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# Gaming and toxicity in Overwatch

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# Gaming and toxicity in Overwatch

- Overwatch = a first-person shooter (FPS) game, with approx. 40 million active players (latest official figure from game developer Blizzard, May 2018).
- Toxicity = aggressive, harassing and/or insulting communication and behavior in online gaming.
- Toxicity is not specific for Overwatch, many popular online games have the same issues (e.g. League of Legends, DOTA2, CS:GO).

# Gaming and toxicity in Overwatch

- There is an ongoing debate concerning toxicity:  
1) How big of a problem is toxicity? 2) If it is a problem, how should it be dealt with?
- Here, I focus on the forum debates concerning toxicity in Overwatch, how toxicity is presented, discussed and debated in the forums.
- Empirical material: Approx. 150 pages of Overwatch forum discussions, downloaded during 2017-2018.

# Gaming and toxicity in Overwatch

- In the forum discussions about toxicity, several dimensions may be noted. Here, I want to highlight the following themes:
- *Anonymity and social disinhibition*
- The *normalization* of toxic behavior
- *Gender* and toxicity
- The *gaming culture*

# Gaming and toxicity in Overwatch

- *Anonymity and social disinhibition*
- *“It blows my mind how many internet tough guys and know it alls are out there hiding behind a computer screen using the anonymity of the platform to act out.”*
- *“I feel like one should never act differently with a group of players online than they would if they were all in the same room.”*
- *“The sheer volume of toxic spew that come out some players mouths is ridiculous. It would never be tolerated in person.”*

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- The *normalization* of toxic behavior
- *“Welcome to the internet!”*
- *“Just mute people and move on, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that can be done about this, not from Blizzard and not from the community, considering that the community itself is the problem. Grow some thicker skin.”*
- *“Any competitive game with an e-sports criteria is going to be like this. Hate to break it to you but that's just the way it is.”*

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- *Gender and toxicity*
- *“While I'm used to such overused jokes as go to the kitchen and make me a sandwich [...] this time I had people asking me if I would break their cherry because of my username and worse.”*
- *“Constantly asking me about sexual favors for the small time that I was in their [chat] until the end of the game.”*
- *“This isn't just an Overwatch problem. It's an online problem. One day the stigma that women aren't allowed to be "gamers" will be gone.”*

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- The *gaming culture*
- *“Toxicity is inherent to gaming culture, not just Overwatch. You’re dealing with a culture spearheaded by men for decades who were defined as being ostracized in their youth and used games as an escape to say and do whatever the hell they wanted to.”*
- *“There is literally no excuse for toxicity. Gaming culture, and by proxy Overwatch, is just filled with negative people.”*
- *“I’m sorry. Puberty and anonymity don't mix. Then throw in internet/gaming culture. It's like a disease these days.”*



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- Some of the arguments are well-known from research: anonymity/social disinhibition, gender issues and the concept of normalization.
- The gaming culture is an interesting analytical point. This may be viewed as a *field*, in the sense of Bourdieu's concept.
- The transformation of gaming culture into mass culture creates conflict. Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* – the rules of the game are changing...

*Thank you for listening!*