



Methodological Challenges, Risks, and Ethical Implications in Game Research

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ABSTRACT

Researcher protection is a growing concern within game research. Researchers who investigate game communities are subject to online harassment, exacerbating the lack of information available in preparation for academic work. In this workshop, we invite researchers to share their experiences and thoughts on methodological challenges and risks that they faced or anticipate facing.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **HCI design and evaluation methods.**

KEYWORDS

Research methodology, user protection, ethics, toxic behavior

ACM Reference Format:

Arianna Boldi, Selina Cho, Yubo Kou, Amon Rapp, and Max V. Birk. 2023. Methodological Challenges, Risks, and Ethical Implications in Game Research. In *Companion Proceedings of the Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play (CHI PLAY Companion '23)*, October 10–13, 2023, Stratford, ON, Canada. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3573382.3616026>

1 BACKGROUND OF ORGANIZERS

Arianna Boldi is a Ph.D. student in Psychology at the University of Torino in Italy. Her research focuses on the intersection of human-computer interaction and psychology. She explores various topics, including the potential of video games for understanding human behavior and enhancing mental health, as well as investigating the emotional experiences of E-sports players.

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CHI PLAY Companion '23, October 10–13, 2023, Stratford, ON, Canada

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ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-0029-3/23/10.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3573382.3616026>

Selina Cho is a PhD student in the Human Centered Computing group at the University of Oxford, where she investigates online game communities with a focus on cheating. Her research interests lie in the intersection of game cheating, cyber security, and computer-supported cooperative work.

Yubo Kou is an assistant professor from the College of Information Sciences and Technology at The Pennsylvania State University. His research lies in human-computer interaction, computer-supported cooperative work, and video games, with a focus on the intersection of governance and play.

Amon Rapp is an Associate Professor at the Computer Science Department of the University of Torino. His main research areas are self-tracking and behavior change technologies, video games and intelligent agents. He organized several workshops in prestigious conferences like UbiComp/ISWC, CHI Play, Hypertext, and UMAP. He is an associated editor of the International Journal of Human-Computer Studies (Elsevier) and Human-Computer Interaction (Taylor & Francis).

Max V. Birk is an Assistant Professor in the Human-Technology Interaction group at Eindhoven University of Technology. Drawing from psychology, data science, and game design, Max's research focuses on motivation in games, game-based digital biomarkers of stress, and behavioural design strategies in commercial games. His work aims to contribute to a healthy society, improve entertainment experiences, and develop tools and methods for researching interactive experiences.ly!

2 SUBMISSION ABSTRACT

When conducting research in online worlds, researchers can rely on practical and theoretical guidelines [4], which were however elaborated for the protection of the participants and do not consider the potential risks to which the researchers themselves may be exposed. In fact, to investigate online communities, game researchers need a significant amount of insider knowledge, which is required for them to enter these complex online environments [7]. Recently, the vulnerability of researchers in the online world and the consequences of abuse and harassment have been the subject of discussion among scholars [1, 5] and especially by female

researchers investigating male-dominated gaming communities [8]. In this workshop we aim to bring to light the variability of the experiences of researchers subject to their backgrounds, research interests, and methods.

Game communities have a unique reputation for toxic behaviors both in-game and beyond, once referred to as “toxic technocultures” [6] that game researchers are exposed to in the conduction of their study. The identity of the researchers poses the biggest challenge. When the methodology concerns interactive components such as interviews or focus groups, researchers are expected to reveal their identity as part of the procedure. However, when the researchers do not corroborate with the preconceived identity of someone who “belongs” in the gaming community [2], they are often subject to gatekeeping or toxic behaviors, preventing them from their initial capacity to even access any viable subjects or data. Equally important is how such behaviors of the subjects impact the researchers themselves. Social scientists who frequent toxic online communities have called for the need to better protect the researchers who find themselves in the blind spots of qualitative research, which present unforeseen risks to their personal well-being [9]. Even when the methodology does not involve interactive components, researchers collecting secondary data or conducting observational studies in order to understand player behavior could still be exposed to harmful player behaviors such as hate speech and extremist ideologies.

Despite the growing attention to promoting researcher protection [3, 9], the specific requirements demanded in the context of gaming are overlooked. Researchers involved with game communities face significant challenges which they would not typically receive in other types of environments. Given the growing interest in the intersection of games into our everyday social lives, active debate in this area is warranted to better inform future researchers in the field and protect the relevant users.

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Received 2023-06-22; accepted 2023-08-03