

CHAPTER 12.

LIVING BY THE CODE

DRAFTING AND ENACTING COMMUNITY GUIDELINES FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE ESPORTS ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the role a code of conduct plays in making collegiate esports a more inclusive space. It argues for careful reflection on such a code of conduct in the all-too-often contested space of esports. It then describes the process of one collegiate institution's esports program to form a guidelines committee. This committee, of which the authors are participants, served to advise arena staff members in how to contour the program's code of conduct to fit the needs of its diverse student body. The paper then describes the resources this committee produced and lays out the process by which the committee's work might be replicated in other contexts.

Introduction

The aspiration to make esports a more inclusive space has a nearly universal appeal among major stakeholders. Teams, sponsors, tournament organizers, publishers, and live streaming platforms all want increased viewership and broader appeal. Moreover, high schools and colleges with esports clubs and/or teams want their students to flourish in a welcoming space free from identity-based judgment. Esports is a site at which policy

quite publicly meets practice. Diversity statements drafted by academic administrations commonly state that all students are welcomed to participate in campus activities without harassment; in esports, these statements are then put to the test, often on camera, and under the scrutiny of players, audiences, developers, and sponsors.

This paper discusses the authors' efforts, in an interdisciplinary collaboration between university esports staff and on-campus academics, to refine the language of their institution's code of conduct for campus esports players, shoutcasters, and community members. The committee that formed to help refine this language also created training materials to demonstrate how university esports settings can maintain an inclusive and welcoming space while enacting preventative measures to stem disruptive and exclusionary behaviors before they happen. This paper describes the committee's composition, the scope of its work, the products of its labors, areas for future work, and the applicability of its results to other settings. We present a method for examining and crafting inclusive language in esports policies and documents that can be adapted and applied to a variety of esports contexts.

Background

Gaming generally and esports specifically are contested spaces in which identity-based harassment is all too familiar. As Consalvo (2012), Ruberg & Shaw (2017), Murray (2018), and others have noted, gaming culture is rife with identity-based harassment over anonymous public fora, including voice and text chat during gameplay. Additionally, gaming culture is punctuated by flashpoints of harassment campaigns against perceived "outsiders" to hegemonic game culture, especially in the spheres of video game development and journalism, as well as for other spokespeople for diversity. The cases of Anita Sarkeesian, Mattie Bryce, Zoe Quinn, and Brianna Wu, who

among many others were targeted for harassment and violence by video game players, testify to this. The experiences of these women, as analyzed by Cross (2016) and Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill (2017), speak to the range of real and symbolic violence that players will enact on others in attempts to keep games culture exclusive to particular kinds of players.

With respect to esports and its history in particular, Kocurek (2015) has documented gender-based discrimination in competitive gaming since the 1980s, and Taylor (2012) discusses at some length the ways in which gender is performed in esports. In particular, Taylor noted that female and genderqueer players in esports encounter heightened harassment and scrutiny at all levels of play, from novice to professional. In her latest book *Watch Me Play* (2018), which in part sprung out from her work in esports, Taylor addresses identity-based harassment in live streaming and esports, remarking that women, people of color, and queer players in both spheres are expected to accept harassment as part of their existence in games culture. In this, Taylor echoes Gray's (2012) argument that the racist label of "deviant" has been not only placed on black gamers but accepted by many of those gamers themselves. Although there is a growing trend within the games industry (including esports) to take public stances on the need for more diverse content and participants in games, Gray, Voorhees, & Vossen (2018) assert that these efforts are nonetheless entangled with entrenched values that resist diversity, and therefore concentrated efforts at all levels are needed to foster ideals of inclusivity that are not immediately contradicted by unexamined everyday practices.

As public-facing venues in which institutional policy addresses wider cultures with histories of identity-based exclusion, and as sites of great financial interest for industry members, collegiate esports shoulder the weight of heightened expectations to offer a corrective to issues of harassment in and around competitive gaming. One opportunity to make such a corrective is to

incorporate inclusive language into collegiate esports policies and guidelines. In the context of the authors' involvement, our keen interest is in the university esports program's code of conduct, which outlines how commitments to inclusion and multiculturalism are put into practice, as well as what consequences may arise from failing to meet those commitments. Inclusion, or fostering a sense of belonging and respect for individuals regardless of background, is essential for efforts to increase diversity and create better outcomes for individuals who want to be involved in games generally and esports specifically. In their literature review of codes of ethics and codes of conduct for the nursing profession with respect to how these codes communicate values of inclusiveness, Schmidt, MacWilliams, & Neal-Boylan (2016) outline how codes of conduct are essential for demonstrating expectations for how individuals should treat others with different backgrounds. Their review shows that a code of conduct which lacks carefully crafted inclusive language encourages the types of symbolic violence referenced above that has plagued games culture. Incorporating inclusive language into codes of conduct is one way that esports programs can build a framework for connecting the university's stated interest in diversity with the everyday practices that are necessary to achieve this goal.

Committee Formation

On the university campus where the authors work, the esports program staff encountered disruptive incidents at their facility that prompted staff to reassess their policies regarding exclusionary behaviors around esports.¹ Staff members in the

1. One such incident involved a student shouting threats and expletives at online opponents while using the esports program's facilities. Student staff members were initially reluctant to intervene when the disruptive behavior did not abate on its own. After this incident, senior program staff were motivated to reexamine the language of the code of conduct, how to communicate that code to students using the program's facilities, and training methods for staff members to anticipate similar incidents in the future.

program convened a committee to consider the issues at play, and one intervention the committee chose to pursue was to revise the language of the program's code of conduct for esports players and community members. This code would apply to players representing the school in competition (both on and off scholarship), shoutcasters commentating on the games, arena staff, anyone using the broadcasting station in the arena, and people playing games on the computers and consoles set up in the facilities. In addition to esports program staff, this committee was comprised of researchers from multidisciplinary backgrounds, including social sciences, humanities, and information science. The committee worked collaboratively to discuss how to refine the code to be as inclusive as possible in order to meet the needs and interests of a diverse student body.² The interdisciplinary composition of the committee in and of itself brought together many perspectives drawing from different areas of research related to gaming and social practices, resulting in close attention to exact phrasing and careful consideration and debate over potential consequences of different wordings. Over the course of the next year, the committee met in person and over digital platforms to coordinate its efforts, communicate ideas, and delegate responsibilities.

Scope and Work

The committee began with three charges in response to the esports program's needs: help refine the code of conduct, communicate that code more effectively, and put into place a means of arbitrating possible breaches of that code in cases in which the terms of the code may not easily apply. Researchers on the committee tapped peers working in game studies to

2. As of 2017, our institution serves an undergraduate population that is more than 85% nonwhite. As a public university, our institution has a particular interest in serving a student body as reflective as possible of the racial, religious, and ethnic diversity of people in the state, as well as in respecting the diverse genders and sexual orientations of its students.

collaborate together and add their expertise. Work on the language of the code of conduct began immediately with the first meeting: committee members and program staff discussed what sorts of expectations the code of conduct should outline and to whom its guidelines should apply. Following the first meeting, committee members independently worked on a shared digital document to mark it up, leave comments, and discuss the merits of certain choices of words (see Figure 1).

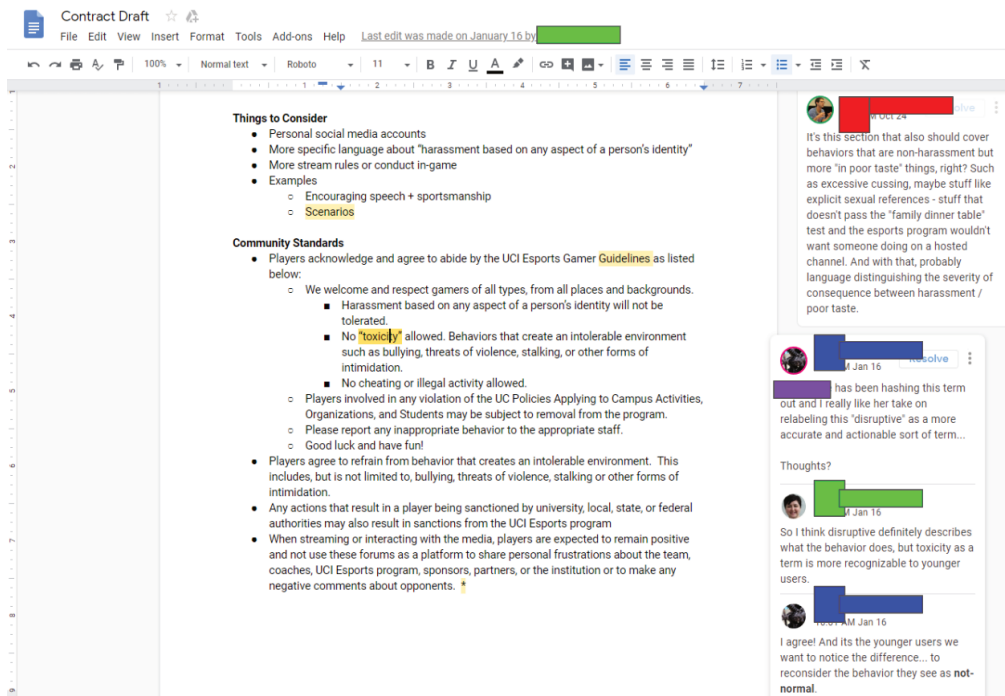


Figure 1: Discussion of language on collaborative document

Committee members pulled from a number of resources to support their views on how the code should best be phrased and how best to serve a diverse student body. These resources include AnyKey's "Live Streaming Moderation Best Practices for Event Organizers" white paper; the North America Scholastic Esports Federation ("NASEF") Code of Conduct; the Queer Games Conference ("QGCon") Inclusivity statement; and UC Irvine's Green Dot Bystander Intervention materials; among other resources. In the committee's view, these resources represent the best practices of nonprofits, academic

organizations, and esports professionals to create and maintain inclusive spaces where disruptive behavior is mitigated and addressed. Like the interdisciplinary nature of the committee's composition, these resources offered multiple perspectives on how to address disruptive behavior, the contexts in which it might occur, and the range of recommended responses to specific instances of it.

One impact of the committee's work was to clarify the meaning of "toxicity," which had previously gone unexplained in the code of conduct. With the committee's input, the term was explained as actions which negatively impact the social environment such as "bullying, threats of violence, stalking, or other forms of intimidation." Disambiguation of the language of the code of conduct was, in the committee's view, critical for clarifying expectations of participation in the space and to help others be aware of infractions while discourage passive bystanding. Players who use facility computers are required to review the code of conduct, which is now posted in multiple locations in the facility as well as online.

Over the course of the next few months, committee members drafted a "wiki" site as a resource for on-campus esports players and community members, with the intent of making this wiki publicly available for other interested institutions in the future. In their analysis of organizational wiki use, Stocker, Richter, Hoefler, and Tochtermann (2012) determined that utilizing a wiki makes current and future work easier, helps a group improve their processes, and facilitates knowledge sharing both internally and externally. However, organizational wiki usage must also account for its potential usage, need for managerial support, and clear communication strategies between creators (Stocker et al. 2012, p. 317). In the case of our wiki, committee members volunteered to author specific pages that would be cross-referenced with each other to discuss such topics as responsible social media etiquette and best practices for using

the arena’s communal streaming computer (see Figure 2). The committee will recruit additional members from across campus and rely on the resources of the esports arena to maintain the wiki in perpetuity.

Broadcast Station

The [redacted] features a streaming computer available to use for clubs that hold events in the arena, for people doing research, for pedagogical uses such as online office hours, or other purposes aligned with [redacted]. Those interested in streaming from this desk should read through this page and contact arena staff to discuss one’s purpose for using it and what room there might be in the streaming schedule.

The streaming computer is located by the console area in the arena. For streamer convenience, the station features multiple monitors, a spacious desk, a sound board that can accommodate multiple simultaneous commentators, and a professional backdrop.

Contents [hide]	
1	Uses of the Streaming Computer
1.1	Competitive league coverage
1.2	Events
1.3	Research
1.4	Pedagogy
1.5	Arena content creation
1.6	Other uses aligned with [redacted]
2	Proper Care
3	Conduct Guidelines
4	Streaming Procedures

Figure 2: Example “wiki” page

While the committee’s first stated purpose was to refine the code of conduct, and the second was to communicate that code more effectively, the third was to put into place a system for arbitrating “edge” cases in which the language of the code may or may not apply. At the time of writing, the committee has not yet been called upon to serve this purpose, but it has discussed hypothetical scenarios as well as the range of consequences that could be given to potential breaches of the code of conduct.

A fourth purpose for the committee presented itself as work on the other three progressed: to share its materials and discuss its findings to the wider scholarly community of collegiate esports. In the spring following its first meeting, the committee presented on its work at a national conference. There, committee members exchanged ideas with fellow researchers and industry members about strategies for making esports a more inclusive and diverse space. Comments from audience members were especially productive in directing the

committee's attention to issues to reflect upon more deeply, such as a path for appealing decisions and the merits of consulting with mental health professionals about disruptive behavior.

Conclusion

Through the committee's reflection, discussion, and collaboration described above, it condensed its process for creating and refining a code of conduct into the following method:

1. **Outreach:** Cast a wide net for prospective participants in the work of crafting the code of conduct.
2. **Collaboration:** Work together on the language used in that code, paying close attention to word choice — particularly around issues of identity — by consulting resources such as successful codes of conduct and inclusivity statements.
3. **Communication:** Convey that code to community members (players, shoutcasters, staff people, and users of the facility) through accessible platforms.
4. **Preparation:** Train staff according to the values at the heart of the code of conduct, using hypothetical scenarios for staff members to rehearse in advance of potential conflicts.
5. **Enforcement:** Set expectations and boundaries, then create procedures and establish consequences for minor and major infractions.
6. **Arbitration:** Put into place a plan to arbitrate in cases in which the code might not clearly apply.
7. **Reflection:** Consider on that which worked, or went unaddressed, or went wrong, in order to refine the code further.

In the committee's view, this method is adaptable and applicable to many esports contexts. Anywhere that the "rubber" of a university's stated commitment to inclusion meets the "road" of practice in esports, it is necessary to put careful thought into how to make such spaces welcoming to the interests of many. Language makes a difference, especially around issues of identity. Using language of inclusive pronouns, crafting policy that mitigates the potential for identity-based harassment on campus, and creating a culture of proactive inclusion rather than passive bystanders: all of these may at first sound straightforward. However, cultivating and refining the language of the code of conduct that works to these ends requires care and attention, as well as wide involvement of multidisciplinary perspectives.

Impact and Future Work

The committee's work is ongoing: some of its projects are scheduled to be completed in the near future, while others are intended as living documents subject to further refinement. The wiki site is drafted, and at the time of writing, it is scheduled to go live in the coming months. Once it does, it will be a resource both for people at our institution and for esports programs elsewhere, as an example of guidelines and policies that work in various contexts, written in thoughtfully constructed language aimed at including a diverse body of students. Moreover, the work of the committee has resulted in changes to the language of the contract for scholarship players, which is more extensive than the language for the code of conduct. One observable impact of the revised training materials on these scholarship players has been their adoption of the "green dot" language of the program's bystander training and their consistent use of this language in context at the arena. As such, they actively apply their training in situ. In terms of outcomes for the staff, they have attested to more confidence in moderating chat in the program's official streams, a clearer understanding of how to

respond to disruptive behaviors when they occur in the arena, and a more open discourse with patrons, visitors, and industry professionals about behavioral guidelines in the program. Also, as mentioned above, the committee has not yet been called upon to arbitrate in edge cases, but any future work in this vein will be a subject for subsequent scholarship.

Outside of this, the committee has also been called upon by industry members at a local chapter of the International Game Developers Association to share some of the exercises the university's esports arena uses for training staff members in bystander intervention. These resources are also being prepared to share online with the wider community of collegiate esports. Our work with this organization suggests promising potential for ongoing communication between institutions of higher education and industry members who produce and manage esports games; we are excited at the prospect of making an impact on the medium of the video game from the developer's side, and we hope this is a first step toward influencing norms of inclusivity in favor of more diverse participation in the esports community writ large.

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