

ABSTRACT

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Title: DON'T TAUNT ME! The Role of Anonymity on In-Game Behaviors in Super Smash Brothers Melee Online

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Anonymity is known to be associated with changes in behavior in individuals both offline and online. Anonymity is typically linked with an increase in aggressive or antisocial behaviors, especially online, where most users are granted partial anonymity in the form of a username. Antisocial behaviors are likewise prevalent in online gaming. Super Smash Brothers Melee, a fighting game typically played in-person, shifted to being played online due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Although the game has no direct methods of communication, players may exhibit antisocial behavior through their only method of communication: in-game behaviors. The present study sought to demonstrate that Super Smash Brothers Melee players exhibit quantifiable antisocial behaviors when playing online. Eighty-seven experience-matched pairs of participants played three matches of Melee against each other online and shared replay files with the researcher before filling out a survey. Participants were randomly assigned to an anonymous condition or a non-anonymous condition. We predicted that participants in the anonymous group would exhibit and report more antisocial behaviors than those in the non-anonymous group. We found no significant main effect of anonymity but did find a significant main effect of player skill level. We believe our sample of the Melee population may have been a cooperative sample and/or subject to social desirability bias since participants knew we would review their gameplay. Future studies should assess the nature of toxicity and antisocial behaviors in online games and may want to analyze data from games played in natural environments, such as tournaments and other in-person settings. Data from the present study may be used for comparison as a baseline for in-game behaviors in a potentially cooperatively motivated setting.