

Douchebag Games and the “Loser-y” Attitude: White, Male Gamer Imaginaries in the 00's

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the dominant gaming culture of the early-to-mid 2000's, one which catered overwhelmingly to a masculine, heterosexual, and white hegemonic gamer subject known colloquially as the *loser* (Fron et al. 2007). After describing the evolution of the loser alongside the neoliberalism of the 1980's and 90's, we present an analysis of the playable media that hail this “designed identity” (Chess 2018)—what we call *douchebag games*—and argue that they validate the loser's (fragile) masculine anger at being misunderstood, rejected, and ostracised. Working from Bernard Suits' (2014) concept of the “lusory attitude”—the state of accepting a game's rules because they make play possible—we introduce the concept of a *loser-y attitude*, which speaks to how dominant logics (rules) like patriarchy and white supremacy are embraced by privileged actors because they conserve a status quo (play) in which they have power. We argue that the loser's legitimation through douchebag games in the post-9/11, pre-Gamergate world highlights how the loser-y attitude shaped game culture in ways whose reverberations are felt even now through Q-anon conspiracies, manosphere influencers, and the rise of the alt-right.

The history of the loser is tethered to market logics. Disillusioned by the perpetual deferral of the good life promised by 1980's neoliberalism and trickle-down economics, many young men in the global North embraced a countercultural position of social and economic abjection (Duncombe 1997). By the 1990's, however, the position of the loser as countercultural outcast was overwritten: those frustrated with authority became recognised as a demographic worth marketing towards (Fiske 2003; Halnon 2005). Media of that period, from *Twisted Metal* (1995) to *Fight Club* (1999), reveal that the loser had become a fraught subject position, an alienated underachiever whose whiteness and maleness nonetheless position them as privileged enough to consume movies and games that endorsed their raging against hegemony, repackaging it as a commodity.

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This paper will use the suite of games released to support the original Xbox to illustrate the hypermasculine titles where douchebag games are prominent. The structures of white male grievance are embodied through many strategies from the performative misogyny of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), *Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball's* scopophilic eroticised leisure (2003), the *Fable* series casually racist and sexist humour (2004), *Conker: Live & Reloaded's* sneering parody (2005), and the hyper-competitive, explicitly misogynist and racist online environments associated with Xbox Live (see Gray 2014). Their aesthetics and mechanics aligned with notions of entitlement through domination, objectification, and the celebration of apolitical transgression. The console's integration of Xbox Live further intensified this culture by normalising trash-talking and amplifying harassment (Gray 2014). These games and their online environments offered a "safe space" for white grievance where anger could be expressed without social consequences, framing misogyny, racism, and other forms of symbolic violence as humorous or deserved. These titles exemplify how douchebag games functioned: they affirmed the loser's fragile sense of marginalisation, while simultaneously re-inscribing the privileges of whiteness and masculinity through gameplay, narrative framing, and networked sociality.

To crystallise the significance of the loser and his douchebag games, we read several prominent douchebag games through theorist Bernard Suits and his concept of the lusory attitude, "the attitude without which it is not possible to play a game" (2014, p. 35). This concept (and many others from early play theory) relies upon the idea that play is *voluntary*, a claim that more recent scholarship has complicated, with Trammell's (2020) helpful distinction between the "player" and the "played" suggesting that play can occur even if not everyone involved exhibits a lusory attitude (p. 42). Inspired by Suits and Trammell, we put forth the term "loser-y attitude," which we define as "*the state of accepting, even tacitly, dominant logics (rules) and contradictory narratives of social exclusion because they make the comfortable, yet oppressive status quo (play) possible.*" Through this concept, we suggest that the angry, white, male gamer subject of the early 00's has great significance for understanding how game culture continues to champion hegemonic values like patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity in the contemporary moment.

By attending to how games of the early 2000's legitimised white, male anger and made "otherness" into a commodity that could be colonised and co-opted by white people (Gray 2014; Leonard 2004), we suggest that this period of popular culture holds great significance for understanding the contemporary rise of fascism and the alt-right. The loser-y attitude also helps to explain the emergence of far-right conspiracy theories from inceldom and the Great Replacement to Q-Anon (Kelly 2017; Massanari 2024; Pearce 2025) take shape through the aesthetic and affective logics embedded in game culture. By tracking how these titles normalised white grievance and anger as a mode of play, we demonstrate how they seeded later cultures of harassment, radicalisation, and reactionary identity politics. This approach offers a historically grounded account of how games shape political subjectivities and contribute to ongoing digital harms.

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