Bias and Hate in Online Games

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

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Video games are played and enjoyed by adults and young people alike. They are also widely used: of all U.S. adults, 67% play video games and 76% of young people under age 18 play video games. In 2021, ADL conducted its third annual report on the experiences people have with online games to learn more about what's positive and what's concerning about online games.

2021 ADL survey

ADL's survey explored the social interactions, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of online multiplayer gamers nationwide. Multiplayer games are games

where more than one person plays in the same game environment either in the same physical space or via the internet. The survey asked about the experiences of a nationally representative sample of the nearly 100 million adult online multiplayer gamers in the U.S. For the first time, this survey also included the experience of young gamers, ages 13-17. Most young gamers—more than nine out of ten—reported positive social experiences in online multiplayer games which includes making friends, learning about interesting topics, gaining a sense of belonging, and being helped by other gamers.

Hate and harassment in online games

The report also revealed that while the majority of gamers reported the positive social interactions and connections that gaming brings, a high percentage of them face regular and ongoing hate and harassment while playing. Five out of six adults (83%) ages 18-45 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games and three out of five young people (60%) ages 13-17 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games.

Online hate

Online hate is defined as: "An attack against people or groups based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, immigration status, etc. that occurs in digital social spaces through the use of technology, such as computers, cell phones and other electronic and digital devices."

Online hate and harassment are not unique to the gaming world. In addition to games, online hate takes place on social media, in discussion sites, dating apps, email, texting and other messaging apps. A 2021 Pew Research Center report reveals that 41% of Americans have personally experienced some form of online harassment. While this is a similar percentage to 2017, there is evidence that online harassment has intensified since then with 25% reporting severe harassment like physical threats, stalking, sexual harassment and sustained

harassment. Also concerning is that young adults ages 18-29 are the only age group in which a majority (64%) have experienced online harassment and almost half of people in this age group have been targeted online with severe behaviors.

More on the experiences of young people in multiplayer games

Here is some other data from the report about young people's experiences in multiplayer games:

- Three in five young people (60%) experienced harassment in online multiplayer games.

- Young gamers are targeted based on aspects of their identity, including these identities: Black/African American (31%), women (22%), Asian American (19%), Latinx (13%), Muslim (13%), Jewish (7%) and LGBTQ+ (7%).

- As a result of this identity-based harassment, 67% of young people always or sometimes hide their identity while playing.

- Ten percent of young people report being exposed to discussions around white supremacist extremist ideology while playing online multiplayer games.

- As a result of the hate and harassment young people experience in online multiplayer games, over a quarter of them (28%) quit specific games and 33% reported that they changed how they play, including not speaking in voice chat and altering their usernames.

You can read the whole report on the survey here: Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021

(Note to parents/families: Because the topic of bias and hate in online games is a current societal issue as well as a topic that may impact your children directly, engage in this conversation on one or both levels, whichever makes sense for your family.)

Age

10 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- Do you like playing online games? What do you like about it? What don't you like about it?

- In your own words, how would you define online hate?

- Have you ever seen or experienced online hate and harassment while playing online games? What happened? When it happened, what were your thoughts and feelings?

- When you see hate and harassment in online games, does anyone say or do something? If so, what?

- What harm do you think is caused by online hate?

Questions to Dig Deeper

(See the Additional Resources section for articles and information that address these questions.)

- How does online hate in gaming impact the individuals who are targeted? How does it impact the gaming community?

- What do you think should be done about hate and harassment in online gaming?

- What can individual players do? What can game companies do? What can elected officials or advocacy groups do?

Take Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Help to organize a school forum (in person or virtually) to learn more about about bias and hate in online games and other digital platforms. Discuss what can be done about it.

- Investigate the policies that gaming companies (or other digital platforms, like social media) have around online hate and the process for reporting. Reflect on whether you think their policies and reporting systems are effective and adequate. Then reach out to these companies either applauding them for effective politics or providing feedback about how they can do better.

- Make a personal commitment to do your part to reduce and prevent online hate by self-reflecting on your own online gaming habits and finding opportunities to speak out about online hate, provided that it is safe to do so.

Additional Resources

- [Don't Let Hate Ruin the Fun: Youth and Online Games](#) (ADL Lesson Plan)

- [Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021](#)

- [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#)

- [Cyber Safety Action Guide](#)

- [Hate Symbols](#) (ADL Table Talk)

- [Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2021](#)

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