

Genealogy of a Hate Raid

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INTRODUCTION

From the tranquil shores of Norath to the bustling streams of Twitch, raiding has a complex and contradictory history. Originating in Multi-User Dungeons (MUDS) as a player driven phenomenon, raids are characterized by large amounts of people coming together, initially for the purpose of accomplishing an in-game goal. Increasingly though, the term is being used as a metaphor for an expanding array of ostensibly playful cross-platform user activities. These activities, which range from the coordinated harassment of Twitch livestreamers (Cullen 2022; Grayson 2021) to the emoji-laden spamming of government run Discord servers (Hern 2022), present a series of participatory challenges that platforms are struggling to respond to. This paper aims to critically engage with these challenges by linking raiding to the moving zone in which the emergence of play and the policies of platforms are contested. More specifically, it defines hate raids, connecting the events to a cross-platform genealogy of raiding.

METHOD

By bringing research on gaming and virtual worlds (Bartle 1996; Chen 2011) into conversation with research on critical platform studies and platform governance (Gillespie 2018; Poell et.al 2021), this paper demonstrates how raids challenge ideas of what kind of playful behaviors are permissible. The paper will begin with a discussion of the research methods being applied, which is a mixed method comparative platform studies approach that draws from multi-sited ethnographic (Marcus 2012) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013). Marcus' (1995) account of multi-sited ethnography is particularly relevant, as his 'follow the metaphor' account of different cultural spaces informs this paper's understanding of raids existing in and across the different digital spaces of MUDs, MMOs, Discord and Twitch. An advantage of this approach is that it is 'especially potent for suturing locations of cultural production that had not been previously connected and, consequently, for creating [an] empirically

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argued new visioning of social landscapes' (Marcus 108-109). These social landscapes demarcate the edges of permissible playful behavior, and efforts to shape these behaviors through design and policy, as the emergence of a raid carries vastly different stakes for players, livestreamers, users, and platforms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANALYSIS

What are hate raids and how are they connected to shifting game systems, behaviors, and platform policies? This paper provides some answers to these questions, specifically by tracing the raiding metaphor through four sites of online raiding activity: MUDs, MMOs, Twitch and Discord. Writing in 2006 about the social structures of raiding in *World of Warcraft* (2004 – present, Blizzard Activision), Mortensen (2006, 404) describes the platformization of raiding by way of the Dragon Point Kill system, a system designed to automate the sharing of loot for the purposes of facilitating massively multiplayer collaborative gameplay. MUDs, in contrast, relied on less formalized systems, as theorized in Bartle's player taxonomy (1996), which mentions users preferring less automated, less game-like communities where the distribution of treasure, weapons, and armour is negotiated carefully. In this context, the platformization of raiding cannot be separated from the formalizing, monetizing, and upscaling of MUDs into MMOs, with raids acting as a de facto 'social stabilizer', according to Mortensen.

For Mortensen, the DPK system was a 'way to control and modify the behavior of the players toward each other', establishing clear expectations and commitments between large groups of people (typically, groups of up to 40). These automated loot distribution systems, which are still used in MMORPG design, share the aims (but not the results) of the automated viewer distribution systems implemented by the livestreaming platform Twitch, where a 'raid' involves the sending of viewers from one livestream to another (Twitch 2022). From a social stabilizing perspective, sending a connected group of viewers to another (endorsed) livestream provides a useful means of stabilizing viewer attention and affective connection, which is why most raiders are warmly embraced by livestreamers. However, for many streamers, particularly streamers from marginalized communities (Thatch et.al 2022), the Twitch raid can be an unwanted and potentially offensive activity (Taylor 2018, 235-236) that has seen the use of the term 'hate raid' become prominent.

Building on livestreaming and transgressive play research, this paper will define a hate raid as a symbolic event that can emerge from any point on the ludus/paidia spectrum. Put another way, a hate raid can be goal oriented and planned, if it is being enacted by a white nationalist who is using bots to spam a streamer of color (Chalk 2022), or it can emerge spontaneously in cases where viewers sent to a channel by way of Twitch's raid function begin to spam, harass, or frighten that streamer without any pre-planned goal (Glaze 2022). Hate raids, from this perspective, lack the productive capacity of transgressive player behaviors (Aarseth 2007; Consalvo 2009; Jørgensen and Karlsen 2019), like cheating and smurfing, because they exploit different perceptions and expectations of player safety as opposed to providing a useful means of identifying and categorizing behaviors that a community defines as unacceptable. Unacceptability is difficult to define within these social landscapes, in other words, due to the spreading (and spreadability) of raiding within and across platforms.

While live streaming platforms like Twitch are formalizing raiding for the purposes of retaining viewer attention and affect, community building platforms such as Discord are discouraging raids (Discord Trust & Safety Team 2022), resulting in tension and

confusion, especially when both platforms are being used simultaneously by a livestreamer (Johnson 2021). The tension between different platforms definitions of raiding practices not only points to the moving zone in which the emergence of play and the policies of platforms are contested, but also the conditions under which hate raids emerge. Put another way, a hate raid is an event emerging within, between, and across platforms that exploits three specific tensions. The first tension is the distinction between labor and leisure in general (Chia 2020), which disruptive platform business models are designed to exploit. The second tension is distinctions between player, user, and livestreamer perceptions of safety. And the final tension is the contradictory policies and systems implemented by games and platforms designed to manage competing expectations of what it means to be safe.

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