

# Digital Ethics

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Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online Aggression

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## Chapter 9

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### **Hateful Games**

Why White Supremacist Recruiters Target Gamers

Megan Condis

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## 9 Hateful Games

### Why White Supremacist Recruiters Target Gamers

*Megan Condis*

In 2014, a subset of gamers, encouraged by alt-right wunderkind Milo Yiannopoulos, converged around the hashtag #GamerGate and harassed and threatened progressive game developers and critics.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, YouTube gaming celebrities PewDiePie and JonTron got into hot water for making anti-Semitic jokes (Mulkerin, 2017), using racial slurs and repeating white nationalist<sup>2</sup> talking points, respectively (Sarkar, 2017) on their wildly popular channels. More recently, professional gamers and commentators like Matthew Trivett (Alexander, 2018), Félix Lengyel (Gallagher, 2018), Tyler Blevins (Tamburro, 2018), and Matt Vaughn (Hansen, 2017) also faced discipline for broadcasting racial slurs on the popular streaming service Twitch. And in 2017, Bethesda, the publisher of the newest entry in the *Wolfenstein* franchise (a series of first-person shooter video games in which the player fights against Nazis in an alternate reality where the Axis powers won World War II), angered some fans with their game's marketing campaign, which centered around the slogan "Make America Nazi-Free Again" (Axford, 2017). The slogan was deemed by these fans to be too overtly political and too critical of President Donald Trump and the alt-right. It might seem strange that online video game culture has become a serious recruiting ground for white supremacists. However, a closer look at the historical intersections of race, politics, and play in these spaces reveals why Internet gaming culture is particularly susceptible to white supremacist rhetorics. Such an investigation is important not only because it provides a vital framework for understanding what is going on in this particular subculture but also because it functions as a useful case study of Riche's (2017) concept of "rhetorical vulnerability" or the differential effects that rhetorical appeals have on different populations and the conditions that may prime certain audiences to be vulnerable to certain appeals.

I identify three axioms of online culture that explain why gamers (as a subculture) are especially vulnerable to white supremacist recruiters. First, on the Internet (following the famous Internet adage called "Godwin's Law"), *everyone* is a Nazi according to *someone*. The term "Nazi" is thrown around so often as to essentially have lost all meaning, a fact

that offers ample cover for those who actually espouse white nationalist beliefs. Second, gamers reason, if everybody is calling everybody else Nazis all the time, then it is most likely the case that nobody is *really* a Nazi. After all, the people they see online getting called neo-Nazis and fascists by those on the left don't look or sound like the Nazis they see commonly depicted in video games. Finally, given the distrust gamers feel for politicians (and progressive politicians, in particular) over the failed attempts at video game censorship that took place in the 1990s, any group who claims to be against social justice and political correctness (such as the neo-Nazis and white supremacists on the alt-right) starts to look like a friend to gamer culture.

Many on the left believe (or at least hope) that the rise of white supremacy online can be attributed either to a bunch of silly, childish trolls acting edgy to get attention (and who should therefore be ignored by serious-minded adults) or a bunch of ignorant, know-nothing, hate-filled rubes who will be easy to defeat in the culture war currently being waged for the hearts and minds of the next generation of voters. This kind of dismissive, disdainful thinking on the part of the left is dangerous in that it makes it difficult to recognize the sophisticated tactics neo-Nazis actually use to recruit. Nazis put a lot of thought into how to make their ideology appealing to young people, and anyone who wants to argue effectively against those appeals will first need to thoroughly understand white supremacist "pitches" as well as why it is that they are choosing the targets that they are. This essay looks at the specific appeals aimed at the subculture of online video game players as a case study in how neo-Nazis break down the beliefs, desires, and fears of a particular target group to make them seem to fit neatly into that group's worldview. My hope is that this exercise will serve as a template to help anti-racist activists and academics combat fascism and white supremacy more effectively by helping them to understand the rhetorical strategies that they will face and to shape their rebuttals accordingly.

### **Neo-Nazi Recruitment: The Basics**

Hate groups have been using the Internet as a recruitment tool since the earliest days of the web (Duffy, 2003, p. 292). According to Keipi et al.,

White supremacists in the US were among the very early users of the electronic communication network during the 1980s. Hate is said to have gone online as early as March 1984 when neo-Nazi publisher George Dietz used the bulletin board system (BBS) as a method of online communication. The White Aryan Resistance BBS followed, adopting this form of communication in 1984 and 1985.

(2017, p. 56)

Their ideal target demographic are “isolated, lonely, insecure, unfulfilled, bitter young men who feel that society at large has abandoned them and denies them the opportunities they feel entitled to” (Deo, 2017). Historically, this demographic consisted mostly of working-class white men who felt that they had lost their place of prominence within the broader culture (their status as providers and patriarchs) due to the pernicious influences of feminism and multiculturalism (Beck & Tolnay, 1995, pp. 122–123). The formation of hate groups therefore functions as “a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order” (Perry, 2001, p. 10).

With this in mind, it becomes easy to see why gaming culture provides an ideal environment for the recruitment and radicalization of young white men. After all, during the 1980s and the 1990s, video games were marketed almost exclusively to these same young white men as a way to escape the constraints of the real world. Games were billed as utopian spaces where geeky guys could indulge in masculinist power fantasies without reprisal (Kimmel, 2009, p. 150; Salter, 2017).<sup>3</sup> However, as the audience for video games began to grow more and more diverse and critics began calling for more diversity both within games and in the gaming industry, a subset of gamers started to feel as though their escapist fantasies were being “invaded” by outsiders and that straight white men were being replaced as the dominant demographic in gaming culture (Condis, 2018, p. 44).

#GamerGate was a perfect distillation of these frustrations, and white supremacists quickly noticed that the hashtag was easily exploitable as a recruitment opportunity. According to Cross,

GamerGate has successfully radicalized a disaffected group of mostly – not exclusively, but mostly – young white men who feel put-upon by structural changes in society, but for whom videogames are one of the most important and personal manifestations of that. And so it follows a very familiar pattern that we see in reactionary movements of late capitalism where that latent sense of resentment – of birthrights not being fulfilled, privilege no longer counting for as much as it used to, at least in the eye of the privilege beholder – is being exploited now as a source of movement energy.... There’s a very strong isomorphism between the idea of “they’re going to take our videogames away” and “they’re going to take our country away.”  
(as cited in Van Veen, 2015)

As a result, white supremacists rallied around the #GamerGate hashtag, using it as a vehicle to spread their ideology under the cover of a discussion of popular culture.<sup>4</sup> One poster on the neo-Nazi message board *Stormfront* chatted about how “GamerGate is widely supported by

young White men who might otherwise be oblivious to political matters” and would therefore be “a perfect opportunity to slowly wake them up to the Jewish question” (WakeUpWhiteMan, 2014). Another wrote:

The best thing GamerGate can do is create a perpetual assault to slow down feminists and the Judeo-Left until some sort of political opposition arises. They also need to expand their interests beyond video games, queers and “womyn” in your video games are simply a symptom of a Jewish media, academia, government, and economic hegemony, if they want to push their anti-social virtues they will do it whether you like it or not.

(GreekRebel, 2014)

More “serious” white supremacist publications like *Radix* (a journal founded by Richard Spencer) also entered the fray, publishing articles warning that “gamers protesting that they should be ‘left alone’ will fail unless they can actually ground their beliefs in something deeper and systematic” and that “ultimately, #Gamergate matters because it is one front in a war that encompasses our entire culture. Indeed, it is a war that determines whether something called ‘culture’ can even continue to exist” (“Gamergate and the End of Culture,” 2014). First they came for the video games and I said nothing...

The notion of piggybacking onto some event in the popular zeitgeist and using it as a vehicle to introduce white supremacist ideology to the masses has long been a key part of the neo-Nazi playbook. In fact, journalists recently discovered the actual playbook, a “style guide” designed to teach writers for *The Daily Stormer* how to best present their views for the consumption of the unindoctrinated. The style guide recommends that their writers should

Always hijack existing cultural memes in any way possible.... Cultural references and attachment of entertainment culture to Nazi concepts have the psychological purpose of removing it from the void of weirdness that it would naturally exist in, due to the way it has been dealt with in the culture thus far, and making it a part of the reader’s world. Through this method we are also able to use the existing culture to transmit our own ideas and agenda.... Packing our message inside of existing cultural memes and humor can be viewed as a delivery method. Something like adding cherry flavor to children’s medicine.

(Feinberg, 2017)

Gamson (1995) describes neo-Nazi recruiters as “media junkies” who monitor popular culture looking for useful carriers for their message of white supremacy (p. 85). When it comes to recruiting in online gaming

culture, this means utilizing popular memes and image macros, the lingua franca of the Internet, to showcase their beliefs while also utilizing a thin veil of plausible deniability, making it intentionally unclear whether a particular racist message comes from a place of sincere hatred or if it is just some troll shitposting “for the lulz.” According to white supremacist-turned-peace-activist Christian Picciolini (2018), it also means establishing a presence in virtual spaces where their targets congregate, including popular multiplayer online games like *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2018) or *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), to search for potential converts.

They have also taken to modifying popular video games like *Doom* (id Software, 2016) and *Counter-Strike* (Valve Corporation, 2000) to turn them into explicit celebrations of the Holocaust (Khosravi, 2017) and even developing their own independent titles like *Angry Goy* and *Angry Goy 2*, which give players the chance to shove Jewish characters into ovens and to shoot up an LGBTQ nightclub and a news station called the “Fake News Network” (Dillon, 2018). The intent of these overtures is to demonstrate to the target that white supremacist beliefs “fit in” with the rest of gaming culture by referencing the same cultural touchstones they hold dear.<sup>5</sup> And, at least according to the Nazis themselves, their strategy seems to be working; famed neo-Nazi hacker Andrew “Weev” Auernheimer bragged that #GamerGate was “by far the single biggest siren bringing people into the folds of white nationalism” (Futrelle, 2015).

However, it is not enough for neo-Nazi recruiters to simply repeat popular memes back at their targets with minor tweaks. A shared love of *Skyrim* or *Pokémon*<sup>6</sup> alone is not going to magically make someone convert to a radical right-wing viewpoint. In order to be effective, these recruitment tactics need to connect with something that already exists within the worldview of the target, something that neo-Nazis can use to make their own beliefs seem more palatable and compatible with the target’s existing beliefs. Within gaming culture, the first of these potential “hooks” stems from the tendency of people to default to hyperbole when communicating online; on the Internet, just about *everybody* is a Nazi in *somebody’s* eyes.

### **On the Internet, Everybody Is a Nazi (According to Somebody)**

In 1990, Mike Godwin was tired of seeing the word “Nazi” being thrown around willy-nilly online. Just about any time that a debate broke out on the Internet, he thought, somebody would end up labeling their opponent a Nazi sympathizer, even when discussing the most innocuous of topics. “Invariably,” he later wrote,

the comparisons trivialized the horror of the Holocaust and the social pathology of the Nazis. It was a trivialization I found both

illogical (Michael Dukakis as a Nazi? Please!) and offensive (the millions of concentration-camp victims did not die to give some net blowhard a handy trope).

(Godwin, 1994)

So, he decided to try and counteract this trend by creating “a counter-meme designed to make discussion participants see how they are acting as vectors to a particularly silly and offensive meme ... and perhaps to curtail the glib Nazi comparisons” (Godwin, 1994). What he created came to be known as Godwin’s Law of Nazi Analogies, which states that “as an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one” (Godwin, 1994).

Godwin’s Law was intended to be descriptive. It was supposed to be a “law” in the same sense as, say, the Law of Thermodynamics, not a legalistic restriction of acceptable speech. However, perhaps due to confusion about its name, it was “quickly adopted as a social rule, with general agreement that the guy who fell back on a Hitler analogy had lost the argument” by default (Weigel, 2005). Ugilt calls this use of Godwin’s Law the evoking of the “Nazi-card-card”:

At some point most of us have witnessed, or even been part of, a discussion that got just a little out of hand. In such situations it is not uncommon for one party to begin to draw up parallels between Germany in 1933 and his counterpart. Once this happens the counterpart will immediately play the Nazi-card-card and say something like, “Playing the Nazi-card are we? I never thought you would stoop that low. That is guaranteed to bring a quick end to any serious debate.” And just like that, the debate will in effect be over. It should be plain to anyone that it is just not *right* to make a Nazi of one’s opponent. The Nazi-card-card always wins.

(Ugilt, 2012, p. 1)

In other words, according to this misinterpretation of Godwin’s Law, calling someone a Nazi online must always already be an exaggeration and a falsification of the beliefs of one’s opponents, a rhetorical strategy that only the ignorant, the shrill, or the unscrupulous would deploy. As such, the Nazi-card-card provides excellent cover for actual white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis,<sup>7</sup> who can feel free to espouse all manner of racist, fascist, even genocidal beliefs with the knowledge that, whenever someone calls them out for sounding like a Nazi, *they* will be the ones who seem like calm, logical, rational thinkers to an outside observer, while their accusers will seem unhinged and overly emotional.

Further muddying the waters is the fact that the neo-Nazis that gamers encounter online don’t really look anything like the Nazis that they are

used to seeing. In fact, the depictions of Nazis that gamers have become accustomed to seeing are drawn using such extremely broad brush strokes that *no one* particularly resembles them.

### These “Very Fine People” Don’t Look Like Nazis

Nazis have a long tradition of serving as the “baddies” in American video games, the enemies that the player can slaughter with abandon without having to feel guilty about it. They typically come in one of two different flavors: the cartoonish caricature or the blank slate. The cartoonish caricature is an over-the-top character resembling a comic book super villain who is purely and unrelentingly evil simply for the sake of it (Ugilt, 2012, p. 3) and who poses a threat that goes beyond mere military might and tips into the science fictional or the occult. The most well-known example of this version of the video game Nazi is Mecha-Hitler, the robot-suited final boss of *Wolfenstein 3D* (id Software, 1992).

The Führer also appeared in *Bionic Commando* (Capcom, 1988) for the Nintendo Entertainment System, albeit in a loosely disguised form. The American version of the game was censored, and transformed the Nazi bad guys into a generic group of enemies called the “Badds.” But the title of the Japanese version of the game translates to *The Resurrection of Hitler: Top Secret* and features a plot to bring the great dictator back to life so that he can help them build a super weapon. And although the names have been changed in the American version, it is obvious who the player is supposed to be fighting, considering that the final boss, now called “Master D,” has a character portrait that looks exactly like the leader of the Third Reich. In both games, the deaths of these characters are rendered in excruciatingly gory detail, considering the graphics engines of the time, a fact that emphasizes the moral permission developers and players gave themselves to enjoy a bit of ultraviolence so long as it was aimed at a murderous fascist equipped with advanced technology (Kalata, 2017).

If these games inflate the Nazis into monstrous, superhuman threats, other games tend to reduce them to empty shells with no ideology or personality to speak of whatsoever. Games like *Call of Duty* (Infinity Ward, 2003), *Medal of Honor* (DreamWorks Interactive, 1999), and *Battlefield 1942* (Digital Illusions CE, 2002) provide endless waves of functionally identical Nazi soldiers as “fodder for [the player] to shoot at without needing to feel bad about it” (McKeand, 2018). They are “soulless machines” (Reuben, 2017), empty shells presented without any political context. In many ways, they resemble another video game enemy staple: the mindless zombie (McKeand, 2018). In fact, several games and game expansions have combined the two ideas, making shooting Nazi Zombies into the ultimate guilt-free form of target practice.

So, why is this a problem? Well, first, it means that video games rarely depict what it is about the Nazis that make them despicable in the first



place. We never see their genocidal policies. We never hear their racist rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> We just see Nazi paraphernalia like SS uniforms and swastikas slapped onto interchangeable enemies. To use video gamer parlance, Nazism becomes a “skin,” a cosmetic choice that serves as an easy shorthand for “scary bad guys” with no substance and no explanation of what it is exactly that makes them bad besides the fact that they are wearing the “bad guy costume.”

Second, when these comic book villains are the only images of Nazis that gamers see depicted in their favorite medium, it becomes difficult for them to recognize neo-Nazis in the real world. This is because real-world Nazis don’t necessarily look anything like the ones that gamers are familiar with. White supremacist recruiters online often go out of their way to distance themselves from well-known Nazi imagery and vocabulary, “rely[ing] heavily on dogwhistles and crypto-fascist terminology” (Deo, 2017) and using labels like “identitarian” or “ethnonationalist.” They also work hard to create an atmosphere of camaraderie in their online communities, often targeting unpopular, disillusioned young men who feel rejected by their peers and telling them that they have a home in their movement (Deo, 2017). Finally, as described earlier, they mask some of their most vile beliefs behind a veneer of irony. Again, according to the official *Daily Stormer* style guide, “Most people are not comfortable with material that comes across as vitriolic, raging, non-ironic hatred. The unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not” (Sparrow, 2017). This purposefully cultivated layer of plausible deniability allows actual neo-Nazis to simultaneously disavow Nazism (“Of course I was just kidding when I said on my livestream that Hitler did nothing wrong! Only a monster would say something like that and really mean it.”) even as they go about spreading white nationalist talking points.

Thus, neo-Nazis disguise their ideology when talking to new recruits, a process that is much easier when the image that those recruits have in their head of what actual Nazis look like is so cartoonish and silly. But even that is not enough to win many people over to their way of thinking. To seal the deal, they must demonstrate not only that white supremacists can seem friendly when they want to but also that they and their target convert share a common enemy.

### **The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Friend**

When one looks at the rhetoric used by gamers to describe their community, it would seem that they shouldn’t have many political enemies. Many, in fact, declare that they abhor politics in games of all sorts and that they just want to be left alone to play their games in peace without real-world issues showing up in their virtual playgrounds and ruining the fun (Condis, 2018). One source of this hostility to politics is an echo

of the threat of censorship that politicians posed to video games back in the 1990s, the memory of which is still fresh in many gamers' minds. During this period, games like *Mortal Kombat* (Midway Games, 1992) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993) were causing parents to worry about the prevalence of violence in products that were thought of as being for children. In 1993, Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman held a U.S. Congressional hearing on the possibility of forming a federal commission to oversee the games industry, prompting the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (Hsu, 2018). In the meantime, a lawyer named Jack Thompson began a crusade against video games, filing lawsuits on behalf the family members of school shooting victims blaming game designers for the deaths of their loved ones (Benson, 2015). Later, when it was discovered that the Columbine shooters played the computer game *Doom* (id Software, 1993), both Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich and President Bill Clinton called for an investigation into the effects of violent video games on children (Hsu, 2018). And, as recently as 2005, Senator Hillary Clinton partnered with Senator Joe Lieberman to push for legislation that would punish retailers for selling games with adult themes to kids (Peterson, 2015).

The last of these provided a convenient talking point for white supremacists who wanted to recruit gamers to their cause in the run-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election. By repeatedly identifying Hillary Clinton (and, by extension, the left as a whole) as “anti-video game” and by decrying feminist and anti-racist video game criticism as an attempt to censor or silence game designers, they were able to convince many gamers that they had common cause with the alt-right (Sherr & Carson, 2017). In fact, some journalists have noted that “a proportion of Trump’s most vocal supporters are gamers” (Tait, 2018) and that #GamerGate brought many gamers into the Trump camp (Condis, 2018; Tait, 2018).<sup>9</sup>

### Creating a Cheat Code to Defeat Hate

Because of the history outlined earlier, gamers are rhetorically vulnerable to certain recruitment tactics employed by white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis. Rhetorical vulnerability is an idea developed by Riche (2017) that seeks to acknowledge the uncomfortable openness and exposedness that communication entails and that some bad faith actors such as trolls or peddlers of propaganda seek to exploit. So, what can we do about it? How can we push back against the ever-evolving narratives being put forth by neo-Nazis, not only within gaming culture but across mainstream culture? I don’t claim to have all the answers, but I do want to make a couple of suggestions here that I think will help.

First, we need to demand that the gaming industry “pick a side” in the fight against white supremacy in the games they create and on the platforms they build. We also must acknowledge that when companies

refuse to acknowledge the presence of Nazis in gaming culture or try to dodge the responsibility of dealing with them for fear of seeming “too political,” they are already choosing a side. They are choosing to allow white supremacists to feel at home in the spaces they create. Take, for example, Steam, the humongous digital gaming distribution platform with a “near monopoly” on PC game sales (Colwill, 2017), which hosts thousands of user-created groups featuring white nationalist themes, Nazi imagery, and copious racial slurs (Campbell, 2018). In October of 2017, Emanuel Maiberg, a reporter for *Motherboard*, discovered that

searching Steam Groups for the term “Nazi” brings up 7,893 results. Searching for the n-word brings up 4,520 results. When I searched Steam Groups for the term “white power” I found a group called “Power to Whites” that has 85 members. In its “About” section it says that “We are a group dedicated [sic] to killing Jews, Crips, Gays and Blacks.

And while Valve, the company that owns Steam, does “have a habit of quietly removing specific hate groups any time they’re mentioned in the press” (Grayson, 2018), their official moderation policy remains extremely hands-off (EJ, 2018).

This desire on the part of technology companies to wash their hands of their responsibility to moderate their platforms is a key feature for white supremacists and other hate groups to exploit. And it *is* a feature in the eyes of developers, not a bug. According to Salter (2017),

Since social media and crowdfunding sites also receive a share of income from user activity, they profit directly from the major spikes in traffic associated with controversies.... This implicates platforms financially in online abuse in disconcerting ways, raising unanswered questions about their business model and their duty of care to others.  
(p. 16)

In other words, technology companies have a strong financial incentive to ignore hate speech and Nazi activity on their platforms, both because they want to avoid the expense of hiring human beings to make the judgment calls involved with deciding what constitutes “hate” and because they profit from the increase in user engagement associated with flame wars and harassment campaigns. This means that, as consumers, we need to hold technology companies to account and invest our money in those that are willing to invest the time and money necessary to moderate their platforms.

Furthermore, as scholars and teachers, we need to learn to listen to the language that white supremacists are speaking to their targets before we can ever hope to speak persuasively against it. Neo-Nazis are using

the mediums that gamers are familiar with and deeply care about to communicate their message, including memes, game mods, and social media platforms. They are going to where the gamers are (Steam, reddit, 4chan, Discord) to speak directly to them in their own spaces. We need to enter those spaces as well, both to observe what is being said and to make our own arguments against fascism and hate wherever we can. Academic discussions taking place within the ivory tower about the horrific perniciousness of white nationalism are not an effective way to study how to fight back. We need to get out into the world, listen to, and directly engage with people if we want to make our own messages heard. To that end, I also suggest that academics practice writing in modes other than those we are used to. We need to create our own memes and make our own games to teach others about how Nazis recruit and to push back against white supremacist rhetoric.

These modest proposals will not bring about the end of white supremacy online, but my hope is that they will enable a conversation to take place. Right now, most of the conversations being had on this topic within the academy are taking place at a far remove from where neo-Nazi recruitment is actually taking place. As a result, the presence of hate online is becoming normalized. It is our responsibility, then, to look at the ways that our communications' technologies are constructed, to find effective ways to moderate our online communities, and to create digital content of our own. To do otherwise is to cede gamer culture, or perhaps even the Internet writ large, to the Nazis. And, as we should all know by now, Nazis are never satisfied with conquering just one small region of public life.

## Notes

- 1 Very briefly, #GamerGate was a harassment campaign aimed at feminist and anti-racist video game critics and developers that masqueraded as a consumer revolt. For more information, see Dewey (2014) and Condis (2018).
- 2 In this piece, I am going to be using the terms "white supremacist," "white nationalist," and "Nazi" pretty much interchangeably, although technically they all represent different political philosophies. For example, white supremacists believe that the white race is inherently better (healthier, more intelligent, more civilized, etc.) than all other races. White nationalists, on the other hand, are proponents of the creation of a nation-state that is reserved only for white people. While it is theoretically possible for someone to be a white nationalist but not a white supremacist (they believe that all races are inherently equal; they just want to make sure that race mixing doesn't happen within their own nation) or for someone to be a white supremacist but not a white nationalist (they believe that whites are inherently superior to others but don't advocate for the creation of a white ethnostate); in practice, these groups overlap quite a bit (Perlman, 2017). Nazis and neo-Nazis, on the other hand, are a specific subgroup of white nationalists who model themselves on Hitler's Germany and the Third Reich (Gao, 2018). The reasoning behind my collapsing of these terms is as follows: first, in the wake

of recent events like the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which included white supremacists, white nationalists, representatives from various neo-Nazi groups, neo-Confederates, and the KKK, it makes sense to me to discuss these groups as interconnected with one another. Although one group or another might prefer to refer to themselves using one particular term over another, they are seemingly happy to work together with other groups to push a shared political agenda. Second, I don't want to get bogged down in a maze of labels that has been intentionally designed to derail the larger conversation about what these hate groups are actually advocating. I argue that pedantry is a luxury that we cannot afford in the fight against literal fascists and that the benefits of taking the time and energy to parse out the minute differences between these groups are vastly outweighed by the drawbacks associated with further muddying the waters for those who are observing this debate and who are not up to date on the latest fashionable euphemisms for hate.

- 3 This is not to say that only men play games. Rather, since the mid-1980s, the games industry has been pitching their products as “toys for boys,” turning games into an activity that is thought of as a “masculine” pursuit. See Condis (2018) and Lien (2013).
- 4 This is not the first time that white supremacists have attempted to hitch their wagon to a subcultural community rooted in some aspect of popular culture. They have also buried their messages of hate in punk and folk music, heavy metal, and, just recently, a new genre of electronic dance music called “fashwave” (Love, 2017, pp. 265–268).
- 5 In fact, as van Veen (2015) discussed in a roundtable for *First Person Scholar*,

GamerGate's ‘campaigns’ are produced through online strategies that are similar to hacktivism, and its culture of enjoyment produces a reward system for active participation that is not unlike gaming itself except that its targets are very real people, suffering from very real forms of harassment and violence.

In other words, one of the ways that white supremacists prove to gamers that they are ideologically compatible is by transforming the kinds of activism they encourage people to engage in online *into a kind of game*. See also Cross (2016).

- 6 In 2016, Andrew Anglin of *The Daily Stormer* made a post about the idea of posting neo-Nazi fliers featuring, among other things, an image of Pikachu dressed as Hitler, at *Pokémon Go* (Niantic, 2016) gyms (spaces where players of the game congregate to battle each other) in hopes of “converting children and teens to HARDCORE NEO-NAZISM!” Although it is unclear whether this posting was a sincere call to action or a troll, Anglin did provide a PDF of the proposed flier and a map to various gym sites around the country to his readers, suggesting that even if this particular mission is just a joke, there are neo-Nazis who are thinking on some level about the logistics of using virtual worlds and multiplayer games to recruit young children (King & Cohen, 2016).
- 7 In fact, Mike Godwin himself recently showed his disdain for the Nazi-card when he Tweeted about the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville and declared, “By all means, compare these shitheads to Nazis. Again and again. I'm with you” (Mandelbaum, 2017).
- 8 This is one of the main reasons that the alt-right and white supremacist groups were so incensed about *Wolfenstein 2: The New Colossus* (MachineGames, 2017). The *Wolfenstein* franchise has had Nazi enemies since its inception, but in this iteration, the Nazis are not just mindless automatons for

the player to mow down nor are they decontextualized from their genocidal politics. Instead, they are directly connected to both the Holocaust and to the resurgence of white supremacy in modern American politics. According to Grubb (2017), the game, which takes place in an alternate reality in which the Axis powers won WWII,

paints a picture of a white America that abandoned its people, its principles, and its religions. That same America simultaneously embraced the Nazi's promise to secure the future of the white race. Some people are more enthusiastic about the new government than others, but everyone is – at the very least – standing with the Nazis. Throughout the game, you'll stumble across letters, notes, and conversations of “free” American people continuing to lead relatively normal lives. In one town, a pair of high-school-age boys talk about taking their dates to a wholesome, government-sanctioned film before casually mentioning the German lessons they have planned for the weekend. In that same town, a mother watches a parade and proudly boasts in her American accent about her son joining the Nazi military. Even the KKK give up their pseudo-libertarian ideology and Protestant Christianity in favor of Nazi socialism and German Catholicism. Machine Games is making the argument that white Americans are willing to give up their beliefs and accept Nazi rule because they don't value those things nearly as much as they cherish their position in a white-supremacist society – whether that was before or after the Nazis arrived.

9 Ironically, Trump then turned around and blamed video games for school shootings himself in the aftermath of the Parkland massacre (Tait, 2018).

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