

Chapter 54

Playing “Nice”: What Online Gaming Can Teach Us about Multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT

Within the Internet, a range of international and multicultural communities abound, especially within the context of interactive online games known as Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). The clashing of cultures in one particular MMORPG, Omerta, has caused many problems within the related online community. These conflicts have led to online instances of culturalism – discrimination based upon cultural-mindset – within this international online community (Jacobs, 2009). This chapter examines the following questions: Do players in international online gaming environments have the right to discriminate based on cultural attitudes and perceptions, or should a player’s right to not be discriminated against dominate in such international contexts? And how can multiculturalism be successfully managed in international online spaces?

INTRODUCTION

Every new electronic communicative technology brings with it the means to change communication, often taking it to a new level.. Thus, from the telegraph to the telephone to the television and beyond, as our engineering skills advance, modern technology has shaped both our ways of communicating, and expanded our abilities

to communicate with others. With the advent of the Internet, communicative technology advanced once again, and it did so in a way that was completely unexpected to many individuals. The connective power of the Internet, in combination with its ever increasing availability, is constantly changing the dynamics of our communicative landscape, and these changes are causing us to rethink and re-explore our methods and approaches for interactions.

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Arguably one of the biggest changes the Internet has brought about is the opportunity for people from all over the world to interact and communicate with one another in an instant fashion. In this way, the Internet has changed the scope of our own personal lives by moving the nature of our everyday interactions from the local to a global stage. With this global access come the natural collisions of cultures within the Internet, and such collisions often create new forms of collaborations that were not previously feasible. These developments have led to the formation of many multicultural online communities (i.e., online groups comprised of individuals from multiple cultures). This development, in turn, brings with it a need to further explore the ideas and the principles of multiculturalism and cultural cooperation in cyberspace.

This chapter examines the constraints of multicultural Internet communities and considers how to approach the discriminatory problems surrounding them. In doing such an examination, the chapter also explores aspects of discrimination (the right to discriminate and the right to not be discriminated against) within the context of digital multiculturalism. The chapter will also address the ramifications of discrimination, and of not allowing discrimination, for the reader to consider when encountering multiculturalism within their own online interactions. It should be noted that the objective of this chapter is not to consider if discrimination is fair or unfair, or good or bad. Rather, the purpose of the chapter is to address and quantify the issue in as neutral an academic discussion as possible; the goal is to explore and not to pass moral judgment.

CULTURE AND CONFLICT

The general idea behind multiculturalism is that several independently different cultures should be able to coexist on peaceful and equal terms within a single territory. This concept thus ex-

ists in opposition to the idea of having a need for a solitary national culture (i.e., nationalism) in order to achieve the same results. In theory multiculturalism seems to be the best approach to humanity's quest for equality, as its dogma is grounded in the principal belief that no culture is superior to another culture (Parekh, 2000). In practice, however, this objective appears to be not as feasible as the strength of multicultural communities often wavers and might eventually tip to the point of total collapse.

Two recent examples of this kind of collapse can be seen in cultural conflicts within the Netherlands and within Cyprus. In both of these instances, different cultural affiliations have been thrown together within a single country while the members of each group are still encouraged to keep their cultural identity strong. The negative results of such situations have ranged from the development of further distinction between the cultures to violence and even legal chaos.

Within the Netherlands, the Dutch legal system is struggling to keep a hold on the Moroccan and Turkish communities that have immigrated to the Netherlands and have refused to adapt to the Dutch law when it conflicts with the Moroccan and Turkish cultural values (Phalet & Schönplüg, 2001). This situation has led to violence, including the assassination of a Dutch political figure, as well as further distance between the Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan cultures. Such cultural differences have led many Dutch citizens and politicians to develop a defensive attitude about culture, and this stance has led many of them to become more nationalistic than they were previously (at the beginning of the immigrations). In the case of Cyprus, after the Turkish invasions in 1974, instead of the two cultures (Greek and Turkish) mixing together within the independent state to form a new nation, both cultures divided the island into sections, occupied by either the Turkish Cypriots or the Greek Cypriots. Initially a wall was even built between the two sections of the island, and this structure represented the

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