative provides developer tools for creating virtual worlds and interactive connections between virtual worlds and the physical world.

## What Makes Social VR Different Than Other Technologies

VR technology has several unique affordances that set it apart from other gaming and social networking technologies. Presence (a psychological feeling that you are truly interacting with a virtual environment), immersion (an effect of reality created by the technology displaying the virtual world)<sup>[viii]</sup>, and embodiment<sup>[ix]</sup> (feeling like your virtual body is your real body) together contribute to an immersive, lifelike experience. Technology-enabled sensory experiences, like 360 vision and three-dimensional audio, spatial mobility in several directions (left/right, up/down, and forward/backward), high-quality storytelling, and easy to use user interfaces help to produce the feeling that you are “really there”. In psychological research, users often report feeling that they are fully immersed in virtual experiences.

These affordances heighten both the promise and the threat of hate in Social VR. As one recent headline put it, “when virtual reality feels real, so does the sexual harassment.”<sup>[x]</sup> In addition, patterns of hate in social media and long-standing industry norms of biased representation of women, people of color, and others in video games create a precedent for tolerating harassment in Social VR. Indeed, recent news reports and research show that **Social VR will become a hotbed of hate, bias, and harassment if preventive measures are not taken soon.**

## HOPEFUL FUTURES: EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND VR

While problems with hate, bias, and harassment are emerging in Social VR, there are several positive theories, indicators, and potential applications of VR that seem poised to advance justice and equity in society. Many of the positive applications of VR discussed so far go beyond Social VR and include the effects of embodying a person different from oneself in virtual worlds and using VR for educational purposes. Such research and uses of VR might open up future routes of development for Social VR. User experience in single-user VR content may translate to the experience of social VR, too. Plus, educational content and empathy training could be combined with multi-user social elements to create scalable or more social experiences.



## Empathy

Filmmaker Chris Milk famously dubbed VR an “empathy machine.” He believes VR will make people more compassionate, empathetic, and connected, fostering greater understanding and cooperation among individuals in societies<sup>[xi]</sup>. The empathy machine idea has motivated global organizations like the United Nations to adopt VR and immersive filmmaking techniques. Milk’s 2015 short immersive film *Clouds Over Sidra*<sup>[xii]</sup>, for example, was used to seek international funding and support for the UN’s management of the Syrian refugee crisis and it yielded tangible results<sup>[xiii]</sup>.

These hopes for VR echo the hope surrounding the development of the Internet and of social media platforms during the first decade of their existence in mainstream culture. Consumer uses of the Internet developed alongside the utopian ambitions of early Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, many of whom came of age in progressive communities seeking to change the world for the better with the help of technology in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>[xiv]</sup>. As the Internet became common in homes, platforms like bulletin board systems (BBS) in the 1990s helped people build community around shared cultural interests, like television shows<sup>[xv]</sup>. Since the turn of the century, platforms like Facebook and Twitter gave ordinary people the ability to connect with others around the world. Hopes that the internet would act as a lever for increased political engagement were borne out in real-world events. Twitter and Facebook, for example, were powerful forces behind the organization of real-world protests against the Egyptian government in Tahrir Square<sup>[xvi]</sup> in 2011 protests and other “Arab Spring” protests in Libya and Tunisia. Enthusiasm for its democratizing impact has been tempered somewhat in recent years with rising numbers of hate groups online<sup>[xvii][xviii]</sup> and ongoing reflections, including from Facebook itself<sup>[xix]</sup>, about the role that social media may have played in allowing U.S. adversaries to influence the 2016 presidential election<sup>[xx]</sup>.



Research has now been undertaken to determine whether the empathy applications of VR will deliver. There are indications from social psychology research that VR may be able to increase empathy and willingness to help people different from oneself. The “walk a mile in another’s shoes” phenomenon, or “Proteus effect”<sup>[xxi][xxii]</sup>, is based on the belief that people may feel less threatened by people of different races after inhabiting an avatar of a different race from their own in VR. The researchers and the tech press alike have hailed these findings as an indicator that VR has great potential as a tool – even a “virtual trick”<sup>[xxiii]</sup> - for tackling racism. One possible real-world application of VR was demonstrated through a collaboration between legal scholars and psychologists. The team showed that VR immersion in a body similar to a defendant may prompt fairer evaluation of evidence, suggesting possible use to reduce bias in criminal sentencing<sup>[xxiv]</sup>. Another is the use of VR for sensitivity training for police departments in the hope that it will reduce bias and improve police-community relations<sup>[xxv]</sup>. However, care is needed because while putting people in avatars of a different race from their own may increase empathy and reduce racist behaviors, other research has shown that racial biases could be heightened instead<sup>[xxvi]</sup>.

Other research has suggested that embodying an elderly person in VR might also reduce bias towards the elderly<sup>[xxvii]</sup>. Researchers have even found that embodying a “superhero” in a virtual world makes people more willing to help another person in the real world<sup>[xxviii]</sup>.

### Fighting Anti-Semitism

VR is also being used to reduce anti-Semitism and fight Holocaust denial. Several experiences to date have dramatized stories from Jewish people affected by the Holocaust, for example. The University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation iWitness 360 program released the short immersive film *Lala* in 2017<sup>[xxix]</sup>. In this film, a Holocaust survivor narrates a small piece of his family’s experience in Poland during World War II. The family is forced to move to a ghetto, and their

family dog, Lala, follows them after they leave her behind. Every night, Lala finds the family, and every day, Lala leaves the ghetto to care for a litter of puppies. The narrator concludes from this story that “love is stronger than hate”. The film switches between placing the viewer in the narrator’s home and in an immersive, animated world, connecting memories of the past with the present day.

In 2018, the Anne Frank House, in collaboration with Force Field, released the experience Anne Frank House VR<sup>[xxx]</sup>. In this experience, the user can take an immersive tour of a virtual reproduction of the Amsterdam house in which the Jewish teenager Anne Frank hid with her family from the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands from 1942 until their capture by the Nazis in 1944. The tour guides the user through the house, with quotes from her published diary and objects that she wrote about detailed throughout.



Still of Anne Frank’s bedroom from the Secret Annex reproduction in Anne Frank House VR. Source: <https://www.techradar.com/news/tour-the-anne-frank-house-in-vr-on-oculus-go-and-samsung-gear-vr>

VR is even being used to prosecute former Nazi officers. In Germany, the German Public Prosecution Service commissioned the creation of a VR rendering of

Auschwitz that helped lead to the conviction of former SS guard Reinhold Hanning in 2015<sup>[xxxii]</sup>. In 2017, Mel Films released a short documentary film called “Nazi VR” about the VR model and the case<sup>[xxxiii]</sup>.

More work along these lines is to come. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is exploring ways to use VR to deliver educational content that is engaging for young people. The expansion into VR contributes to the museum’s new efforts to educate the public about the “why” – not just the “what” and “how” – of the Holocaust<sup>[xxxiv]</sup>.

### Sexual Harassment and Gender Diversity

Some companies are even exploring the use of VR for workplace harassment training. For example, the start-up company Vantage Point creates immersive experiences based on the narratives of victims of sexual harassment and assault<sup>[xxxv]</sup>. These situations are used to foster empathy, spot sexual harassment, identify stigma and bias, and learn bystander intervention techniques in workplaces and on college campuses. The company argues that the immersive nature of VR can trigger “state dependent learning,” which they describe as “a psychological phenomena where employee response accuracy and memory is at its highest when the training environment is able to most closely replicate the stimuli of the real-world environment.”<sup>[xxxvi]</sup>

A positive aspect of the VR industry overall is a high level of gender diversity and a demonstrated interest in fostering diversity and inclusion for women as the industry matures. Gender diversity in the industry has drawn significant media attention, with news outlets highlighting women creators and executives in industry reports and lists<sup>[xxxvii]</sup>. Furthermore, there are several industry groups devoted to supporting women workers in the VR industry, including the international Women in VR networking group<sup>[xxxviii]</sup>, which has more than 9,000 members in its Facebook group<sup>[xl]</sup>. The New York Women in VR Meetup group has

nearly 900 members<sup>[xli]</sup>. With a high representation of women decision makers, addressing persistent problems in social networking platforms, like sexism and harassment of women, can become a priority for the VR industry.

There is a great opportunity to make VR a force for good in the world. The industry is in a relatively early stage and the problems observed to date in Social VR can still be contained. Many researchers and industry players are interested in tackling real-world bias using VR and are actively exploring how to do so. The industry itself seems open to talking about and supporting diversity within its ranks. In addition to finding ways to *use* VR to reduce bias, hate, and harassment, now is a prime moment for industry actors and researchers to figure out how to prevent the spread of bias, hate, and harassment *in* Social VR platforms and VR experiences with significant social interaction, like games.

## **CAUTIONARY TALES: HATE, BIAS, AND HARASSMENT IN VIDEO GAMES, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE TECH INDUSTRY**

While Social VR is a rapidly growing industry with many potentially positive social benefits, problems with hate, bias, and harassment in other kinds of virtual worlds and online communities are well documented. Like social media platforms and multiplayer games, Social VR is also a technological platform that allows users to interact with people who are not in the same physical location. What has been learned from those fields should therefore be considered when assessing whether and how Social VR will enable socially problematic behavior in the future. Findings from research on video games and social media offer a roadmap for anticipating and addressing emerging problems with hate, bias, and harassment in social VR.

Furthermore, though video games and social media often seem disconnected from the “real life” of the physical world, researchers have long identified a feedback loop between real-world values and biases and the values and biases portrayed in

video games or in online communities. The same sort of feedback loop exists between today's increasingly sophisticated Social VR worlds and the physical world. Video games and social media provide cautionary tales for what could happen in Social VR if hate, bias, and harassment are not addressed early in the technology's development.

### Video Games and Virtual Worlds

Some of the earliest research on virtual worlds sounded the alarm about how biased visual representation of women characters and people of color in video games could affect general cultural attitudes. These concerns were rooted in an understanding that what happens in video games can affect the values that inform how people live their lives in the physical world, and vice versa. As Christine Ward Gailey argued in 1993<sup>[xlii]</sup>:

Games played in a society embody the values of the dominant culture; they are ways of reinforcing through play the behaviors and models of order rewarded or punished in the society... Games, then, particularly commercially successful ones, are apt to replicate in their structure the values and activities associated with the dominant ideology.

How different groups in society are portrayed in the "virtual" worlds of video games reflects and reinforces pre-existing biases held by members of society in the "real world," such as racism and sexism. For example, research from the early 1990s onward has extensively documented the gender stereotyping of video game characters' appearances. Women are usually thin and scantily clad with accentuated breasts (a trend exemplified in Tomb Raider protagonist Lara Croft) and men have large muscles and aggressive attitudes<sup>[xliii][xliv]</sup>. Psychological research among adolescents and college students shows that viewing these stereotypical portrayals can make real-world cases of sexism seem less shocking<sup>[xlv][xlvi]</sup> and promote the acceptance of "rape myths"<sup>[xlvii]</sup>, like the belief that women who are victims of sexual assault deserve what happens to them.

Sexism in video games is not limited only to professionally-generated content. Research and news reporting on multiplayer online games have widely observed that women are regularly subjected to harassment from other players<sup>[xlvi][xlvii]</sup>. Women players have developed coping mechanisms to guard against such behavior<sup>[i]</sup>.

Sexual harassment in video games famously spilled over into real-world harassment during the Gamergate scandal in recent years. In one high-profile moment of an ongoing series of episodes in which women in the gaming community were harassed for their views in 2014, gaming journalist Anita Sarkeesian was awarded the Ambassador Award at the Game Developers Choice Awards for her web series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. The series explained sexist stereotypes in video gaming based on her long experience reporting on the industry. Following the announcement of her award, Sarkeesian and event organizers received bomb threats and death threats. The perpetrators justified their actions by alleging that Sarkeesian had undisclosed financial ties with other critics of the games industry<sup>[li][lii][liii]</sup>.

The episode was one of several that was collectively referred to as #gamergate on social networks like Twitter. The name itself suggests similarities between an attempt to connect Sarkeesian's alleged (and since debunked) industry ties to the 1970s Watergate political corruption scandal and the general scandalous mood surrounding the harassment of other high-profile women in the games industry. Gamergate, as the episode is now called, showed that sexism in video games is not limited to the content. Video game fans defend, sometimes with threats of violence, the production and distribution of sexist content in video games. The sexist culture surrounding video games poses real-world threats of harassment, injury, and fear for women involved in the industry.

Racist imagery has also been identified as a problem in video games going back to the 1990s. For example, the popular 3D Realms Software 1990s games *Duke Nukem*



*3D* and *Shadow Warrior* are classic examples of how troubling stereotypes about race drive storytelling in video games<sup>[liv]</sup>. In *Duke Nukem 3D*, the game action is premised on eugenic panic about race mixing between invading aliens and white women in a mono-ethnic future Los Angeles. The main character is on a quest to stop the alien invaders in order to save the genetic purity of the human species. In *Shadow Warrior*, the main character's stereotyped and generic "Asian" identity is accompanied by a skill set that is portrayed as biologically-based and extensive jokes about the character's deficient masculinity.

Other researchers have identified similarly racist assumptions at work in the racialization of skills and the civilizational stakes of warfare that underwrite many popular fantasy role-playing games in the 2000s and 2010s, such as the *Elder Scrolls*, with roots in classic fantasy literature<sup>[lv]</sup>. Racial stereotypes and racialized violence are simulated in more realistic games as well, notably in the *Grand Theft Auto* series<sup>[lvi]</sup> and sports games<sup>[lvii]</sup>.

As with sexist representations in video games, racist ideas seem to bleed through into the real world. Psychological research suggests, for example, that playing violent video games increases ethnocentrism and triggers heightened aggression when a player is presented with someone who is different from themselves<sup>[lviii]</sup>. Despite this, and despite activism within the industry from individuals like Anita Sarkeesian, hate in video games has become expected, potentially paving the way for the normalization of hate in other virtual worlds.

## Social Media

Social media platforms like Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter have proven ripe for the spread of racist, sexist, and anti-Semitic content.

The research institute Data & Society has documented the development and impact of hate groups and the loosely organized communities that spread hateful ideas online, including men's rights activists, the alt-right, and so-called "Gamergaters." In a 2017 report<sup>[lix]</sup>, the group identified the affordances of social



media platforms as one factor contributing to these groups' success, arguing that hate groups online have learned how to "leverage both the techniques of participatory culture and the affordances of social media to spread their various beliefs." These groups, Data & Society said, amplify their impact by creating newsworthy content that is easy for time-strapped journalists to cover, and thus amplify. "Taking advantage of the opportunity the internet presents for collaboration, communication, and peer production, these groups target vulnerabilities in the news media ecosystem to increase the visibility of and audience for their messages," it said.

Examples of hateful speech online are plentiful. Sexual harassment and hate speech against women, for example, makes news when prominent women delete their social media presences. Culture writer Lindy West, for example, cited sexual harassment as her reason for abandoning her large Twitter following in January 2017<sup>[lx]</sup>. More recently, *Star Wars: Rogue One* actress Kelly Marie Tran deleted her Instagram posts to stop experiencing online sexual and racially motivated harassment<sup>[lxi]</sup>.

Sometimes harassment against women online can be career- and life-threatening, as in the case of Chinese technology video blogger Naomi Wu. In her case, sexual harassment from online followers increased following reporting in early 2018 by United States media outlet Vice<sup>[lxii]</sup>. In their coverage, Vice released identifying information about Wu that could be used by both internet trolls and Chinese authorities to target her in the real world<sup>[lxiii]</sup>. She claims that she now fears for her freedom from government persecution, her physical safety, and her livelihood<sup>[lxiv]</sup>.

Anti-Semitic hate speech and harassment has been a persistent problem in social media as well. In the summer of 2016, for example, some Twitter users, including neo-Nazis<sup>[lxv]</sup>, began using "triple parentheses" – ((( ))) – around the names of journalists and others who they believed to be Jewish. This was meant as a threatening gesture and used to undermine the expertise and credibility of the

targeted individuals<sup>[lxvi]</sup>. [Some Jewish Twitter users, however, now use the triple parentheses as a way to publicly claim their Jewish identity and reclaim power from such hateful actors.]

Also in 2016, Pepe the Frog<sup>[lxvii]</sup>, originally a cartoon character with no racist or political implications, became identified with the so-called alt-right. Displaying Pepe the Frog allowed anti-Semitic social media users to find other like-minded individuals. The character became a fixture at real-world hate rallies in the United States as well, such as the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017<sup>[lxviii]</sup>. The first phase of the Anti-Defamation League's [Online Hate Index](#) provides additional documentation of anti-Semitic, sexist, and racist hate speech found on social media platforms<sup>[lxix]</sup>.

Recognizing the links between internet hate and hate in the real world, some governments are beginning to act against online hate speech. For example, in January 2018, Germany began enforcing the Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz (NetzDG), the first law of its kind in Europe. This new law requires social media platforms to remove most content that violates Germany's strict anti-hate speech laws within 24 hours or face fines of up to €50 million (\$58 million)<sup>[lxx]</sup>. Prohibited content includes pro-Nazi material. However, the law is still a work in progress. An amendment has been proposed that would allow users to review and respond to content removal in response to concerns that some material has been inappropriately deleted<sup>[lxxi]</sup>.

Social media provides many examples of why it is important to track and fight hate, bias, and harassment in online communities. While social media has facilitated connections between people around the world, it has also become a hotbed of bias, hate, and harassment. Troublingly, these occurrences are not isolated or "only online." Symbols that begin online can become symbols of real-world hate, and online harassment can lead to real-world harassment and even government persecution.

## Lessons Learned

Numerous lessons emerge from these findings and controversies about hate, bias, and harassment in video games and social media, such as:

- Real-world bias and hate is often mirrored in video games and on digital social media platforms and virtual bias can perpetuate real-world hate and harassment. Therefore, tackling real-world bias and hate requires tackling prejudice in social networks and in the video games industry, and vice versa.
- In online social networks and multiplayer games, users do not always uphold generally accepted social norms of civility and respect. Racist and sexist content may be present.
- Unmoderated social networking spaces can serve the purposes of hate groups.
- Moderation of online social spaces may be necessary to make digital social worlds inviting and bias-free. But because automated systems are influenced by human designers' biases, moderation needs to be thoughtfully designed and executed by diverse teams trained to understand and guard against bias and hate.

## **SEXISM, RACISM, AND ANTI-SEMITISM IN SOCIAL VR TODAY**

Multiple forms of hate, bias, and harassment are emerging as problems in Social VR, including sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism. Some of these problems bear a strong resemblance to prior problems with hate, bias, and harassment in social media and video games. Given this strong resemblance to hate in other digital media contexts, it's fair to say that this problem is likely to get worse without real hands on intervention from Social VR companies. One challenge: the scope of the problem is not clear. While it is unfortunate that hate is emerging in a new medium at all, the unique affordances of VR, such as immersion and presence, may also heighten the effect of hate upon those who are targeted. At the same time, there is nothing inherently hateful or harmful about the technology in and of

itself, and it will be up to the Social VR community — users and companies — to determine the way forward for this new and exciting medium.

The next section summarizes key incidents of hate, bias, and harassment that have been researched and reported to date in the new medium of Social VR in an effort to highlight the real harms and threats that are being experienced by users as this medium evolves. The section focuses on behavior that can be explicitly perceived externally as sexist, racist, anti-Semitic and otherwise offensive. It is worth noting, however, that content that does not appear to explicitly fall into these categories can still be experienced by users as offensive in these ways and others, and that the examples mentioned in this section are only the most obvious and egregious examples of this behavior that have been reported to date.

### Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Social VR

Since 2016, several high-profile episodes and studies of sexual harassment in Social VR have been reported. The affordances of the various platforms offer different opportunities for sexual harassment, and many platforms have seen problems with such behavior to date. While research done in collaboration with Oculus, a VR headset manufacturer now owned by Facebook, reports little evidence of sexual harassment in VR<sup>[lxxii]</sup>, several high-profile controversies and other research provides a multifaceted account of harassment in virtual worlds. From pornographic images to sexually-explicit drawings to simulated physical assault, Social VR can be highly threatening for women or anyone else who presents as feminine in virtual worlds.

### *VR Groping in QuiVR*

One of the most infamous incidents occurred in the VR game QuiVR in October 2016. QuiVR is an archery game in which players are immersed in a virtual world with other human players. Players can accomplish game objectives on their own or as part of a team of players in the virtual game world at the same time. Other

players are visible around each individual in the form of a pair of hands holding a bow and arrow and a head wearing a helmet.



QuiVR avatars and gameplay. Image source: <https://store.steampowered.com/app/489380/QuiVr/>

Player Jordan Belmaire wrote about being “virtually groped” while playing the game with her brother in October 2016<sup>[lxxiii]</sup>. The only indication of her gender was her voice. As she wrote in a Medium post following the incident:

In between a wave of zombies and demons to shoot down, I was hanging out next to BigBro442, waiting for our next attack. Suddenly, BigBro442’s disembodied helmet faced me dead-on. His floating hand approached my body, and he started to virtually rub my chest.

“Stop!” I cried. I must have laughed from the embarrassment and the ridiculousness of the situation. Women, after all, are supposed to be cool, and take any form of sexual harassment with a laugh. But I still told him to stop.

This goaded him on, and even when I turned away from him, he chased me around, making grabbing and pinching motions near my chest. Emboldened, he even shoved his hand toward my virtual crotch and began rubbing.

There I was, being virtually groped in a snowy fortress with my brother-in-law and husband watching.

Belmaire responded by shouting at BigBro 442 to stop. She became angrier and attempted to run away. The player followed her and continued to grope her until she left the virtual world. Belmaire described unexpectedly feeling violated during the incident. At the end of the post, she reflected that while women were allowed in VR spaces like the QuiVR world, they might not want to return if they faced such behavior.

The company's CEO, Aaron Stanton, responded with a public statement<sup>[lxxiv]</sup>, voicing his disappointment and vowing to take corrective action. Stanton said the company would explore how to "offer the tools to re-empower the player as it [abuse] happens." QuiVR soon after updated its Personal Bubble "superpower" feature, which originally was designed to preserve the quality of the gameplay if players were hit by malicious bow and arrow shots from other players or if another player tried to obstruct their view. With the updates, when users enter a person's the bubble, their hands disappear from the view of the bubble user and they cannot interact with the person who activated the power<sup>[lxxv]</sup>. AltspaceVR includes a similar bubble feature that limits how close other players can get to a person's avatar<sup>[lxxvi]</sup>. These features give individuals control over how close others can get to the "personal space" of their avatar, thereby preventing virtual groping and assault.

The need for personal space features may also play a more general role in promoting player comfort. Experimental psychology research has found that the ideal distance between users in virtual space is between 2 meters and 2.5 meters<sup>[lxxvii]</sup>.



## Sexual Harassment in VRChat

The ongoing issues in the platform VRChat provides additional examples of sexual harassment in Social VR. VRChat is an open social world in which the primary objective is for players to interact with each other, just like in a chatroom or public social media forum. Each user is represented by a full-body avatar designed by the player, and many users create avatars that imitate the physical human form. Players can share content, such as images or videos, with other players in the vicinity and alter their avatars during gameplay.

These features have been used to sexually harass people, often those identified by other users as women. For example, Twitch streamer Glacey made gamer news in March 2018 after being approached by a 10-foot-tall avatar altered to show male genitalia at the level of her avatar's face<sup>[lxxviii]</sup>. Other users report that the content sharing features have been used to force other players to view sexually explicit photos, videos, and drawings by strangers<sup>[lxxix]</sup>. After receiving many complaints from users, in 2018 the company created a "panic button" whereby users can "mute" interactions and content from other users in their immediate area<sup>[lxxx]</sup>.

To some observers of the industry, even these new systems are imperfect because they are reactive measures that still expose users to harassment. Plus, the solution requires the victims of harassment to protect themselves after exposure to hateful interactions or distasteful content, rather than pre-empting hate and harassment<sup>[lxxxi]</sup>.

## Harassment in To Be With Hamlet

*To Be With Hamlet* was a performance based on the William Shakespeare play performed in the Social VR platform M3diate as part of the 2017 TriBeCa Film Festival's Virtual Arcade. This play immersed viewers in a virtual world for a 12-minute performance. Performers acted out their parts off-site in a studio where their movement was recorded and relayed to the virtual world. Avatars in the



world — replete with special effects like flames emerging from the feet of the ghost of Hamlet's father — moved in correspondence with the actors' movement. The actors could not see or what was happening around their virtual avatars and were completely focused on their performances. Viewers could see one another in the virtual performance space as a set of hands and a head.

However, as with Jordan Belmaire's QuiVR experience, the limited visual representation of users in the space did not stop some individuals from harassing the actors' avatars. During one performance, Javier Molina, a member of the creative team, reported seeing a virtual groping incident<sup>[lxxxii]</sup>:

The first time I noticed something unusual was when one of those blue avatars made a sexual innuendo of grabbing Hamlet's genitalia and joking about it. Since I was not close to that avatar, I did not hear very clearly what was the context in which the joke was made, but the gestures I observed were sexual and to be considered as Virtual reality sexual harassment. The actor performing at the other end of the communication did not hear the sounds, so his dialog was not disturbed.

Molina noted that the technical affordances of the performance and anonymity of the spectators did not lessen the impact of witnessing such activity in a virtual space:

In this occasion, the inability of the actor to perceived the sexual harassment does not excuse the behavior perpetrated towards the actor. Unwanted sexual solicitation is a standard feature in cyberspaces where men and women can navigate anonymously, and VR was not going to be the exception.

At another performance later in the day, Molina also witnessed a spectator virtually choking and "killing" the character of Hamlet. While this violence was not explicitly sexual, it contributed to dampening the spirits of the team behind the piece. Following this incident, the M3diate team was spurred to consider the best moderation tools to address harassment and hate in their platform.

The research firm The Extended Mind has conducted two studies of women and sexism in Social VR that begins to quantify the extent of harassment. In a 2018 survey of 600 regular VR users, researchers found that 49% of women and 36% of men experienced sexual harassment. Harassment included everything from being shown lewd images to virtual groping and virtual assault<sup>[lxxxiii]</sup>.

These findings corroborate a smaller 2017 study by the same researchers in which 13 women used Social VR for the first time in a laboratory setting. Participants reported that they received sexual comments and saw drawings of male genitalia in shared public spaces<sup>[lxxxiv]</sup>. For example, participants saw drawings of genitalia in shared spaces in AltspaceVR on two different occasions. In describing of one incident, a woman user downplayed the shock value, chalking it up to an expected consequence of a space “ripe for parody”:

Someone had drawn a giant dick in the alt space drawing app. I was looking for landmarks to try and find [person] and I turned around and there was a giant green dick just drawn in space. And so I just said the first thing that came to me which is ‘oh, that’s a dick.’ And I think I heard someone else in the space too – not [person] – also say that. ‘Oh. There’s the dick.’ Like someone had drawn it and was looking for it, they had lost the giant dick... That space is ripe for parody, and for weird, funny shit to happen.



Image of male genitalia found in AltspaceVR. Image source: The Extended Mind, 2017.

In response to sexual harassment, women users and others who choose to use feminine avatars use a variety of coping skills. For example, users may remain at the margins of public social spaces, avoid talking to other users, and mention romantic partners (real or fictitious) to prevent sexual advances<sup>[lxxxv]</sup>. Such behaviors mirror recent findings about how women navigate physical-world social spaces to avoid sexual harassment<sup>[lxxxvi]</sup>. Just as virtual harassment follows similar patterns in the physical world, so too do coping techniques.

### Race, Racism, and Anti-Semitism

Racism, racist harassment, and anti-Semitic imagery is also a reality today in Social VR platforms. Precedents from game studies and recent news reports provide evidence of the potential and reality of racism and racist harassment in Social VR. In particular, games represent one way that racist ideas maintain a foothold in society. Racialized avatars in Social VR and characters in VR video games with social elements may perpetuate stereotypes about the links between ideas about race, appearance, and race-linked capacities.

By contrast, several psychology experts have argued that VR may, instead, provide a way to reduce racism, based on their experimental studies. Nonetheless, just because the medium shows the potential to diminish racism in experiments does not erase incidents of hate that have been reported or remove the need to combat hate where it exists today among real users of Social VR platforms.

### *Social Psychology Research*

Social psychology researchers at Stanford University and the University of Barcelona have conducted experiments they argue demonstrate that VR helps reduce racism. The majority of these experiments involve putting individuals – predominantly or exclusively white individuals – into solo or social VR experiences where they use an avatar of a same or different race. Most often, white individuals are placed in non-white avatars. This experiment is used to assess variables like implicit bias and outgroup threat assessment (the degree to which someone associates people different from themselves with danger and unfavorable stereotypes).

Early research of this kind found that putting people in avatars of races different from their own increases responses that are correlated with racist beliefs and behaviors<sup>[lxxxvii]</sup>. However, more recent research has found that letting participants embody avatars of a different race can sometimes reduce indicators of racism. Yee and Bailenson have called this the “walk a mile in digital shoes” phenomenon<sup>[lxxxviii]</sup>, while other researchers refer to this as “the Proteus effect”<sup>[lxxxix]</sup>. These findings, however, have been inconsistent even within individual experiments and papers, with some assessment tools finding reductions of racism and others finding no difference<sup>[xc][xci][xcii]</sup>. This research may be salient for the design of Social VR because using or interacting with avatars of a different race than one’s own may have real-world consequences for how individuals respond to people similar to and different than themselves.

### *Ugandan Knuckles in VRChat*

Among real-life users, there have been numerous reports of racist imagery from users of Social VR. The most famous example is Ugandan Knuckles<sup>[xciii][xciv]</sup>. Ugandan Knuckles is a character that has been extensively used in VRChat. Originally inspired by the Knuckles character in the *Sonic the Hedgehog* video game series, in VRChat “Ugandan Knuckles” users imitate a fake, stereotyped “Ugandan” accent and syntax and make clicking noises in imitation of Khoisan languages. Groups of users amass in public spaces in coordinated attacks, overwhelming other users and activities with their large numbers, making statements that mock African cultures and the intelligence of Black people, and conducting fake “Ugandan” rituals to find “the way.” Ugandan Knuckles attacks often target feminine avatars.



Ugandan Knuckles users imitate a stereotyped “Ugandan” accent while harassing other users. Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdVIC8YIIHo>





Ugandan Knuckles continue to surround and harass a user who asked them to stop harassing them.  
Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdVIC8YIIHo>



Dozens of Ugandan Knuckles avatars surround a feminine avatar, chasing the target and making spitting noises. Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oo4PeRKQ3Fg>

Though the image itself, like Pepe the Frog, has inoffensive origins, its use in VRChat seems to be motivated by a desire to dominate shared social space, driving other people out through the use of racist tropes.

Ugandan Knuckles “raids” have been compared within the industry and among gamers to racist and anti-Semitic “pool’s closed” raids led by 4chan users in the Habbo Hotel two-dimensional virtual world starting in 2006<sup>[xcv]</sup>. Users would stand around the “pool” – typically using Black avatars with stereotyped features – to block access to the pool and intimidate and keep out other users. Users would sometimes leave comments like “Pool’s closed due to AIDS,” implying a link between Black people and ill health. In some actions, users positioned the bodies of their avatars to form swastikas in public spaces<sup>[xcvi]</sup>.



A tweet about the “Pool’s Closed” meme from 2017. Image source:  
<https://twitter.com/attackoftehafro/status/936483720269389825>





Screenshot of "Pool's Closed" activity in the Habbo Hotel virtual world. Image source:  
<http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/148224-pools-closed>

### *Nazi Imagery and Hitler Avatars*

VRChat users are discussing the issue of Nazi imagery on the VRChat Steam community online discussion boards. Some users have expressed the belief that using Hitler avatars and other Nazi imagery should be allowed and should be regarded as humorous because it is already part of gaming culture<sup>[xcvii]</sup>. For example, one user posted a thread on December 8, 2017 that was titled "Offensive Avatars Allowed?" and wrote:

I didn't think these kinds of models would be allowed, but I've been seeing a pretty large amount of people running around like this, blasting nazi music.

Kind of seems strange when they warn people for saying "Begone thot" [a criticism that a user was being too politically correct] but don't punish genuine anti-semitism.

On January 8, another user replied:

"genuine"? how do you know they aren't just RPing as a character, which is actually a nazi, then what? punish them for making a character like that? that'd be like punishing anime because the japanese used to work with the nazis.

On January 10, a third user chimed in:

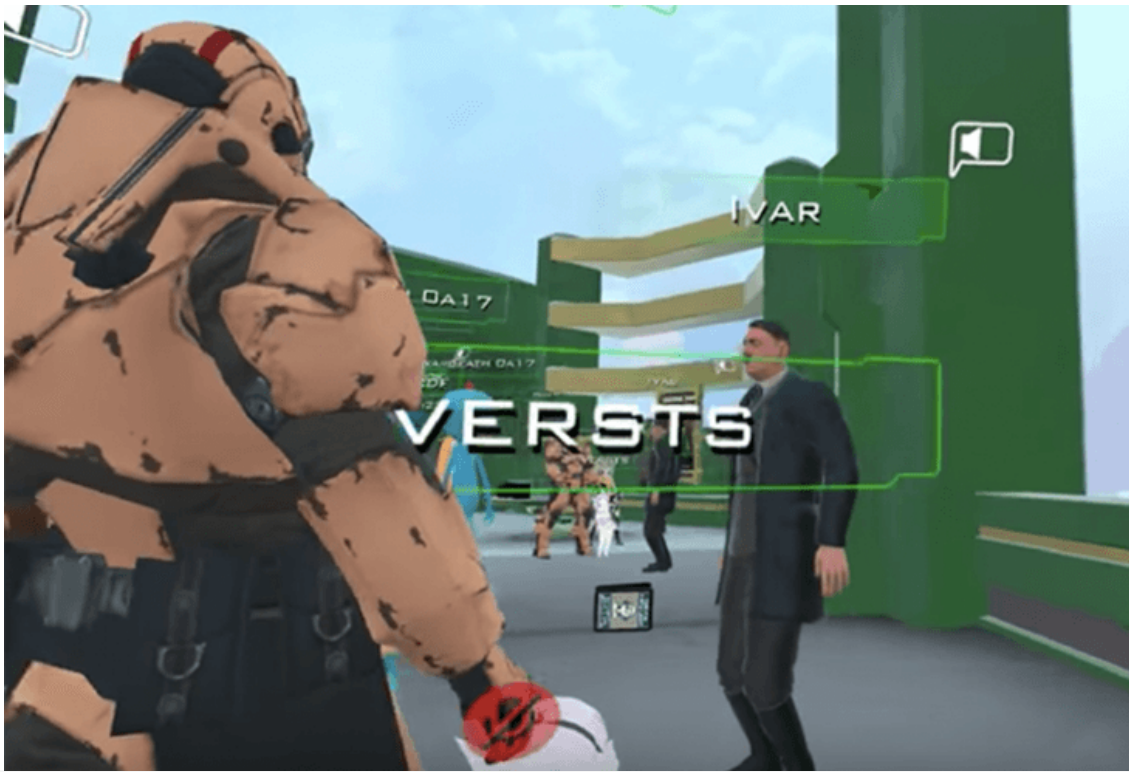
A day or two ago, I went on a chill lounge world, and then Christ on the cross floated by. Then became Hitler, complete with a custom heil emote. Another guy turned into Trump, clearly thinking "my moment has come", and then Hitler responded by turned into Kim Jong Un, and the two had a danceoff while the crowd egged them both on.

Probably the highlight of my experience on VRchat in the short time I've been on.

I say leave it be, but do give people the ability to self moderate and such. kick votes and ♥♥♥♥ exist for a reason, and room owners can have their own rules. But trying to enforce global bans on things is just kind of anti-fun.

The apparent tolerance for Nazi music and imagery in these messages suggests that anti-Semitic and otherwise hateful and offensive content is acceptable to some users. Videos and screenshots of VRChat interactions provide further evidence that Nazi imagery and music is used and tolerated by some users of the platform. In VRChat, users have the option to design a custom avatar, a process which is extensively documented and can take just a few minutes<sup>[xcviii]</sup>.

As the conversation above suggests, several users have used this feature to design avatars that look like Hitler, allowing them to use the body of Hitler as their own and appearing as Hitler to other users. While using Hitler avatars, some users sometimes even broadcast Nazi songs or behave in ways that seem to be motivated by racism or sexism.



User Ivar uses an Adolf Hitler avatar. Nazi-era German anthems play in the background while Ivar dances to the music and a crowd watches. Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKwpQypWK-g>



An Adolf Hitler avatar dances on the image of a face of a Black child to American hip hop music while wearing an apron, chefs hat, and cooking a meal. Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

Research conducted by The Extended Mind corroborates the presence of racism and anti-Semitism in Social VR. In their 2018 survey of 600 VR users, 28% of men, 17% of women, and 29% of people with other gender identities reported receiving racist or homophobic comments in Social VR settings<sup>[xcix]</sup>. For example, one user reported receiving “racist statements because I am black.” Another user reported seeing “Nazi imagery in a shared space” in an unnamed Social VR platform.

The mixed results so far in psychological research regarding VR and race suggests that the impacts of racist imagery in virtual spaces may be unpredictable and require ongoing, careful study. The reports of racist imagery in VRChat that are already cropping up show that racism is becoming a problem in Social VR. And the links made by journalists and users to past anti-Semitic actions in virtual worlds and the evidence of tolerance for Nazi imagery in the VRChat community suggests that it may only be a matter of time until this kind of offensive imagery is widespread in Social VR

### Future Issues for Social VR

Without intervention and appropriate preventive strategies, harassment, bias, and hate may grow and become the norm in Social VR spaces. Sexist imagery, harassment, and simulated assault may push women, LGBTQ, and others out of these worlds, as it has on social media. This may discourage the very individuals who might be motivated to fix the problems of sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism from working in the industry. Without intervention, Social VR may become an environment in which hate, bias and harassment of many kinds is accepted and perpetuated.

Just as troublingly for the current cultural moment, the full ramifications of the ability to embody people of different races and analogous gender, religion, culture, and ethnicity role-playing opportunities are not yet clear. They may promote



empathy and understanding, or they may instead strengthen bias. In cultural terms, role-playing another race or culture represents “cultural appropriation” and can lead to misrepresentation of certain communities and cultures<sup>[c]</sup>. In psychological terms, such role-playing may increase “outgroup threat assessment”<sup>[ci]</sup>. That is, groups that a user imitates that the user sees as different from themselves can counterintuitively seem more threatening following racial, ethnic, or other forms of role-playing, not less. In other words, being embodied as another race (and other forms of cultural, racial, and ethnic imitation) may, in fact, heighten bias and hate. The potential for heightened levels of bias warrants careful consideration because VR is currently being positioned by some researchers and industry experts as a “solution” to racism<sup>[cii][ciii][civ]</sup>.

Finally, the well-documented surge in anti-Semitism in online social networks and the ubiquitous presence of racist ideas in video games and gaming culture suggest that industry insiders need to be on guard against rising anti-Semitism in Social VR. Signs of this form of bias are already evidenced in Social VR discussion boards and warrant careful observation. These are multifaceted issues that will need to be tackled in online communities where anti-Semitism is already evident or bubbling up on the part of the designers, storytellers, and engineers of virtual worlds.

## **WHAT COMES NEXT FOR SOCIAL VR?**

### **What Comes Next for Social VR?**

The future of Social VR is bright, but developing virtual communities that are welcoming spaces for a wide variety of people will require careful planning. On the positive side, early indications from psychological research suggest that the immersive qualities of VR may nudge people to become more empathetic, understanding, and helpful to those who are different. Further, the main draw of Social VR, like social media before it, is the potential it has to bring users together to form connection and community regardless of location and nationality and

with the freedom to determine one's self-presentation in virtual space. On the negative side, Social VR is maturing in the wake of decades of innovation and community growth in video games and social media. Some Social VR platforms seem to have inherited the racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism that has been documented in video games and social media. It is a hopeful sign that the Social VR companies affected have already begun implementing moderation tools intended to reverse these trends. The big question is: will the positives of VR outweigh the negatives to make Social VR a force for good in society?

The Social VR industry is growing in tandem with the development of other uses of VR, including games, workplace productivity tools, design and architecture applications, and VR for health. Innovation in these adjacent sectors of the VR industry may uncover more ways that virtual immersion can positively shape social interactions and further expand the tools available to develop and sustain enjoyable communities in Social VR.

Bias, hate, and harassment are not the only challenges facing the industry. Slow adoption of consumer headsets has created a limited demand for content, but new, lower-cost headsets may make the technology and content more appealing and accessible in 2018. For Social VR in particular, where interacting with other users is an integral component of the experience, broad adoption is a prerequisite for lively social worlds. As a new industry with new technologies, talent development has also been identified as a factor that may slow the growth of both hardware and software companies<sup>[cv]</sup>.

Another wildcard for the Social VR industry is the effect of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This rule introduced new standards for data privacy when it went into full effect in May 2018, making it harder to share data between platforms and companies and limiting how collected data can be used and stored. The limits on how companies can use the data of EU citizens may impact advertising-driven business models now common in digital media. In VR, this may affect the kinds of body, gaze, and environment tracking data

companies can collect and use<sup>[cvi]</sup>. Because of GDPR, Facebook-owned Oculus has updated its terms of service to limit how Oculus-collected data can be shared with Facebook for ad targeting<sup>[cvii]</sup>. In the coming months, the industry as a whole will undoubtedly consider what data is necessary to collect and how to target VR content to users.

Finally, it will be important to monitor the development of moderation techniques designed to deal with hate, bias, and harassment in Social VR. As social media platforms have grown, hate has become a normal part of many users' experiences. Since we are still in the early days of Social VR, there is an opportunity to preempt the development of similarly toxic cultures in up-and-coming virtual worlds.

To date, a variety of moderation tools have been implemented or proposed, including:

- Personal space management features
- Blocking features
- Features that limit interaction with large groups of strangers
- User reporting of harassment and hate
- Active moderation by company representatives
- Machine learning-based techniques, to automate the identification and removal of hateful content and harassers
- A combination of automated detection and human review of hateful content

ADL's Center for Technology and Society will continue to monitor and research tools and features as Social VR develops. In particular, CTS will monitor the development of new policies to understand and assess:

- What tools industry leaders and observers predict will be effective in curbing hate, bias, and harassment in Social VR.
- What values will be prioritized in the development of moderation tools. For example, will moderation tools allow individuals to filter hate from their



personal experience of Social VR, or will they remove hate from all shared social spaces? Will moderation tools be proactive (preventing hate) or reactive (removing hate once it is shared and reported)?

- Which groups in society (e.g. women, people of color, people with disabilities) will be considered in designing moderation tools.
- The efficacy of different approaches to prevention and moderation of hate, bias, and harassment in Social VR.

The Social VR industry has an exciting future ahead of it. With proactive development of tools and technologies to limit hate by a diverse community of technologists and other professionals, the new generation of social virtual worlds can be a welcoming, collaborative place for all.

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## **APPENDIX: CODES OF CONDUCT AND CONTENT REPORTING AND MODERATION IN SOCIAL VR**

### **Codes of Conduct**

#### **Facebook Spaces**

Facebook Community Standards prohibit:

- **Credible violence**
- **Dangerous individuals and organizations**
- **Promoting or publicizing crime**
- **Coordinating harm**
- **Regulated goods**
- **Suicide and self-injury**
- **Child nudity and sexual exploitation of children**

- Child nudity and sexual exploitation of adults
- Bullying
- Harassment
- Privacy violations, including image privacy rights
- Hate speech
- Graphic violence
- Adult nudity and sexual activity
- Cruel and insensitive material

## Oculus Rooms & Oculus Venues

- You may not use or promote sexually explicit, abusive or obscene content.
- You may not use or promote language or content that would qualify as hateful or racially offensive. We don't allow content that attacks people based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, diseases or disability.
- You may not harass, bully, threaten other users, or encourage other users to do so.
- You may not encourage, celebrate or promote real-world violence.
- You may not encourage or promote illegal activity.
- You may not impersonate an Oculus employee, partner, representative, other real person or encourage other users to do so.

## Rec Room

- Rule #1: Be excellent to each other!
  - Sexist, racist, discriminatory or harassing language, behavior, or content is not welcome
  - Do not promote, encourage or participate in illegal behavior
-

- Players 12 or younger must use a Junior Account
- One player per account. The player must match the birth date on the account.
- No disruptive trolling or inflammatory stuff in public rooms
  - E.g., sexually explicit material, controversial topics
  - This rule does not apply to private/unlisted rooms. But whatever you choose to do in a private or unlisted room, be sure that everyone present is cool with it.
  - Potentially inflammatory rooms should clearly communicate their purpose to other users before they enter the room
- Do not impersonate devs, moderators, or other authority figures
- Don't mess with other people's games! We don't want to implement a million rules to control your behavior in every game. Don't make us. This includes:
  - Cheating
  - Abusing the in-game moderation tools
  - Just generally being an ass/not being a good sport.
- Please use the in-game reporting tools to report Code of Conduct violations.

## VRChat

- Intolerance
  - Hate speech, including language, symbols, and actions.
  - Discrimination towards spiritual beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, disability, and/or any other personally identifying factors.
- Harassment
  - Repeatedly approaching an individual with the intent to disturb or upset.

- Going through other individuals and channels such as social media to continue to harass an individual after being blocked.
- Reporting maliciously on our mod report form.
- Inappropriate content
  - Usernames must abide by our community guidelines.
  - Pornography & nudity is not allowed.
  - Political & Religious figures and symbology. Civil discourse is allowed in private spaces where all participants are aware of and accepting of the discussion.
- Impersonation
  - Impersonating a VRChat employee.
  - You may not falsely identify yourself as another individual or group.
- Disclosure of personal information
  - Also referred to as “Doxxing”, disclosing an individuals personal information will result in immediate account termination and actions leading up to alerting local authorities.
  - Including but not limited to personally identifiable information such as name, address, phone number, other online handles, & real life pictures.
  - Please also refrain from callout threads on VRChat forums. Name shaming will not be tolerated. If you have an issue with an individual, please send us a moderation report.
- Solicitation
  - You may not market, promote, advertise, or solicit unauthorized products or services within VRChat or official forums.
- “Role-playing” is not an excuse for violating the community guidelines



- Lots of users enjoy roleplaying in VRChat. Please keep in mind that even during roleplay, the guidelines detailed here and in our ToS must be followed.
- Organizing hate groups
  - Creating and being involved in a group that is based on or advocates discrimination or harassment is not allowed. We will aggressively pursue moderation action toward group leadership / members as well as disbanding such groups.
- Evading bans
  - Evading bans is prohibited and will result in account suspension leading up to termination.

## AltspaceVR

AltspaceVR Community Standards prohibit:

- Defamation and intolerance
  - AltspaceVR is an international community of users that come from many different cultural backgrounds. Each community member has their own individual background, cultural practices, accents and mannerisms, belief structure and reasons for being in VR. As a community that is enriched by this multi-cultural environment, there will be no tolerance for bigotry regarding any user's race, nationality, spiritual beliefs, physical abilities or sexual orientation. Any language that is meant to defame or injure another user will result in an immediate suspension and determination as to whether the account will be closed permanently.
- Harassment
  - A healthy community is rooted in the shared understanding that everyone is entitled to feel and express whether something is offensive or uncomfortable for them. When a user chooses to ignore this and

continue to aim the uncomfortable behavior at that person, it is perceived as Harassment. If another community member expresses that something makes them uncomfortable, it is your responsibility to cease that behavior in the presence of them. Continued harassing behavior will result in a suspension and subsequent determination as to whether the account will be closed permanently.

- Cyber-bullying and intimidation

- While Cyber-Bullying is regarded as being an issue affecting teens and pre-teens, we are including it as part of the Community Standards so that we make it clear that any form of intimidation levied against another user be it on the AltspaceVR platform or on any social media or forum site managed by AltspaceVR Inc., shall be considered grounds for suspension or account termination.

- Lewd or unwanted advances

- We understand that there will be situations where two consenting adults may develop a relationship of a romantic or sexual nature. Sexual or romantic language that is used when one of the individuals has clearly expressed they are not interested, will be considered to be a lewd or unwanted advance. This is considered to be grounds for account suspension or termination, dependent on the severity of the situation.

- Discovery and disclosure of personal information

- Community Members are entitled to a reasonable level of privacy on the AltspaceVR platform. Sharing personal information about your fellow users without their consent -- including gender, religion, age, marital status, race, sexual preference, alternate account names, and real-world location beyond what is provided by them, is not allowed. Discovering this information and using it to contact the person without the consent

of the community member will be considered to be inappropriate behavior, and may be grounds for account suspension or termination.

- Impersonation of an AltspaceVR employee
  - AltspaceVR staff can be identified by the AltspaceVR logo in the name tag that expands when you mouse-over, or click, the avatar. Employees will never ask for passwords to your account. Any account found to be impersonating an AltspaceVR employee will be subject to immediate suspension or termination.
- Inappropriate content
  - Beaming content of an explicit nature, such as pornography, gruesome violence, and offensive lyrics is not tolerated in Public Events. Repeated attempts to display this content will result in the suspension of the account, and potentially permanent termination. Additionally, we expect that users will choose a Username and First Name that is free of inappropriate terms. AltspaceVR may adjust these names at its discretion.
- Personal space
  - AltspaceVR is a truly unique environment. The power of the platform is the ability to communicate verbally with fellow users, but also to engage with them non-verbally through body gestures and the spatial positioning of your avatar. Like with real-world interaction, users in VR can feel social discomfort if those who they are interacting with are violating normal real-world personal space. This may include the proximity of one avatar to another, the placement of motion-captured hands, arms or legs close to the avatar's face, or even a high speed approach and passing of one avatar through another. 2D users have to be aware that those in VR experience these sensations very differently. If a user expresses discomfort with a particular behavior and the

activity continues, this can be considered harassment and may result in account suspension or termination.

- Creation of alternate accounts for the purpose of harassment
- While community members may choose to create and use more than one account, specifically or consistently using an alternate account to harass other users or violate the Community Standards is not acceptable.
- Alternate accounts are treated as separate from a user's principal account, but misuse of alternate accounts can and will result in disciplinary action on the principal account.

## vTime

- Being yourself in vTime
  - vTime may be a virtual world, but it's not a fantasy world. Just be yourself, not the twelve headed hydra of Methalongi.
  - You should choose a screen name that lets people know who you are (like your screen name on social networks) and an avatar that represents you the best. Our policy is not to allow any username (or screen name) which could cause confusion or offense. So no brand names, rude words etc...
  - And don't go impersonating someone else, either. As Oscar Wilde almost certainly didn't say, "Be yourself; everyone else is already taken."
- Behaviour in vTime
  - We expect all vTime users to respect each other. No bullying, stalking, abuse, religious or racial extremism or any other nastiness, please.
  - The easiest way to think of it is; Please don't do (or say) anything in vTime that you wouldn't do (or say) if you were actually sat in the same room as the other users.
  - Now, that means you will inevitably encounter some unpleasantness in vTime, as we all do in the real world.

- But, unlike the real world, you can block (and if appropriate report) that user, so you don't have to put up with it. Which is good.
- Sharing stuff in vTime
  - vTime is a great way to share flat and 360 images amongst friends. But please only share things you are entitled to share. No sharing of copyright material, offensive or illegal images.
  - Again, think to yourself; "Would I be happy to post this image on my social network page for all to see?"
  - If the answer's yes, you're sweet. If no, then don't share it in vTime either. In either case, make sure that your post complies with vTime's Acceptable Use Policy.
- Streaming and recording vTime sessions
  - vTime allows you to have private sessions with your friends and family, as joining a group is always done by consent.
  - But, if you're joining a group with random people you should treat it like a public forum and don't assume your conversation is private! It may be that one or more of the other users is recording or streaming your public chat.
  - And if you're the one doing the recording or streaming then, out of courtesy and in the spirit of vTime, we'd ask you to inform users joining your public chat that they are being recorded or streamed.
- Age limits in vTime
  - You should be 16 or over to use vTime. Please bear in mind that not everyone in vTime is over 17 and, therefore, some discussion topics or files may not be appropriate for those individuals.



Intolerable behavior according to the Mozilla Community Participation Guidelines include violence and threat of violence, personal attacks, derogatory language related to:

- Background
- Family status
- Gender
- Gender identity or expression
- Marital status
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Native language
- Age
- Ability
- Race and/or ethnicity
- National origin
- Socioeconomic status
- Religion
- Geographic location
- Other attributes
- Unwelcome sexual attention and/or physical contact

## **Reporting and Moderation**

### **Facebook Spaces**

Facebook Spaces is a place for you to connect with your friends and family in virtual reality (VR). If you're ever in a space and you don't feel safe or comfortable,

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you can choose do the following things:

- Pause
  - You can choose to pause your space whenever you want to take a break. When you pause your space, you'll enter your own private space away from your friends. While you're paused, your friends won't be able to see or hear you until you choose to return. To pause your space, rotate your left wrist outwards and tap [the pause button]. To unpause, rotate your left wrist again and tap [the play button].
- Mute
  - You can choose to mute people in your space if you don't want to hear them speak anymore. To mute someone, use your index finger to tap Friends on your dock, tap the friend you want to mute and then tap Mute. To unmute someone, return to the friend you want to unmute and then tap Mute.
- Kick
  - If someone is harassing you or you don't want them in your space anymore, you can choose to kick them from your space. To kick someone from your space, use your index finger to tap Friends on your dock, tap the friend you want to kick and then tap Kick.

## Oculus Rooms

If you notice someone isn't following the Oculus Code of Conduct, click here to report them: <https://support.oculus.com/report-user/>

When you report someone, make sure to include the following info:

- The username of the person you're reporting.
- The issue or reason for reporting.
- The app the issue happened in.

- The date and approximate time of the abuse.
- A description or additional details of what happened.
- A video recording of what occurred (if available).

## Oculus Venues

If you notice someone isn't following the Oculus Code of Conduct, click here to report them: <https://support.oculus.com/report-user/>

When you report someone, make sure to include the following info:

- The username of the person you're reporting.
- The issue or reason for reporting.
- The app the issue happened in.
- The date and approximate time of the abuse.
- A description or additional details of what happened.
- A video recording of what occurred (if available).

Oculus Venues groups users into 4-person pods to increase social interaction and to allow users to control who they share space with.

## Rec Room

Reporting is encouraged if the code of conduct or terms of services or violated.

Users can use the Stop Gesture or Report feature, which immediately alerts the matchmaking system to block a player from any contact with the user, including occupying the same space as the user.

## VRChat

Safety tools:

- Self moderation

- Mute
  - Block
  - Vote to Kick
  - Panic Mode
  - Personal Space
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- Private worlds
    - Users can create private copies of public worlds. When creating a new instance, there will be the option to create a friends-only or invite-only private world.
  - Personal Bubble
    - Users can create private copies of public worlds. When creating a new instance, there will be the option to create a friends-only or invite-only private world.
  - Report abuse
    - Help us keep VRChat safe. Whenever you see someone breaking the community guidelines please report it so we can perform a proper investigation. On the report describe the incident and add supporting media. Note: Reports will not be responded to for privacy reasons.

Report here: <https://goo.gl/AR8sK8>

## Altspace VR

Options for interaction with other users shown on user Nametags:

- Mute
  - Clicking the Mute icon will allow you to mute a user, this is a temporary mute and you can unmute them at any time. If this users' mute icon is already red, it means they have muted themselves.

- Block
  - The block feature will allow you to remove a user from your experience. You will no longer see or hear that user, and they will no longer see or hear you. If you ever need to unblock a user you can open up your Friends panel in AltspaceVR, click the block tab, you will then be able to unblock any users.
- Friending
  - The friend button will send that user a friend request, after Friending another user you will be able to message them across spaces, see when that user is online, and easily join their room. That user's Nametag will also include a blue border so you can easily recognize them as a friend. You will also notice a counter at the bottom of their Nametag which will show the duration that you've been friends with that user.
- Admin Badge
  - AltspaceVR has staff on hand 24/7 in New User Info to assist you in VR. All staff members representing AltspaceVR will have the Admin Badge on their nametag. Our staff is here to support and assist you, so please ask them any questions you might have!

When you host your own activity you will receive some additional tools for moderation. You will now have the ability to message users who you are not yet friends with, and you will also have the ability to Kick users.

- Kick
  - If a user interrupts your activity you can always utilize the Kick button, this will remove that user from your activity. After being kicked they they will no longer be able to join your current activity.

Other tools:

- Personal space bubble

- Causes others to become invisible if they get too close to you.
- Abuse reports
  - If you feel it does warrant our attention please file an Abuse Report. Please make sure to provide a detailed account of your experience with the user, as well as an accurate spelling of their Display Name, and when the instance of abuse took place. We will follow up where appropriate, and take the necessary action to maintain Altspace as a place where people feel safe and are free to communicate with others. We will not inform you as to our decision regarding the status of the individual's account.
  - <https://altvr.com/report-abuse/>

## vTime

What happens if you (or others) don't follow these guidelines

- First, and foremost, we'd encourage you to block them. This means you won't show up in their friends list anymore and they won't be able to drop into any session you are in. They'll still show up in your friends list (as blocked) so, if you reconsider, you can always unblock them at a later date.
- When you block someone, we'll ask you if you wish to report them. We'd really like to know about bad behaviour so, if you think it's appropriate, just choose the reason you blocked them from the list and let us know. It's as easy as that.
- And if you're reported, we'll let you know and give you the chance to make things right, which we hope you'll do.
- But if you don't, we reserve the right to take further action including suspension of your account.

## Mozilla Hubs



Violations of the Conditions of Use and Community Participation Guidelines can be reported by emailing [inclusion@mozilla.com](mailto:inclusion@mozilla.com).