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Ever since computer games have existed, the people who have played them have found ways to modify the game in order to change the way it plays or break the rules in the hopes of appearing to be better at the game. The concept of changing took on a whole new idea when online multiplayer games were created, now people not only cheated to beat the game, they also were able to cheat in order to compete better against other real people. Cheating in multiplayer online games has become very commonplace and most competitive games now have some sort of anti-cheat in order to curb the effects of cheating in their games. Cheating occurs when players are given the ability to do so and people believe they will be better off utilizing cheats, this comes to directly affect the gameplay experienced by the other players within the game and ends up creating a net negative experience overall, because of this net negative effect, those who choose to cheat in online games must be punished somehow, anti-cheat programs and banning of users are the common solution. In this paper I will be exploring how players cheat within online video games, how it affects the other players, why cheaters must be punished, and how games go about doing this.

Online Multiplayer games do not have a very complex description that can be used to explain a specific class of games. Simply, Online Multiplayer games are those which are both Online and Multiplayer. This means that players either cooperate, or compete against one another in order to complete the objective of the game and do so while connected over an internet connection. This leaves a lot of room for many different types of game that fit into this genre. Some of the most popular types of Online Multiplayer games are MOBAs, FPSs, MMORPGs, and RTSs. Within these genres, there are many different games that all employ slightly different mechanics that offer a different experience depending on what the player wants. These are representative of most of the popular games that people play such as Fortnite, League of Legends, Counter-Strike, World of Warcraft, and Starcraft. Most, if not all online multiplayer games have some sort of competitive mode in which players compete, and get ranked based on their performance and are placed into tiers so they are able to play against players of the same skill level as them. This is the most common place that a player will encounter cheaters, as those who engage in cheating are usually attempting to gain something they normally would be unable to such as a high rank in a competitive game. "Cheating is commonly seen as engaging in an act of dishonesty that results in some type of unfair and unpermitted advantage that may or may not harm another" (Hamlen, 2015). Cheating is a way that players use some sort of external assistance or an exploit within the game in order to gain an advantage that allows them to perform better in the game than they are usually able to. There are many ways that a player can go about cheating in a multiplayer online game, and developers have to adapt in order to stop players from using whatever methods their game is vulnerable to. In FPS games, the most common external forms of assistance are programs that assist the player in seeing the enemies through walls and assisting their aim to kill them faster. "The use of automatic aiming algorithms or "aimbots" in first-person shooter games is cheating because it violates the user agreement created by the developers" (Doherty, 2014). These are

made possible by an external program interacting with the game in order to show these effects to the player. Other games have bugs within the code that create an unintended effect that players can abuse to catch players who do not know about it off guard. No matter how the cheat is achieved, it is not fair to other players and developers have to work hard to ensure they cannot be used.

Cheating is not always without its consequences, but on the plus side, there may also be positive effects that come from utilizing cheats. While there is always a positive effect that comes with cheating, in that the cheater is able to make whatever progress it was that they wanted to achieve. "The most common reasons identified for cheating behavior occurred in cases in which players cheated when they were stuck in the game ("to progress") or to gain advantage over others in a game" (Doherty, 2014). On the other hand, in games which are meant to encourage honing of skills in order to climb ranks, by bypassing this growth they do not actually improve but instead are only temporarily raised to the rank which they wanted to achieve. "Whenever a player employs a tactic that gives an advantage in play over the others or alters the intended format of play, there is general consensus that this is an unacceptable form of cheating" (Doherty, 2014). Cheating affects the players which the cheats are used against mostly negatively and this shows in the community almost unanimously deciding that they do not like that other utilize cheats. While "Many players cheat in games (single as well as multiplayer) to "play God" or have fun, without necessarily wanting to get ahead or defeat another human player" (Consalvo, 2005), there are still those who are harmed by cheating and there has been enough complaints to developers about these cheaters that most games in fact have some form of modicum against them. While those mainly affected by cheating are the cheater, and the player which plays against the cheater, they are not the only parties that are affected. In many multiplayer games, players compete as teams so it is not just one player who is wronged by one person using cheats. Games with random matchmaking, players may end up on a team with someone who is cheating against their own will. These players may be conflicted on whether or not they should continue to play on the same team as the cheater and if they should leave the match in order to not cooperate with someone who is cheating. No matter how much someone is cheating in an online multiplayer game, someone is always affected because, "video game players tend to define cheating by some form of "unfair advantage"" (Hamlen 2012).

Punishing cheaters who use some sort of external assistance or an ingame exploit is something that is necessary or else players will come to believe that it is something that is deemed to be okay by the developers of the game. In games which utilize a ranked competitive system, if there are a large number of players that utilize cheats, the ranking system will become compromised, because there will be a large number of players that exist in ranks in which they do not belong. Not only will the cheaters be escalated to a rank which they do not belong as their skill does not meet the requirement of the skill ladder, but also the people they play with and against will have their ranks affected in a way that they should not be. "Offensive, illegal, cheating, or other inappropriate actions by particular community members can decrease the enjoyment of the on-line session for the other community members" (Zalewski, 2007). When

cheating comes in the form of external programs used to manipulate the code of the game in order to make it behave in a way that it is not supposed to, it can pose another threat. "Even when there is no financial stake in the game, a cheater can detract from the experience of other participants and, in some cases, may pose a threat to the secure operation of their computers" (Konforty, 2008). Online Multiplayer Video games communicate back and forth with a server in order to make the game work the way they are supposed to. The server is able to communicate with the user's device in order to execute specific code that keeps the gameplay in sync with all of the other players within the match. Players can take advantage of the connection and hijack it to put code into another user's device without them knowing, allowing them to gain access to things they should not like sensitive files and controls over their system which they can take hostage of and demand a ransom from the owner. No matter how a player decides they want to cheat, they need to be punished because the things that they do are not condoned by the players or the developers.

When it comes to figuring out the optimal solution to dealing with cheaters, it is hard to say which way is right, but there are several good methods that are currently in use by popular Online Multiplayer games. Most of these systems have some sort of player reporting system where "a first player in the online game session detects suspected cheating behavior by a second player in the online game session, the first player communicates an indication to a game cheat monitoring entity that there is suspected charting behavior" (Zalewski, 2007). This allows individual players to notify the developers of the game that they believe another user is utilizing some sort of cheats. Beyond the basic reporting system, these systems check "if there was cheating activity by one of the players, the game cheat monitoring entity takes appropriate action. An example of appropriate action includes restricting access to the online game session by the cheating player" (Zalewski, 2007). These sort of automated systems rely on player reporting and recorded data of known cheaters to determine without human intervention whether or not the reported player is utilizing some sort of cheats. There are notable specific tactics which some developers employ such as Valve, whose VAC (Valve anti-cheat) which when it finds players who are without a doubt cheating, it waits until it detects large numbers of other players that are utilizing the same method of cheating and then banning all of them from playing on official Valve servers (Valve, 2017). Other common anti-cheat systems used in most popular games run in the background on the users device and check that there are no external programs that are interfering with the games code. Another mode that is employed is that instead of outright banning users who cheat from playing on official servers, they are cordoned off without their knowing into specific servers with other players who have also cheated.

Cheating is extremely common in multiplayer video games, but is not something that should be tolerated and needs to be cracked down on by the player base and the developers. User to User interaction is extremely important in Online Multiplayer games and while players may choose to cheat, this will have an adverse effect on them and the other players around them and developers need to take action in order to prevent the effect that cheaters will have on the games' ecosystem. There are many ways that video game developers are able to go about

this and most of them are very effective in curbing the effect of cheaters. Cheating should not go unpunished.

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