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“There’s a Soldier in All of Us:” An Inclusive Fantasy
Of the *Call of Duty* Franchise



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CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS

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The video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops* earned “over \$650 million in five days.”¹ This staggering statistic for a video game points to the impact that video games have on audiences. The earnings support a multi-billion dollar game industry composed of artists, coders, designers, and marketers. Market research company NPD reported in 2018 that 67% of Americans play video games.² But video game culture also can have a downside, often reflected in an exclusive gamer identity. In a 2018 interview regarding the release of the latest *Call of Duty* game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*, game designer Tony Flame said, “We don’t want toxicity,” in reference to his developer altering the design of the game to focus on inclusive gameplay for all gamers in an attempt to thwart toxic online gameplay experiences.³

The need to address this level of negativity through a change in game design begs onlookers to question how the *Call of Duty* franchise got to this point, and what techniques the developers and publishers used in the past to diminish perceptions of negativity in their game as the franchise released a new version almost every year for the past 12 years. Before the game developer actively altered game design to address this, the game publisher attempted to remedy the situation via advertising in a 2010 and 2011 campaign dubbed “There’s a Soldier in All of Us.” The sheer scope of the influence of video games demands attention regarding how game publishers market their games.

This essay addresses the 2010 and 2011 iterations of the video game *Call of Duty*, notable for having the highest number of units sold, at 30.4 million and 30.71 million, respectively, within the franchise.⁴

Game publisher Activision and game developer Infinity Ward released the initial *Call of Duty* game in 2003, with the number of units sold rising steadily each year to the peak in 2010 and 2011, followed by a steady decline, with 2017’s *Call of Duty: WWII* selling 12.19 million units.⁵ The marketing for the 2010 and 2011 versions, demonstrating the highest peak for the franchise’s units sold, is relevant to rhetorical study to determine why the advertising was so successful for these versions of the game. For instance, the *Call of Duty* franchise consistently ranks as a toxic gaming environment,⁶ illustrating a problem that the publishers had to overcome in order to appeal to more customers to buy the games. Expletive-laced, racist, and misogynistic verbal attacks illustrate *Call of Duty*’s reputation as a hostile online gaming environment.⁷ The 2010 and 2011 commercials appear to address the negativity surrounding the online experience by presenting *Call of Duty* as a welcoming game for novices and experts alike.

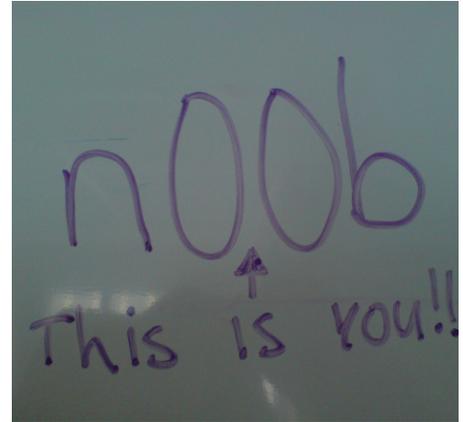
The two television commercials from 2010 and 2011 rely on the “There’s A Soldier in All of Us” marketing campaign for the *Call of Duty* franchise. Representing *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, the 2010 commercial expresses a message of inclusion by displaying various types of individuals engaging in combat.⁸ [This commercial](#) features live action players firing real weapons in bombed out buildings to “Gimme Shelter” by the Rolling Stones while helicopters soar overhead.



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The actions of the players showcase both experienced and inexperienced players having fun, and feature Jimmy Kimmel and Kobe Bryant. In turn, the 2011 commercial for *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* expands upon the 2010 commercial by displaying the development of an individual from a novice player to an expert player.⁹ [This commercial](#) uses Jonah Hill to represent an inexperienced n00b player who dies often from foolish mistakes and Sam Worthington to represent a veteran player who teaches the n00b how to become a better player. The two commercials combined express a narrative of inclusivity and improvement that seek to expand the consumer base of the *Call of Duty* franchise by expressing that anyone can be a player, and anyone can improve to be a great player. This progression distances the franchise from a traditional video game player identity of exclusivity.

This essay references notions of Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence to discern that these commercials develop a rhetorical vision of inclusivity and progression by drafting a fantasy that draws in consumers who might be averse to the *Call of Duty* franchise, or even video games at all. As a component of this rhetorical vision, the commercials' fantasy converts the exclusive n00b devil term within gamer culture to an identifier of mere progression. For example, the 2011 usage of the n00b character introduces the term in an accepting manner to a broad audience. Thus, the commercials work to dispel the negative connotations of the gamer devil term n00b by providing a message of inclusivity that lowers the negative tone of the term n00b and illustrates an eventual overcoming of such a negative label. The "There's a Soldier in All of Us" television commercials establish



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a fantasy of inclusion and progression that rivals a possible perception of exclusive gamers. The purpose of this essay is a) to address how the 2010 and 2011 "There's a Soldier in All of Us" commercials shifted the identity of gamers by dissolving a devil term and b) to reveal how a segment of gamers maintains an identity of exclusion, a matter that the gaming industry must continue to tackle. To accomplish this, I, first, address gaming culture's development as a unique group via its usage of l33t speak and the devil term n00b. Second, I illustrate the inclusive rhetorical attempt by *Call of Duty* publishers to dilute the negative n00b label to craft a message of inclusivity. Lastly, I conclude the essay by addressing the implications of the commercials for rhetorical criticism and the impact of the shifting negative identity by some in gaming culture.

Gaming Culture and n00b

To understand the significance of the term n00b to gamer culture, first, we must examine l33t speak, brought to the mainstream in Bruce Sterling's 1992 book, *The Hacker Crackdown*.¹⁰ L33t, or l337, speak references the unique message creations developed by hackers to evade computer filtering software. For example, the letter E was replaced by the number 3, or the letter T was replaced by the number 7. In addition, some letters were eliminated or replaced with various symbols on the keyboard. In turn, a person maintained the ability to recognize the message, whereas computer programs searching various forums could not. L33t is a word shortened from elite, representing the elite status of hackers. L33t speak was used by hackers and the like through the 1980s and 1990s when communicating online, such as using

message boards. Sterling stated, "Hackers have their OWN rules, which separate behavior which is cool and elite, from behavior which is rodent-like, stupid and losing. These 'rules,' however, are mostly unwritten and enforced by peer pressure and tribal feeling."¹¹ The use of the letter structure illustrated an individual's elite identity and, more importantly, separated that individual from the common crowd.

As the World Wide Web made Internet capabilities user-friendly, the gaming industry saw a natural progression to online gaming at the turn of the century. In turn, the elite status of l33t speak made its way into online gaming as well. Hence, the use of the disparaging term, n00b, brought over from Internet l33t speak. The term n00b identified an individual who wished he or she possessed the hacking skills as those engaging in l33t speak on message boards. So, the term was used in the same disparaging fashion in the gaming realm. A n00b represented an individual who possessed no skills and was unable to learn. As testament to the negative connotation of the term, in the mid-90s, AOL spent millions of dollars on a marketing campaign incorporating the Jetsons theme song designed to "shake the perception that [AOL was] only for 'newbies.'"¹² The term, with the two letter Os being replaced with two zeroes, has seen its fair share of change. For instance, players may reference noobs, with two letter Os, and newbies. The elimination of the two zeroes has gone hand-in-hand with the expansion of gameplay. Informally, noob, with two letter Os, and newbie may be used by players in a playful manner to refer to gamers who are new to a game, but willing to learn. This is in stark contrast to the disparaging usage of n00b, with two zeroes. So, gaming has seen the initial term newbie, unrelated to gaming, get filtered through l33t speak to n00b, and back around to noob or newbie after being popularized by mainstream gaming. In turn, player usage of the word n00b, and all of its variations, reinforces perspectives in gaming culture, especially its divisions.



Evan-Amos [Public domain]

Divisions within Gaming Culture

Gamer culture is unique. Historically, part of that culture has been crafted by the lack of social acceptance of gamers, resulting in a social position outside of the normal realm. Whereas gamers smashed buttons and maneuvered joysticks in the public realm of arcades in the 1980s during the golden age of video games, the widespread availability of home consoles and personal computers pushed gaming into the private realm. In turn, gaming's use of fantastic fictional elements fell in line with science fiction and fantasy novels and comic books, guaranteeing the social stigma of geek status. Along with this stigma, the stereotype of the lone male gamer playing in his parents' basement took center stage. The effect of such a negative stigma would result in an exclusive perspective of gaming culture by gamers themselves, a sort of circling the wagons scenario. Naturally, this would result in the symbolic convergence of gamers into establishing a unique gamer culture. Unique symbol usage to establish a shared fantasy results in individuals symbolically converging.¹³ Payne discussed the communicative actions of a gamer gathering, providing evidence that a gamer fantasy has, in fact, symbolically converged.¹⁴ Criticism from the outside influenced gamers' hierarchal social status. Predictably, this resulted in the establishment of a hierarchal perspective on the inside of gamer culture as well, for as rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke viewed society, people are "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy."¹⁵ Some gamers took on the same disapproving spirit they may have felt was applied to them and began applying it to individuals claiming the culture. Thus, the inevitable emergence of the devil term¹⁶ n00b took prominence in gamer culture. And with the term's rise, division with the term became a solidifying factor of being a true gamer.



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Burke referred to people as “the inventor[s] of the negative,”¹⁷ and the use of this negative devil term supports this notion due to gamers’ unwillingness to be satisfied with the mere playing of games; gamers began to demonstrate dominance over other gamers to be true gamers. In order for gamers to be true members of the culture, they had to divide themselves from the n00b devil term. Burke explains identification as “[confronting] the implications of division.”¹⁸ So, a player seeking to identify with the label of gamer had to safeguard the culture by weeding out the unworthy. In turn, the term n00b became a negative label to call out an imposter in gaming culture. This division from the n00b label was an action to guarantee the exclusivity of the culture.

Kenneth Burke described a scapegoat as “...represent[ing] every [person,]...[the scapegoat’s] punishment is [humankind’s] chastening.”¹⁹ The n00b functions as a scapegoat for players, and the reliance on the scapegoat perpetuates the exclusivity of gamer culture. Gamers who need to establish themselves as part of an exclusive club defeat n00bs as a means to cleanse themselves of any notion of normalness. This cleansing sets the players apart from others and solidifies the players’ exclusivity. Thus, n00b is not only a devil term, it is a goat allowing players to participate in the process of exclusivity. This ritual is repeated time and time again as thousands of players strive to achieve the exclusive status of a gamer. The slaying of the goat may not be enough, additional rituals, such as jumping on a player’s dead body, pumping additional bullets into a dead body, or “tea bagging” (squatting up and down on the face of a dead player) add intensity to the ritual, infusing it with a greater amount of competitiveness. Many in society would view these desecrations of a dead body as immoral. Yet such a real world violation runs rampant in video games, especially the *Call of Duty* franchise. This falls in line with De Simone’s findings that frequent gamers are more likely to act anti-socially in the real world than less frequent gamers.²⁰

Hardcore Versus Casual Gamers

This difference in real world behavior demonstrates the exclusivity of those deeming themselves hardcore gamers, as opposed to casual gamers. Nintendo brought the notion of casual gaming to the forefront with its 2006 release of the Wii console. This console appealed to a broad array of people, and Nintendo utilized advertising depicting people of all ages using the motion-sensor remote to play with friends and family. The console offered an example of accessibility for people who may not have otherwise played video games. In response to this phenomenon, gamers began differentiating between casual gamers and hardcore gamers, with the hardcore gamer label arbitrarily attached to gamers who played traditional games. But the floodgates to the moniker of casual gaming had opened, and the game publishers behind the *Call of Duty* franchise’s “There’s A Soldier in All of Us” marketing campaign attempted to capitalize on casual gamers by illustrating a route to meld casual and hardcore together. Regardless of the differences, Activision, the *Call of Duty* publisher, forces people adhering to these two identities together in their advertising while attempting to have the social aspects of the casual gamer win out, thereby diluting the anti-social behavior of hardcore gamers.



Evan-Amos [Public domain]

Despite the establishment of an exclusive gamer culture, Juul referenced a casual revolution in video games that drastically altered for whom developers designed games, demonstrating an appeal to game players interested in physical game interactions and noncommittal downloadable games.²¹ Despite this apparent change in the gaming industry toward casual gamers, *Call of Duty* publishers attempted to alter their gaming audience through rhetorical means, not design. "We have managed to market the game to a wider base," said Brad Jakeman, chief creative officer of Activision Publishing, who leads the company's marketing efforts.²² Essentially, rather than alter the game design to appeal to casual gamers, the publishers used advertising to convince casual gamers that the game could be casual and that the casual gamers could be hardcore gamers. This broadening distinction between exclusive, hardcore gamers and casual gamers was less about two different groups of people and more about commitment levels and desirable goals.²³

The stigma of gamer culture appears to be shifting, possibly in tandem with generations that grew up with video games. No more are games merely the toys of children, for the children have grown up to become adults, and these adults might bring with them positive viewpoints of gaming. In addition, the change in gaming hardware, such as the introduction of the Nintendo Wii that relied on motion controls and mobile gaming gave rise to a change in the design of games that Juul called the casual revolution.²⁴ In 2009, around the time when the two commercials analyzed in this essay aired on television, market research company NPD reported that 63% of Americans had "played a video game in the past six months," surpassing the number of people that had been to the movies.²⁵ Although this could be seen as gamer culture finally achieving acceptance by society, this redistribution of values correlates with the boundaries of the traditional gamer's identity dissolving. Whereas gamers used to safeguard their identity by the devil term n00b, now they found themselves at a crossroads: revel in the social acceptance of their culture and by doing so acknowledge the identity of the culture will dissolve, or press their safeguarding strategies with more vigilance. Thus, we see the rise of the adjective "hardcore" to reinforce the traditional identity of the gamer, now morphed into the "hardcore gamer." Violent games became synonymous with hardcore gaming, reflecting the medium's roots with technologically-savvy males in arcade competitions.²⁶ Illustrating the hardcore, competitive violence in games like *Call of Duty*, Andersen and Kurti state, "For the first person shooter, killing is a measure of success."²⁷ Shira Chess sums up the design appeal to hardcore gamers, stating, "An unchanging demographic had predictable consumer needs that are easy to satisfy."²⁸

But this clear demarcation from casual gamers illustrated a rift regarding for whom developers should design games. Taking place three years after the "There's a Soldier in All of Us" commercials aired, the 2014 Gamergate controversy surrounding antisocial behavior in response to female game critics, such as Anita Sarkeesian, criticizing the male domination in game design brought the exclusive identity of hardcore gamers to the public stage. Game studies scholar Mia Consalvo references this "toxic gamer culture" that reinforces an exclusive, male-dominated view of gamers.²⁹ Chess offers "player two" as an alternate gamer identity featuring minorities and women to rival the traditional gamer, historically acknowledged as "player one."³⁰ Thus, the moniker hardcore gamer has become associated with men resisting change to traditional game design previously crafted for them. A hardcore gamer culture already exists, with the label of n00b being a discursive output of this symbolic convergence. Whether the





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Call of Duty publishers are using the “There’s a Soldier in All of Us” commercials in an attempt to expand gamer culture itself, or merely to create the perception that non-hardcore gamers can be accepted into the shared fantasy is unclear. The likelihood is that the *Call of Duty* publishers are relying on whatever strategy increases sales, expansion of gamer culture is a convenient byproduct. So, players instilled a vision of gamer culture by using the disparaging devil term noob to reinforce the exclusive skillset of gamers, then, players experienced a shift in culture as gaming received a mainstream, casual acceptance. This resulted in some gamers differentiating themselves as hardcore, holding on to an attachment to the exclusive, traditional gamer mindset.

Shift in Culture: Inclusive Rhetoric

In light of the introduction of casual gamers into the market and *Call of Duty*’s online reputation as an unwelcoming environment, *Call of Duty* publisher, Activision, faced the problem of how to continue increasing sales of its popular video game franchise. Based solely on Activision’s advertising, the publisher appears to have appealed to casual gamers by illustrating the *Call of Duty* video game in a positive, welcoming light, in contrast to the game’s reputation. So, an analysis of the rhetorical tactics of *Call of Duty*’s 2010 and 2011 commercials, representing the highest point of the franchise’s sales, reveals the publisher’s technique to promote inclusivity in gaming. This is of note to rhetorical critics due to its blueprint for breaking down an exclusive identity, as well as of note to individuals in gaming culture to understand how the culture has changed.

The 2010 Commercial

Although the 2011 commercial heavily features the notion of a noob, the [2010 commercial](#) explicitly addresses noobs by showing Jimmy Kimmel holding a rocket-propelled grenade launcher with the words “proud noob” on the side. In fulfillment of the term, after firing the RPG Jimmy Kimmel falls backward, displaying his lack of experience. However, Jimmy Kimmel displays a smile after firing the RPG, despite his obvious inexperience with the weapon. In turn, no other person within the commercial acknowledges Kimmel’s mishap, or even displays disapproval or disrespect. Within the confines of the commercial’s fantasy, Jimmy Kimmel’s lack of experience completely is acceptable. The 2011 commercial greatly evolves the essence of the miniscule mishap of Jimmy Kimmel from the 2010 commercial by highlighting the development of an inexperienced player (portrayed by Jonah Hill) into an experienced player.

Burke discusses a rhetor constructing her or his environment or scene by that rhetor determining the size of the scene by referring to the action as an expansion of circumference.³¹ Rhetors can increase or decrease their rhetorical circumferences based on the scope of their desired influences. So, regarding the *Call of Duty* franchise, the publishers are expanding the circumference of the gaming community in an effort to increase membership in the community. An increased membership in the gaming community leads to increases in sales of the *Call of Duty* games. From an inclusive standpoint, an expansion of circumference is an obvious step for expanding a consumer base. A circumference expansion links audience participants viewing themselves as part of the constructed fantasy group to a larger narrative. This narrative becomes a monumental cause with enough backers, granting clout to the fantasy group.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/saneboy/3605180954>

The 2010 commercial portrays an assortment of players alongside typical action-oriented violence associated with a hardcore game. The publisher uses both men and women representing an array of careers, such as business professionals, concierges, and cooks, to appeal to a large audience. Characters within the commercial appear to be smiling noobs, like Jimmy Kimmel mentioned earlier in this essay, as well as seasoned fighters. The notable aspect of none of the characters appearing to disrespect each other illustrates an inclusive component to the commercial's narrative. The publisher shows noobs having fun alongside seasoned players.

The 2011 Commercial

Likewise, the [2011 commercial](#) adheres to the previous commercial's message of avoiding disrespect of noobs. While the commercial shows noobs making obvious mistakes while playing, no characters in the commercial display aggressive anti-social behaviors toward the noobs. This



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb2SNOeHuso>

commercial goes a step further than the previous commercial by showcasing noob status as a stage where all players start but eventually progress toward being better players. Jonah Hill's n00b character illustrates a light-hearted progression as evidence that n00bs will become better. Sam Worthington's veteran character acts as a mentor for the n00b, making encouraging statements like, "Watch and learn," and "Now you're getting it n00b."³² This addresses any fears of casual players who feel shunned by the competitive nature of first-person shooters. At the end of the commercial, Jonah Hill's n00b character tells Sam Worthington's veteran character, "Take a break, big dog. I got this," demonstrating his completed progression from a n00b to a veteran.³³ These commercials show a clear message by the *Call of Duty* publisher: being a n00b is nothing to be ashamed of, and n00bs have the ability to become better with practice.

Dissolution of the n00b Devil Term

The *Call of Duty* marketing strategy appears to dissolve the impact of the devil term n00b. In so doing, these commercials illustrate a rhetorical strategy of dismantling a devil term that was used as a scapegoat to solidify a symbolic group via division. Such a strategy shadows Foy's assessment of a scapegoat resisting a narrative cast upon the scapegoat.³⁴ However, in this case, individuals who would be scapegoats are unaware, or more importantly, are not fazed by their scapegoat status. Here, the marketing campaign attempts to fight back on behalf of the scapegoats, different than Foy's identification of the scapegoat performing the resistance. Also of note, this rhetorical strategy allows external sources to influence a group's fantasy membership. Hardcore gamers may resist the dilution of their fantasy identity, but larger social forces that may be indifferent to such an identity may win out.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/popculturegeek/>

The noob possesses the means to improve gameplay in order to cast off the negative label. In this instance, the player engages in the eventual act of transformation from noob to hardcore gamer by committed improvement. This especially is of note due to its significance regarding symbolic convergence. If casual gamers do not view noob as a disparaging term and they develop game skill as the second commercial suggests, then those casual gamers may attain the competitive skill of a hardcore gamer but will not engage in the symbol usage that allows the hardcore gamer identity to converge as a group identity. The social force of people who play games but do not identify as hardcore gamers will change not only the identity of gamers, but also call into question if a separate gamer identity still surfaces in an age when so many people use the medium of video games. Additionally, as Juul and others referenced in this essay suggest, an altered player identity significantly will impact the design of games.

From a rhetorical standpoint, the strategy used by the *Call of Duty* publisher allows any audience member receiving the negative label of a devil term a means to cast the label aside and receive group acceptance. Since n00b is a devil term within gamer culture, the *Call of Duty* commercials attempt to provide direction on how to dispel the label and have players accepted within the gamer culture. What is more important to note is that this strategy does not actually cast off negative labels applied to audience members; it merely provides the perception that the label can be cast off. It is left to be determined if the commercials actually impacted its audience members in this way. Whereas a causal link between the television commercials in particular and the skyrocketing video game sales truly cannot be known without a hypothetical control group not subjected to the advertisements, we

still can assume the television commercials positively impacted the sales of the *Call of Duty* games. Realistically, the promised results of a noob player progressing to a veteran player will not come to fruition simply by the audience member watching the message. The burden of success still rests conveniently on the audience member, not on the rhetor. This strategy relies on a fantasy to draw individuals into group membership while adhering to a traditional perspective that hard work pays off.

It should be noted how different this focus is toward attempts at dispelling negative labels of devil terms in other contexts. For example, Burke identified Hitler's reliance of "the Jew" as a scapegoat to address the German economic situation resulting from World War I.³⁵ Obviously, this mindset is filled with disturbing assumptions surrounding the negative portrayal of the people the devil term was cast upon in the first place. So, a rhetor considering the strategy of the one outlined in this essay heavily must consider the moral implications surrounding the cultural devil term label, and the soundness of dispelling the negativity the label implies versus discrediting the actual people that the label is forced upon in the process. A rhetorical strategy of this nature is placing heavy emphasis on a rhetor's claim, but, as with any claim, it falls upon the audience's acceptance of the claim's motivational warrant, which assumes that members of the stigmatized group see their group as negative and wish to leave that group in the first place. When relying on this rhetorical strategy, a rhetor would be wise to ponder not only what a reasonable person would assume, but whether making the assumption itself is ethical. The "There's A Soldier in All of Us" *Call of Duty* commercials, on the other hand, ask the scapegoats, n00bs, to cast off the stigmatized status and become



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/scabeater/>



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/140669675@N07/>

members of the gamer culture. This strategy is based on the assumption that the rhetor's audience agrees that the stigmatized label or scapegoat is negative and the audience wishes to avoid that social identity to which the label refers. The assumption regarding the *Call of Duty* commercials illustrates an acceptable assumption due to its attempted positive social inclusion. Goehring and Dionisopoulos detailed the use of Burke's identification by antithesis as a rhetorical means for constituting a group that unifies around a common foe.³⁶ In their case, they identify a divisive strategy used in white supremacist unification. Likewise, the identity of the hardcore gamer, as detailed earlier in this essay, has evolved into a divisive identity clinging to traditional gaming perspectives that privilege competitive male players. The rhetorical strategy displayed by the *Call of Duty* publishers appears to offer a countering strategy to dismantle such a divisive unification.

Conclusion

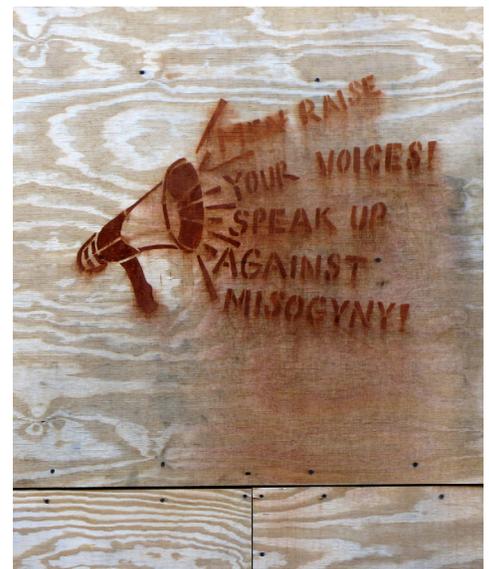
An analysis of the 2010 and 2011 "There's a Soldier in All of us" *Call of Duty* commercials illustrates how the game publisher dissolved the devil term n00b to establish a perception of an inclusive culture. However, the use of n00b as an antithetical, scapegoating means of reinforcing an exclusive gamer identity gave way to a casual wave in gaming that resulted in a push for resistance as the identifying feature of an exclusive gamer identity.

Current issues like Gamergate demonstrate that the industry still struggles as the inclusiveness of a new culture attempts to suffocate the exclusive hardcore elements of the culture that continue to resist.

Implications for Gaming

The success of the "There's A Soldier in All of Us" campaign is apparent in the total number of games sold. While the campaign may have been successful in luring casual gamers into a hardcore game, it is unclear if the traditional, hardcore gamer identity changed. The n00b devil term became diluted, demonstrating a success for positive cultural change. However, as revealed by the 2014 Gamergate controversy, the negativity encapsulated around the n00b devil term as an identifying moniker shifted toward a negativity utilizing misogyny under the cover of journalism ethics to demonstrate a resistance to cultural changes in the gaming community. From the online play of the 1990s with the appropriation of l33t speak and bashing n00bs, to the attempted melding of casual and hardcore gamers via 2010 and 2011 in response to the success of the Nintendo Wii, to the Gamergate controversy in 2014 highlighting resistance to change, some players continue the exclusive identity of a gamer. However, the dissolution of the disparaging devil term n00b, with its usage having been a core identifying element of the gamer identity, and the misogynistic elements of the industry coming to the forefront, there is hope that the exclusion in gaming culture will continue to diminish.

The message presented by the publisher in these commercials appears contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of a negative gamer culture. The message in the 2010 and 2011 *Call of Duty* commercials directly challenges that image. These commercials promote a good time by the inexperienced and experienced alike. Furthermore, the publisher paints a player's progression from inexperienced to experienced in a positive light. Today, current critics of gaming culture identify it as toxic.³⁷ Because of this current view of toxicity, we must ask

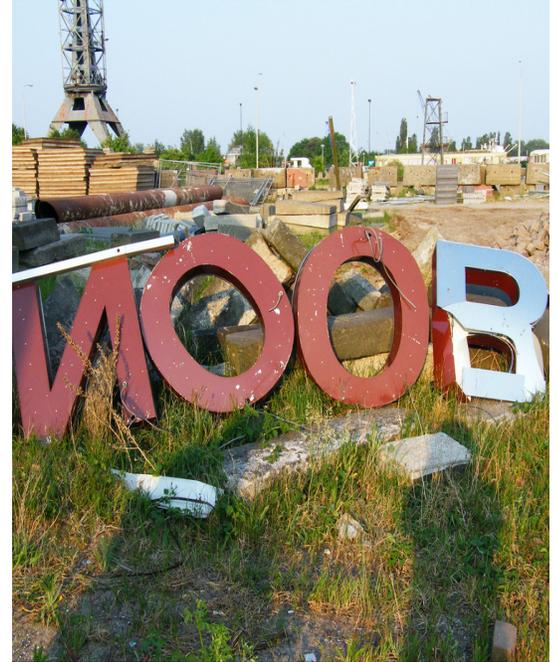


<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pinelife/>

ourselves what happened to the inclusive message engineered by the *Call of Duty* publisher nine years ago. I argue that as these *Call of Duty* commercials highlighted an industry marketing move toward inclusiveness as a means to recruit gamers to increase profits, the inclusive message diluted the exclusivity in gaming culture. The culture became mainstream, meaning gamers lacked the uniqueness that made them special. However, as the doors to the culture were ripped open to the public, the focus of the exclusivity changed. Skill was no longer the focus of the exclusivity, rather, resistance to change became the new rallying cry. Toxic behavior in gaming existed for years along with the rise of the Internet, but promotion of toxic behavior, as opposed to skill level, as the rallying cry, illustrated in the 2014 Gamergate controversy demonstrates that the exclusivity of gaming culture has not changed, it merely shifted its focus.

Implications for Rhetorical Criticism

The *Call of Duty* "There's A Soldier in All of Us" commercials rely on a strategy of emphasizing inclusivity in order to increase product sales. This inclusivity centers around the use of specific jargon, in this case "n00b." Other rhetors attempting to duplicate the strategy would do well by appropriating a jargon-specific devil label within a fantasy group as a means of expanding the circumference of the rhetor's message in order to accomplish the rhetor's strategic goal, in the case of *Call of Duty* that goal is selling a product. The dispelling of a group's devil term diminishes the group's identity since it reduces the value of the group's symbolic usage. As the devil term n00b diluted into noob or newb and altered the term's meaning from an aggressive, negative insult to a light-hearted jab so, too, did the traditional gamer's identity become diluted



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/apotheary/>



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/phoenics11/>

as well since it lost the ability to reinforce its existence by antithetical means. Even the loss of the two zeroes confirmed a reduction in the l33t speak that demonstrated a symbolic convergence of gamers into a unique identity. Juul stated, "The diversity of game players make it paramount that games intended for broad audiences be flexible on several levels: flexible in the assumption about who the player is, what the player knows, how the player wants to use the game, and when."³⁸ Although the *Call of Duty* publishers displayed no evidence of altering game design in their commercials to address a broad audience, the rhetorical strategy displayed in the advertising offers some sense of hope toward the industry's attempt to dismantle the exclusive identity of a traditional, hardcore gamer to make way for an inclusive gaming experience.

End Notes

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