Should I stay or should I go? A Study of Pickup Groups in Left 4 Dead 2

# Details

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## Topics

## Sample

"...we have conducted an autoeth-nographic study of pickup groups (PUGs) in the game Left 4 Dead 2(Valve 2009) (L4D2 hereafter). We have looked at how participants enter and leave these groups, how they negotiate their performances, present themselves, burst out in anger and make excuses." (Authors, 118)

## Implications For Parents About

Other

## Other Parent Implication

Social life of gaming encounters; inclusion and exclusion in online games; games as social arenas where exhibitions of misogyny, racism, homophobia and other forms of intolerance are more likely to ‘pass’ than they would in other activities

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Stakeholders About

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Social mechanisms for gameplay; games as social arenas where exhibitions of misogyny, racism, homophobia and other forms of intolerance are more likely to ‘pass’ than they would in other activities

# Abstract

In this article we report an autoethnographic study of pickup groups (PUGs) in the game Left 4 Dead 2 (L4D2). The study focuses on how PUGs as social arenas are constituted by their participants and the role game design plays in structuring interaction. We use Goffman’s idea that activities are surrounded by a metaphorical frame together with an understanding of gameplay design patterns in order to analyze inclusion and exclusion, social positions and the relation between the game context and the players’ “wider worlds.” In the case of L4D2 the design pattern of Symbiotic Player Relationships creates a social situation that puts extra pressure on the players to perform well and leads to issues of identity. By negotiating the boundary between their in-game identity, based on gaming skill, and other social relations outside of the game context, players can constitute a more stable game session. The study concludes with the tentative suggestion that positive perceptions of other players’ out-of-game identity can save a game from falling apart, yet negative perceptions of other players’ values and out-of-game identities pose no threat to the game activity.

# Outcome

"Our study showed that when players communicate with each other, even if it is very sparse communication, they make a social agreement that seems to make kicking and rage quitting more unlikely. They present themselves as something more than just a position in the sys-tem. Goffman’s metaphorical boundary between the game activity and the wider world thus becomes more solid, i.e. less likely to fall apart, when players show more of themselves than their local ‘player iden-tity.’ Humor, self-criticism, politeness, etc. are social elements which give players a relationship outside the game-relevant domain and yet these observations indicate that they are crucial for the game experi-ence. This means that elements like politeness can be strategically used in a meta-game where it is important to take measures so the activity does not fall apart, for instance through anti-quit talk." (Authors, 139-140)