# game environments



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Special Issue


**Democracy Dies Playfully. (Anti-)Democratic Ideas in and Around Video Games**


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# Issue 13 (2020)

## report

## interview

## review

# *It Was Just a Joke*. Demagoguery, Humor, and Video Game Streaming

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## Abstract

Video game communities and fandoms have been a breeding ground for hate speech and neo-fascist ideology. In 2017, the most popular *YouTuber* at the time, PewDiePie, used a racial slur during a stream, apologized, and obfuscated the racism of the moment by calling it a *joke*. Other personalities like streamer Dr. DisRespect have faced little-to-no backlash for using similar racist slurs. Massive fan support from across the internet has insulated these, and similar gaming content creators, from consequences for their behavior because they embody the ideologies of these fans. These communities have relied on establishing *in* and *out* groups. Typically, these *in* an *out* groups position white, straight, males as the primary *in* group within the streamer communities. Using Roberts-Miller's (2017) definition of demagoguery, we demonstrate that streaming communities promote demagoguery and anti-democratic communication. Through an analysis of problematic humor used by PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect and their response to the fallout, we argue that humor often functions as a rhetorical shield against criticism and further entrenches the troubling political trends found within many of these fan groups.

Video game communities and fandoms have long been a breeding ground for hate speech and neo-fascist ideology. With support for white nationalism rising in the mid-to-late 2010s, there have been numerous instances of gamer communities absorbing and participating in these ideologies such as the *GamerGate* movement (Allaway 2014, Dewey 2014, Massanari 2015, Apperley 2016) and the backlash to the

launch of *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* (2017) (Robertson 2017). Openly racist behavior is often excused by members of the community because they frame in-group communication as humor, especially if the offending members are prominent. At the time of writing, Felix Kjellberg or, as he is more commonly known, PewDiePie[i] is one of the most popular and successful video game vloggers and is also no stranger to controversies around racist language and jokes. In 2017, PewDiePie faced intense censure from within and outside of the gaming community for a string of Nazi and Holocaust related jokes which were at best problematic and at worst antisemitic (Berg 2017). PewDiePie and his fans defended the jokes as satirical and mocking Nazis, but many of his sponsors and media partners including the Disney corporation removed him from their marketing which likely hurt his earnings significantly (Berg 2017). Later that year while streaming battle royale game *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (*PUBG)*, PewDiePie called an opposing player a racial slur (Ohlheiser 2017). While public backlash was strong, PewDiePie apologized for using the slur and his subscription count continued to climb despite his track record of hate speech. The opposition to PewDiePie was so strong that *YouTube* omitted him from their yearly *Rewind* videos summarizing the significant trends of the past year. Despite this, PewDiePie was not removed from *YouTube* and continues to help the site attract millions of viewers and fans. In a similar series of events, popular *Twitch* streamer Herschel Beahm IV also known as Dr. DisRespect has a history of mocking Asian players and their accents (Gach 2018). DisRespect responded to criticism by calling it absurd because his wife is of Asian descent and saying those who criticize his humor are "clueless" (Gach 2018).

While these are not the only cases of prominent live streamers using similar language, they are indicative of rhetorical strategies used by online personalities in the gaming industry to preserve the communities that provide them with financial support. For example, streamers like Tyler Blevins (Ninja) (Gilbert 2018), Tunner Tenney (Tfue)

(Stephen 2019), and Daniel Walsh (Dubs) (Field Level Media 2020) were involved in scandals where they said racial slurs on stream. While some apologize for their behavior and language, other prominent video game streamers like PewDiePie and DisRespect largely avoid culpability. They position their *truest* fans as in-the-know about a secret layer of humor and irony that the general population might misconstrue as offensive. This process not only justifies the behavior, but it also creates a stronger boundary between the fandom and the outside world, further entrenching fan support. In this paper, we describe how this process works and reflects trends found in gaming communities and in game design. Through rhetorical theories on demagoguery, we explain how streamers like PewDiePie and DisRespect create these insular communities where hate speech and racism of other forms can go unchallenged. We examine these two online, video game entertainers in particular as case studies for this because of their prominence within their respective platforms and because of the widespread attention that these incidents received (Alexander 2019, Gach 2018, Berg 2017). While other case studies also exist of online video game personalities employing similar tactics, these two specific instances informed the cultural response to similar controversies that followed. By analyzing the aforementioned examples in depth, we will show that the rhetoric of demagoguery exists outside of spaces where it is traditionally thought to function and creates safe havens for white nationalism and similar movements to grow in online spaces. Through this analysis, we propose that these dynamic spaces, environments, and platforms deserve substantial attention and critique as part of the gaming ecosystem.

## Demagoguery and Video Games

Video games and the culture surrounding them have spurred considerable scholarly attention into their potential to act as forms of propaganda and sites for harassment,

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prejudice, and bias. Both qualitative studies (McLean and Griffiths 2019) and quantitative studies (Fox and Yang 2016) of harassment towards women in online contexts demonstrate the prevalence of misogyny in general digital contexts. This is particularly a problem in online gaming spaces (Cote 2017) where women are frequently targeted for harassment on the basis of being *fake* having their skill or expertise questioned or disqualified, and blamed for issues they have no control over. While this is indicative of larger societal level issues with regards to inclusion and justice, the exclusion of all but men from these cultural gaming spaces has been an intentional and deliberate exercise, one we will explore further below. The effect of this exclusion is that members of this space who consider themselves to be *gamers* have already been conditioned to believe in an *us vs. them* mentality that can easily lead into demagoguery.

In addition to the misogyny, this division between *gamers* and what are often labelled as *casuals*, *social justice warriors* (SJW), or *non-player characters* (NPC), has taken on an additional dimension of racism and white supremacy. From the beginnings of online play, black bodies have been discriminated against and use of racial slurs in online gaming spaces is common (Alwaysblack, 2006). In the aftermath of the targeted harassment campaign of *GamerGate*[ii] and the disbursement of its members across digital spaces such as *Reddit* and *8chan*, the development of neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideologies have pervaded internet gaming spaces (Etherington 2018). This has taken several forms such as subreddits on *Reddit*, targeted harassment and review bombing of games deemed *political* or catering to SJWs, and the creation and use of dozens of symbols, sayings, and memes as dog whistles (López 2014). We argue that in addition to the incidents, strategies, and approaches mentioned above, humor functions as a particularly effective tool for the development of demagoguery and subsequent spreading of hate speech through the establishment

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of in-groups (*gamers*) and out-groups (*casuals,* women, SJWs, etc.). The easy incorporation of comedic elements into video game streams such as PewDiePie's over-the-top reactions to jump scares provides a context in which any claim, utterance, or act can be dismissed as unintentional and irrelevant because it is *just a joke*. Those who find it funny *get* it, and those who are offended are treated as outsiders. This is no accidental system, rather, as scholars such as Kocurek (2015) and Morrissette (2019) have shown, it is one that has been set up and perpetuated in video game culture for nearly fifty years.

The long history of video game comedy and advertising is a consistent exercise in using humor to establish a particular identity and then using what Chess (2017, 5) argues is a "designed identity" to include certain groups while excluding others. As scholars such as Kocurek (2015) and Chess (2017) have deftly pointed out, the narrative of video game history is one dominated by a hegemonic, male perspective. Kocurek (2015) uses ethnographic analysis coupled with close readings of historical events and classic video games to demonstrate how the video game industry centered itself around young, white, males as a means of gaining legitimacy. Chess (2017, 6) argues that this legacy of the constructed video gamer as male continues on to this day as evidenced by the positioning of non-male gamers as "Player Two." Two quick examples demonstrate how both humor and objectification have been used in video game culture to both demarcate group membership as being exclusive to men and exclude marginalized populations. In 2000, Eidos released the fourth installment of the Tomb Raider series, *Tomb Raider: Last Revelations* (1999). Known for being unusual in having a female protagonist, the Tomb Raider series has long stood as an example of how even when female-coded characters exist, they do so under the scrutiny of the male gaze. IGN, one of the most prominent video game culture websites in the world at the time of writing, reviewed *Last Revelations* with the tagline

under the title: "Lara, you're cute, but please just go away. I've got a headache…" (Justice 2000) and made it clear who was the audience for the game and what purpose women should serve to that audience. Reviewer Brandon Justice (2000) begins his review:

> "Women. What an incredibly perplexing creation. On one hand, they can be beautiful, intelligent, compassionate, engaging, and on occasion, down right awe inspiring. On the other, they can be ugly, spiteful, shallow, heartless, ambiguous and deliberately deceptive to the point of frustration that borders on insanity. But still, we come back for more."

The positioning of the audience for the review as *we* in the final sentence implicitly indicates that only those who have sexual interest in women are welcome in the review. Justice (2000) continues,

> "Lara Croft is back, and has most certainly matured into the leading lady of video gaming, but is she the girl you hope you're going to marry, or that bitch you still can't believe you got suckered into dating? Let's explore, shall we?"

Here the use of the second person pronoun *you* explicitly puts the audience into the role of a sexual relationship with a video game character. Justice uses humor to help make the review entertaining, but the humor is not poking fun at his own desires. Instead the humor is used to clue in the reader as to who the review is for: people who think women are bitches that sucker men into dating them. In this way, humor is commonly used in video game cultures to delineate who is and is not welcome in that space.

Sexualization and objectification are also frequently used to establish insider and outsider status in video game cultures. *Dead Island: Riptide* (2013) offered a special edition that featured a hand-painted figurine of a beheaded torso wearing a small bikini and thong, covered in blood (Lukas 2015). With all the limbs and head

removed, the statue leaves little representation for any possible agency. What remains are the parts of female anatomy most often sexualized by the male gaze. The image of the torso is used again on the packaging for the collector's artwork, this time with a large, claw-like tear ripping through the packaging. The sexualization of both the body and the violence toward it act as clear indicators of the hyper-masculinized audience the advertisement both creates and caters to.

These examples, along with the countless others documented by scholars such as Chess (2017), Shaw (2013), and Kocurek (2015), are evidence that large AAA video games are typically marketed toward a young, male audience. Over time, through deliberate strategies by the video game industry to professionalize itself as well as increased advertising and marketing toward young, white males, the identity of who was and was not a *gamer* constituted the formation of an in-group (Paaßen, Morgenroth, and Stratemeyer 2017, Paul 2018, McClean & Griffiths 2019). Propagated by the advertisements targeted toward them, members of this in-group began to see themselves as the center of the video game industry and acted as gatekeepers of a *gamer* culture. As Boudreau (2018) demonstrates in her analysis of boundary keeping and digital subcultures, these groups traditionally formed around age and geographical location, but in the age of the Internet, subcultures form around a sense of identification. Much has been written on incidents such as *GamerGate* that demonstrate how this identity of the default *gamer* as a straight, white, male has been toxic (Aghazadeh et al. 2018). We build upon this work to demonstrate how the development of the idea of the default *gamer* has led to the creation of demagoguery in video game fandoms, particularly those centered on an individual streamer or content creator. This is the basis of demagoguery, and we argue that video game streamers and their fandoms frequently engage with demagoguery under the disguise of humor.

Demagoguery can be a slippery term, one that is used to silence populist movements or legitimize dictatorships, so it is especially important to have a firm understanding of how demagoguery operates and why it is detrimental to democratic deliberation. Patricia Roberts-Miller (2017) defines demagoguery as discourse that reduces all decisions, policies, and motivations to questions of identity. She argues that in demagoguery:

> "Complicated policy issues can be reduced to a binary of us (good) versus them (bad). [Demagoguery] says that good people recognize there is a bad situation, and bad people don't; therefore, to determine what policy agenda is the best, [demagoguery] says we should think entirely in terms of who is like us and who isn't." (Roberts-Miller 2017, 8)

The establishment of in-groups and out-groups is the first step on the path to demagoguery and becomes the basis for decision-making with demagogic cultures and societies. Of course, not every example of a group or club with defined members is a demagoguery, but when group or club membership increasingly becomes the measure of both a person's worth and the merit of their argument, then the group or club has verged into demagoguery. Decision making and reasoning deriving from in-group and out-group status is the first characteristic of demagoguery.

The second characteristic of demagoguery and demagogic discourse is its denial of outside perspectives, particularly when those denials are based on the out-group status of the perspective. Roberts-Miller (2017, 35) notes that this particular quality of demagoguery "insists that the Truth is easy to perceive and convey, so that complexity, nuance, uncertainty, and deliberation are cowardice, dithering, or deliberate moves to prevent action." Those who believe and support this view

> "deny that they are looking at the world from a particular perspective (let alone mediated), they see no need to learn how to look at things from the

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> perspective of other people (in fact, they often believe they can see all
> perspectives from their position). Their experience is normal and universal,
> other perspectives are special and particular and prejudiced." (Roberts-Miller
> 2017, 40)

In demagogic cultures, certainty and gut-reactions are more valuable than sustained dialogue and inquiry. The result is that group-biases are upheld through selective examples used to confirm previous stereotypes. A double standard develops where the in-group's views and actions become normalized and proper simply because they are performed by the in-group. Out-group actions are wrong because they are performed by the out-group.

To maintain this equilibrium, demagogic cultures must actively other all outside views (Roberts-Miller 2017). One particular way this has been successfully done is through the use of humor or, more often, through an appeal to humor as an apology. Roberts-Miller (2017, 100) argues that

> "demagogic humor is generally mean, and doesn't have the destabilizing effect
> that a lot of humor has (in which at least part of the joke is on the person
> telling it)—it's only about the out-group and their minions."

The effect of this type of humor and dismissal is that the in-group is able to use language that often positions the out-group as less than human, oftentimes as a form of property or type of animal. When called out upon the dehumanizing language, the in-group deflects the criticism towards intent instead of content, with humor being the frequent scapegoat and *free speech* as a close second.

The final characteristic of demagoguery present in PewDiePie's and DisRespect's streams is how they foster a culture of loyalty to the in-group and its leader. In demagoguery, the leader of the movement or its most prominent figure relies on a

form of authority that Ann Ruth Wilner (1984, 2) deems "charismatic leadership." Far from popular connotations of charismatic leadership being positive, in a sociological sense, charismatic leadership is marked by four toxic qualities as identified by Wilner: the leader is seen as superhuman or has god-like powers, followers support and do not question the leader's statements, members of the group blindly follow the leader's commands, and the in-group gives an enduring emotional commitment to the leader (Wilner 1984, 8). Charismatic leadership is often present in cults or other hierarchical-based societies, but its manifestation in demagoguery is through the projection of the in-group onto the leader. Roberts-Miller (2017, 59) argues that

> "charismatic leadership satisfies our desire to be part of something bigger, and, paradoxically, to hand all power over to someone else can make us feel more powerful because we think that person is the best version of ourselves."

The projection of the in-group onto their leader becomes a way to dismiss personal flaws of individual members. In absolving the personal of guilt or responsibility, the group must then protect and defend the leader at all costs, since any attack or fault of the leader is now a fault of the entire in-group. In charismatic leaderships, Roberts-Miller (2017, 59) argues that

> "our sense of self-worth gets attached to the identity of the leader, so that we take personally any criticism of that leader, and have as much difficulty admitting flaws or errors on the leader's part as we do on our own."

Because an attack on the leader is an attack on all in-group members, demagogic cultures that rely on charismatic leadership often have very vocal constituents that vehemently deny, defend, and reflect any criticism of the leader. The ultimate effect is that dialogue and deliberation become impossible because the only quality that becomes valued in an attack on the leader is loyalty to the leader.

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Having identified three of the chief characteristics of demagoguery, we will now analyze specific examples and instances of video game culture in general and the streams of PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect in particular. From this analysis, we will demonstrate how these cultures enact and reinforce demagoguery at the expense of democratic and civil norms, all of which has a cumulatively toxic effect in other areas of culture, media, and politics.

## Enacting Demagoguery in Streaming Communities

Creating fan unity is not unique to PewDiePie or Dr. DisRespect and many of the strategies they use to cultivate their fanbase are utilized by Streamers and *YouTube* personalities at large. Streamers will often create or adopt a fan-made nickname for fans, develop catchphrases, and encourage fan engagement to make fans feel loyalty to the streamer's brand. PewDiePie has called his fans *Bros* while fist-bumping his camera at the end of videos while Dr. DisRespect has referred to subscribers as members of the *Slick Daddy Club*.[iii] PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect also sell merchandise and monetize their videos and streams through their respective platforms, *YouTube* and *Twitch*, which creates an additional layer of fan loyalty as they can literally buy into a content creator's work. While these approaches are not unique to streamers or even to internet personalities, online communities such as these can have a rapid feedback loop between streamers and their fans as many streamers have a live chat running as they stream, a comments sections below their posted videos, and online chat communities like *Reddit* or *Discord* where fans can discuss the streamer and their content. This shorter loop gives fans the feeling that they are interacting with the streamer more directly, thus making it possible for these fandoms to slip into in-group and out-group structures. These community dynamics can lead to fans reacting vitriolically when their fandom is not shared by others. When

PewDiePie was omitted from the *YouTube* Rewind video series in 2017 and 2018, fans expressed their outrage by overwhelmingly downvoting the videos. The *YouTube* Rewind series is intended to summarize the previous year on YouTube, and though PewDiePie was the most popular *YouTube* channel in the world, *YouTube* excluded him from their summaries because of his antisemitic and racist comments and imagery (Alexander 2019). The Rewind video for 2018 even became the most disliked video on the platform to date, though this was not solely because of PewDiePie's absence from the platform as fans of other creators or trends objected to their absence from the video as well (Alexander 2019). Regardless, PewDiePie's presence on *YouTube* continued to expand.

PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect both employ similar rhetorical moves when defending their problematic humor that dismiss objection by reinforcing the in-group and out-group dynamics of their fandom. In one of the videos that sparked backlash against PewDiePie, he used popular freelance app *Fiverr* to ask people who did not speak English to write "Death to all Jews" (Berg 2017) and display it in a video. In a now-deleted video from January 17, 2017, PewDiePie creates a dichotomy between humor and hate speech to defend his position. PewDiePie describes the situation as one of mocking the Nazis and pushing the envelope but not one of direct hate speech: "I think there's a difference between a joke and actual like, fuck, death to all Jews" (Kjellberg 2017 cited in Berg 2017). He further emphasizes this joke/hate speech dichotomy by noting he did have people create the sign, but he never said

> "Hey guys, PewDiePie here. Death to all Jews, I want you to say after me: Death to all Jews. And, you know, Hitler was right. I really opened my eyes to white power. And I think it is time we did something about this." (Kjellberg 2017 cited in Berg 2017)

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PewDiePie establishes the boundaries of antisemitism as overt and explicit, that anything short of endorsing Hitler and encouraging others to do so is passable which gives him virtually unlimited leeway when determining what is acceptable humor. In this relationship, the metric for determining if a video is a joke or hate speech is in the speaker, not in the audience, because PewDiePie is able to dictate after the fact whether he was making antisemitic remarks. Similarly, Dr. DisRespect received censure from journalists and gamers for how he mocked the English accents of Chinese players. Dr. DisRespect responded similarly to PewDiePie by framing the incident as a joke/hate speech dichotomy, referring to the criticism as "clueless" (Beahm 2018 in Gach 2018). Unlike PewDiePie, Dr. DisRespect leaned more heavily on his identity to excuse the behavior by noting that he has many friends of Asian descent and that his wife is from the Hawaiian island Molokai and has Filipino family (Gach 2018). Dr. DisRespect argues that the jokes cannot possibly be racist because of his identity and the identities of those around him. By being surrounded by people of Asian descent, Dr. DisRespect claims he is immune from this sort of racism, so anyone claiming otherwise merely fails to understand the joke. For PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect, any criticism that does not meet nearly impossible criteria is evidence that the critics are from the out-group and that in-group fans must accept all jokes as acceptable.

In demagoguery, the in-group projects their ideals into an idealized conception of what reality is. In doing so, they claim that the way they perceive things is objectively true and other perspectives are biased, faulty, or just plain incorrect. When PewDiePie or Dr. DisRespect dismiss sexism, racism, and homophobia through an excuse of *it was just a joke* or other deflections based on humor, they engage in a sort of dog whistle with the in-group. Those who are able to see the slur as being innocent, free of hate, and all in good fun are interpellated as part of the in-group. Those who feel the slur was in poor taste, hateful, and part of a long tradition of systemic prejudice

are made to feel as they are on the outside. The discussion then becomes one of whether or not you have in-group status instead of a discussion on anti-Semitism or racism. This is often seen in the form of fan comments that redirect any potential arguments and reduce it down to a question of identity. For example, one fan argues,

> "Im [sic] really happy for the guy! Through [sic] all the ups and downs hes [sic] still managed to retain a happy life :D although theres [sic] a lot of disgusting politically correct assholes on twitter getting upset and harassing him for it :<," (Anonymous 2019)

Anyone who objects to the usage is on the outside, and in demagoguery, those on the outside do not have a right to voice their own opinion. Because the in-group sees their leaders' actions as good and virtuous, no true justification for the actions is needed. In fact, many fans and apologists for PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect insists that the truth of their not being racist, sexist, homophobic is so obvious, that it does not need to be pointed out. If someone requires justification or proof, this is an <span style="float:right">371____</span> obvious sign that they do not share the same values and beliefs as the in-group, and therefore they can be ignored.

## The Next Step

Therefore, video game cultures in general and those centered on streamers in particular have long relied on the establishment of in-groups and out-groups as a way of forming identity, proving brand loyalty, and demonstrating adherence to simplified and idealized explanations of how the world operates. While many fandoms and affinity groups also have developed ways of demarcating insider and outsider status, streamer culture has sharply veered into the realm of demagoguery through its insistence that insider and outsider status are determinations for validity

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in arguments, that their perspective most closely mirrors an *objective* reality that is plain for all to see, and a belief in loyalty as a defining value and charismatic leadership as desirable.

There is no easy fix for demagoguery. Just as demagogues are not immediately given power and privilege, there is no easy way to break down the systems that reinforce their power once put in place. Roberts-Miller (2017, 93) writes, "Demagoguery says that all of our problems can be solved if we purify our group of the bad people who are causing problems." It is not enough, or even a start, to begin the process of combatting demagoguery and bolstering democracy by casting aside the demagogues and their followers. As long as a culture of demagoguery exists, their void will simply be filled by new demagogues with new followers who rely on the same, prejudiced arguments about in-group and out-group status as a basis for decision making. Instead, here are three relatively simple tasks that can help combat demagoguery instead of merely treating its symptoms.

First, we must resist the pull of demagoguery as a cure and response to demagoguery. Claiming that all followers of PewDiePie or Dr. DisRespect should be done away with and disregarded simply based on their status as followers of particular streamers will not address the problem. As Hannah Arendt (1958, 17) argues about the totalitarian systems that demagoguery gives rise to, "It is, in fact, far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think." Instead of using demagoguery in a futile attempt to purge ourselves of demagoguery, the first step toward combating demagoguery needs to be in the identification and classification of demagogic media. When video game streamers defend racist, sexist, ableist, or bigoted actions on the basis of it being *just a joke* or insisting that an outsider could not possibly *get it*, those actions need to be called out as relying on ideologies of

upholding perceived purity (from SJWs, from *casuals*, etc.). In demagoguery, decisions are based on whether or not they agree with the in-group's principles. In democratic deliberation, decision making and debate is based on the perspectives, experiences, and expertise of those who will be affected by the policies. While streaming cultures have many differences from political campaigns, religion, schools, and other mechanisms of civic life, they all exist together as demonstrations of how to effectively communicate. Identifying demagoguery and demagogic thought in one area of society makes it more likely that citizens will be able to spot it in others.

Once we are able to identify and classify instances of demagoguery, the next step in combating demagoguery is to stop consuming it. Roberts-Miller compares demagoguery to algae and its ability to grow exponentially under the proper conditions. She describes the cycle of demagoguery as creating

> "an environment of more and more demagoguery. Then, for people competing for media markets, consumers, voters, and so on, demagoguery is likely to be the more effective rhetorical strategy, and more rhetors will choose it. And rhetors have to out-demagogue each other to get attention, buyers, voters." (Roberts-Miller 2017, 79)

This sense of imitation and escalation should come as no surprise to anyone who frequents *YouTube*, *Twitch*, or other social media platforms. Reaction videos become increasingly over-the-top, and announcements and unboxings become extravagant affairs. In a similar manner, demagoguery has to continually seek ways to top itself and become more incendiary, more bombastic. The way to break free from the regressive, self-perpetuating cycle of demagoguery that threatens democracy is through first identifying demagoguery and then to regulate our intake of what can potentially be a continual torrent of demagoguery. While platforms like *YouTube* and

*Twitch* can also focus their efforts on deplatforming streamers who create these environments, such deplatforming only carries weight if viewers choose to no longer consume the streamers' content.

Finally, we must build up robust systems that allow for democratic deliberation and civil discourse to flourish. Demagoguery relies primarily on emotional appeals, and, as social beings, we enjoy having our emotions synced with others in our groups. However, we should not confuse this emotional comfort with stability, righteousness, or justice. When PewDiePie uses a racial slur in a livestream and then passes it off as a joke, some of his followers may feel comforted by the fact that they too use racial slurs as a joke or angry reaction. This does not excuse either the streamer's or their followers' actions. Recognizing these moments not as gaffes but as dog whistles and delineators of in-group and out-group status allows consumers and users to become self-aware of their own social and emotional needs that are not being met in a healthy way. We all want a sense of belonging, and advocating and allowing for a plurality of voices to join in conversations, particularly when such conversations directly affect the voices that are often excluded from historically privileged in-groups, is the strongest way to combat the culture of demagoguery. Organizations such as I Need Diverse Games, Gaymer X, and Black Girl Gamers are all excellent examples of the type of work that needs to be done to remove demagoguery from video game culture and streamer spaces. Each of these organizations delineates in- and out group status on a different basis – ethnicity, sexuality, and race. However, these organizations do not rely on in-group/out-group status as the basis for their decision making, nor do they rely on creating a stark *other* or *us-vs-them* mentality. In doing so, they model proper moderation of non-demagogic gaming spaces. Particular voices are centered in each of these organizations, but other, respectful voices are not excluded. Allowing a diversity of voices, perspectives, and opinions to

374

flourish within the culture of gaming is a step on a way to a more robust democracy that allows for the full participation of all its members regardless of perceived in- and out-group status.

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[i] Because we are analyzing Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie) and Herschel Beahm IV (Dr. DisRespect) as performers and gaming personalities, we choose to use their performer names instead of their legal names. While Kjellberg is PewDiePie and Beahm is Dr. DisRespect, we consider the personas of PewDiePie and Dr. DisRespect to be the object of analysis here and thus refer to them as such.

[ii] GamerGate was the online backlash that started in 2014 against feminist game developers and game

critics like Anita Sarkeesian, Zoë Quinn, and Brianna Wu as they began to openly criticize sexism with game design and the game industry. While it began under the guise of wanting more transparency and ethics in video game journalism, the movement attacked developers, journalists, critics, academics, and others who it saw as injecting identity politics into games.

[iii] As part of his persona, Dr. DisRespect has referred to his fake, black mustache as the *Slick Daddy*.