"Against OUR rules": A Preliminary Taxonomy of Unsportsmanlike Conduct in FPS Esports

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INTRODUCTION

The esports arm of the digital games industry comprises many subcultures and genre of games, which are ever-increasing in their levels of professionalism and popularity (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). As a cyber environment, operational rules and "hacking" detection is implemented across online professional competitive gaming contexts in effort to thwart manipulation and encourage fair play. However, violation of rules which are "unwritten" and the influence of local implicit norms are much harder to track (Moeller et al., 2009; Smith, 2004). Much like traditional sports (Abad, 2010), esports are also susceptible to rule breaking and unsportsmanlike behaviour. Examples include the *Fnatic Boostmeister* bug in 2014 (Ouyang, 2014), and the *BIG jump bug* as recently as 2017 (Villanueva, 2017). As a relatively young—albeit rapidly evolving—form of mass entertainment, determining what kinds of player conduct are considered "unsportsmanlike" in esports, as well as discerning actions which violate local norms, may serve to enhance our understanding of the viewing/spectating experience and promote further avenues for research and practice. To date, there is a dearth of literature in this area creating a need for further critical scholarship (Carter et al., 2015; Cheung and Huang, 2011; Myers, 2017).

Research in esports has revealed certain acts of unsportsmanlike behaviour which are actually encouraged. For example, Carter and Gibbs (2013) highlight how acts of in-game skulduggery are encouraged by the community of *Eve Online* and part of the fabric of the game. In one of the most recent studies on the topic, Irwin and Naweed (2018) employed boundary-work theory to demonstrate how varying perspectives of unsportsmanlike conduct are conceptualised by spectators within the context of *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* (CS:GO) esports—an objective-based competitive multiplayer First Person Shooter esport. They revealed a broad range of spectator perspectives around player behaviour within their community, with results suggesting a degree of complexity in local esport gaming contexts. Moreover, they argued that spectator perceptions of unsportsmanlike behaviour were engendered through boundaries which were "protean" in nature, meaning they were drawn and redrawn

freely, disputed and defended variably, and in different contexts. These findings set esports apart from more traditional views of sportsmanship.

Building on Irwin and Naweed (2018), a study was undertaken with the aim to develop an initial taxonomy of unsportsmanlike conduct in CS:GO esports which recognised its various forms. A grounded theory orientation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was used to triangulate and analyse data obtained from 50 hours of online observations of in-tournament professional commentary and spectator chat, followed by semi-structured interviews with spectators ($n = 15$). Using NVivo (ver. 12), a holistic nodal hierarchy of all forms of unsportsmanlike behaviour in CS:GO was synthesised based on pre-game, in-game, and post-game dimensions of temporality. The hierarchy was then refined and categorised into a multi-level classification, which also reflected the "protean" nature of sportsmanship for some categories. With preliminary validation performed via concrete examples of unsportsmanlike conduct obtained from the study, and from literature, we present an initial taxonomy of unsportsmanlike behaviour and what we contend to reflect 'esportsmanship,' to guide the thinking of researchers, designers and testers, and to help understand and tease apart the nuances of unsportsmanlike conduct in different genres of esports.

BIO

Anjum Naweed is an associate professor of human factors and applied cognitive science at the Appleton Institute for Behavioural Science in South Australia. He received his PhD in psychology from Sheffield University, UK. His focus on decision-making and knowledge representation is concerned with the relationship between people and technologies, tools, environments, and systems, beginning with the user experience.

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