RACIAL DIVERSITY IN THE FIGHTING GAME COMMUNITY

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Extended Abstract

In recent year competitive video games and game streaming has become an increasingly popular medium, along with competitive 'Esports' tournaments. Fighting games such as Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat, and Super Smash Brothers have their roots in early arcades and remain popular to this day, attracting a sizable and passionate competitive community. Today, however, first-person shooters, real time strategy, and multiplayer online battle arena are among the most popular among both viewers and players (Entertainment Software Association, 2017). Fighting games are typically games that are played in a one versus one format while physically in the same space as one's opponent. These video games communities, online and shared in-person are typically seen as being predominantly white, and when looking at game competitions within these genres of games, this holds true (Paterson, 2017). While industry demographic reports gladly espouse the distribution of men and women playing video games, there is unfortunately a lack of racial demographics data however (Entertainment Software Association, 2017). Observational data suggest that fighting games seem to be different yet there is a lack of academic work examining this phenomenon. Thus, this study aims to examine the presence of minority gamers within the competitive fighting community. More specifically, this work aims to fill this gap in literature by first answering if there is a heightened level of racial diversity within the fighting game community, and then what factors lead to it developing in this way.

To achieve this, popular press articles and community forum discussions were gathered to examine how this community sees and presents itself to the world at large. Preliminary findings indicate higher levels of racial diversity have been noted within the popular video games press and discussed within the video games community. According to sources within popular press as well as from members of this community, lower barriers to entry of fighting games through physical arcades is a prominent driver of heightened levels of diversity. It was far less expensive in the early 90s to go to a local arcade and play a few rounds of Street Fighter II than to buy a personal computer and play Quake over the internet. Additionally, the physically present nature of these games leads to a far more human and social gameplay experience, resulting in a more inclusive space for people to play games together. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with members of the fighting game community were conducted to ensure a more robust understanding of the presence/absence of diversity. Overall,

participants indicate that they whole heartedly agree with the conclusions and statements found within the popular press. To obtain more information from a wider group of individuals, focus groups will be conducted with members of local fighting game tournament communities. The primary aim of these focus groups will be discussing fighting games in detail with groups of community members, with the intention of discovering how they came to be a member of this community and to find commonalities between their lived experiences. It is hoped that these interviews will also agree with research conducted within the popular press as well as data obtained from the informal interviews.