04

Shaping the Stream: Interventions to Address Online Misogyny in Gaming Communities

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Playbook

A playbook for positive gaming interventions addressing the intersection of misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism

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A Project Catalyst Series

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A Project Catalyst Series

This report is part of Project Catalyst[1], a series by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) examining the links between misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism online. The series includes ISD's practical toolkit for addressing these intersections, companion reports mapping online ecosystems in Canada and Jordan, and a report on how platforms address this intersection in their policies.

Content Warning

This report contains descriptions and examples of misogynistic and gender-based abuse, including sexist and derogatory language, sexualized and appearance-based harassment, threats, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Some examples may be distressing or offensive. Reader discretion is advised.

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Executive Summary

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This playbook provides evidence-based and practical guidance for designing, implementing and evaluating positive interventions that address online misogyny in gaming and gaming-adjacent communities. It brings together Project Catalyst's research on misogynistic and extremist narratives and harms, learnings from existing intervention models, and insights from ISD's pilot intervention with gaming streamers. The playbook is intended to help stakeholders translate an understanding of online harms into interventions that are credible, culturally relevant, safe and impactful.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this project, particularly those who participated in the focus groups and anonymous conversations that informed the research. We are especially grateful to the five streamers who shared their experiences, ideas and expertise throughout the co-creation process, and whose contributions were pivotal in bringing the intervention to life.

This playbook is part of Project Catalyst, a series by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) examining the links between misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism online. The series includes ISD's practical toolkit for addressing these intersections, companion reports mapping online ecosystems in Canada and Jordan, and a report on how platforms address this intersection in their policies.

This playbook is written primarily for:

GAMING STREAMERS, CONTENT CREATORS AND COMMUNITY MODERATORS

To understand the role streamers and communities can play in shaping norms, and draw on practical lessons around messaging, content, community engagement and responding to harmful behavior.

GAMING PLATFORMS AND GAME DEVELOPERS

To understand how platform and game dynamics can shape misogyny and related harms, identify opportunities for prevention, and consider how product design, community infrastructure and platform support can enable positive interventions.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND PRACTITIONERS

Civil society organisations and practitioners working on online harms, gender-based violence, extremism, safeguarding, masculinities or youth engagement.

To understand the narrative and behavioral dynamics of misogyny in gaming, identify potential intervention entry points, and apply the playbook's design and delivery principles to their own programming.

ORGANISATIONS WORKING DIRECTLY WITH MEN AND BOYS

To understand how misogyny, masculinities, belonging and gaming culture can intersect, and develop strengths-based preventative interventions that build resilience and positive norms without problematizing men and boys.

TRUST AND SAFETY TEAMS

To understand how community-level and streamer-led interventions can complement moderation and enforcement and identify opportunities to support streamers and communities through appropriate tools, safeguards and escalation pathways. This can be done on gaming platforms, but also at mainstream social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram.

FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS SUPPORTING PREVENTATIVE INTERVENTIONS

To understand the evidence and practical requirements underpinning effective interventions in gaming spaces, including the importance of research, co-design, safeguarding, evaluation and sustained support.

How to use this playbook

This playbook is designed as a practical resource for those developing, supporting or enabling positive interventions in gaming and gaming-adjacent communities. Readers can use its different elements flexibly depending on their role, use case and stage of intervention development.

Below we summarise the key elements of the playbook and their practical application:

CHAPTER 1

Understanding online misogyny in gaming

Examines how misogyny manifests in gaming and intersects with targeted hate, violence and violent extremism.

CHAPTER 2

Gaming communities as sites for prevention

Explores why gaming can provide an important space for upstream prevention, including the role of streamers, communities and social norms.

CHAPTER 3

Approaches to positive interventions

Reviews three relevant intervention models—bystander and community resilience, norm change, and community engagement—with practical examples and lessons for their application. This includes interventions deployed by Project Catalyst partners.

CHAPTER 4

The Catalyst pilot

Provides a practical case study of ISD's streamer-led intervention, from audience research and message development through co-creation, delivery and evaluation.

CHAPTER 5

Lessons learned and guidance

Translates the pilot into practical lessons for intervention design and implementation, safeguarding, and monitoring and evaluation.

Introduction

This practical playbook draws out lessons from a pilot positive intervention exploring how streamers can help strengthen resilience to online misogyny and foster healthier community norms. Drawing on a growing sector-wide evidence base on gaming-focused interventions, the pilot followed an iterative process: mapping the evidence landscape around gaming, extremism and misogyny; conducting focus groups with gamers and streamers; developing and stress-testing potential messaging; co-designing content with streamers; and piloting and evaluating streamer-led interventions within their communities.

This playbook focuses on interventions addressing the intersection of misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism in gaming environments, considering how positive interventions can help address these interconnected harms. It first examines how these harms manifest and intersect in gaming and gaming-adjacent spaces, before exploring why gaming can provide an important environment for upstream intervention. It then reviews three existing intervention approaches with relevance to gaming environments before presenting the design, delivery and evaluation of ISD's own streamer-led intervention. Drawing on this process, the playbook concludes with practical lessons for designing, safeguarding and evaluating future interventions with gaming communities.

Gaming as an intervention environment

Gaming platforms and gaming-adjacent spaces are important social environments in which young people build relationships, form identities and negotiate community norms. They can provide belonging and meaningful social connection, particularly for young men and boys, while features including competitive intensity, anonymity and lightly moderated communication can also create conditions in which misogyny, gender-based abuse and other forms of targeted hate are normalized.

Gaming itself is not inherently a driver of violence or radicalization, with ISD's research highlighting a more complex relationship between gaming, misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism. Gaming can provide a point of contact between individuals, an online environment through which people build strong relationships and identity[2-3], create environments in which grievances and harmful behaviors escalate, and form communities whose norms influence what behavior is tolerated or challenged. Misogyny and gendered grievance can intersect with interpersonal conflict, violent ideation and, in some cases, extremist worldviews, but these factors should not be treated as interchangeable or as forming a single pathway to violence. Gaming communities can also be protective environments: peers may recognize concerning behavior, challenge harmful norms or provide support before formal institutions become involved.

This combination of cultural influence, vulnerability and protection makes gaming an important space for upstream prevention. The project therefore explored how interventions could strengthen empathy, protective factors and positive community norms without positioning gaming—or young men and boys themselves—as the problem.

Trialling streamer-led interventions

To provide an evidence base for intervention[4], ISD brought together deep-dive gaming platform research, ten real-world case studies of gaming-related violence, qualitative research with nine male and female streamers, and online focus groups with 21 young male gamers aged 16–25 in the UK and

Canada. Across these research approaches, hypercompetitive environments emerged as a recurring theme: participants described competition as capable of amplifying toxicity and legitimizing misogyny, while drawing a meaningful distinction between competitive banter and genuine harm.

These findings informed the development and testing of strategic messaging approaches that resonated strongly with both gamers and streamers. **Remember the Human**, centred on empathy and rehumanization, emerged as the strongest approach because it addressed the permissive environment beneath misogyny while building on values already recognized within gaming communities: empathy, agency and an understanding that there is a line between humor and harm.

ISD worked with five streamers focused on different gaming genres and streaming platforms to translate this strategic approach into interventions appropriate for their own communities. Rather than treating streamers as distribution channels for institutional messaging, streamers were given ownership over how the approach was expressed through their content and relationships with audiences. Their concepts overwhelmingly relied on positivity, humor, empathy, community participation and modelling behavior rather than telling audiences how they should behave. Three of the five streamers subsequently implemented interventions within their online communities without payment for content production or delivery, providing an encouraging indication of the feasibility of the overall approach, while also demonstrating the need for sustainable models of funding and support if interventions are to be scaled.

The three implemented interventions tested distinct approaches: norm modelling, positivity and community participation, delivered across Twitch, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Together, the streamers had a combined potential platform audience of approximately 145,495 followers and subscribers across the channels used for intervention delivery, although this should not be interpreted as unique or verified intervention reach. Importantly, the pilot tested both creator-led interventions designed to engage comparatively large existing audiences and a smaller, more sustained community-engagement model, demonstrating that streamer-led interventions can take different forms depending on the creator, community and intended mechanism of change.

Lessons Learned and Takeaways for Practitioners

The pilot highlighted important practical considerations around intervention delivery. Participating streamers were already strongly invested in positive community-building, raising important questions around how to balance credibility, values and existing relationships with communities, versus reach into ecosystems that may be more vulnerable. **Streamers also experienced different potential risks in delivering interventions**: workshop discussions highlighted experiences of racialized abuse and targeted hate, as well as lived experience of sexual violence. **Future interventions should consider individualized risk assessment, appropriate content warnings, disclosure protocols and safeguarding support rather than assuming that streamers or participants experience harm in the same way**.

Going beyond reach and engagement metrics, the pilot experimented with bespoke LLM-assisted classification to analyze audience responses to streamer content at scale. Across two of the interventions, **ISD analyzed 2,849 comments**, examining audience-response posture including agreement, disagreement, hostile disagreement and escalatory agreement. The analysis found no statistically significant changes in audience-response posture over the periods examined. This should not be interpreted as evidence that the interventions reduced toxicity, nor does the absence of statistically significant change demonstrate that they were ineffective. Instead, the pilot highlighted the challenges of detecting community-level change through relatively short interventions and the importance of matching evaluation methods to the intervention model, platform and intended outcome. More broadly, the pilot demonstrates **the importance of defining what meaningful change looks like before delivery and combining available platform metrics with qualitative and behavioral evidence, rather than equating reach with impact**.

Taken together, the pilot generated important lessons for the design and delivery of future interventions. Effective positive interventions should combine research evidence with **the lived experiences of gaming communities**, address the wider cultural and behavioral dynamics that enable misogyny rather than misogynistic content in isolation, and build iteration into the design process. **Streamers should be treated as co-creators rather than distribution channels for ready-made messaging**, with interventions drawing on culturally resonant approaches such as empathy, humor and modelling positive behavior. Streaming can also provide opportunities for deeper, sustained engagement rather than serving only as a channel for campaign distribution. However, this requires streamers to be appropriately resourced and supported, including through funding, safeguarding and institutional support. **Positive interventions are strongest when they work with gaming culture, make healthier behaviors visible and achievable, and invest in the communities and relationships through which those behaviors can be sustained**. Finally, future interventions should resource streamers appropriately, including budgeting for their time and providing the practical, institutional and safeguarding support needed to move from co-creation to sustained implementation.

This playbook translates these findings into practical guidance for designing, delivering, safeguarding and evaluating positive interventions in gaming communities, which the following sections set out.

Glossary

This playbook draws on definitions and thresholds outlined in ISD's harms taxonomy and toolkit on the intersection of misogyny, targeted hate, and violent extremism, produced for Project Catalyst.

Manosphere · The 'manosphere' is an umbrella term that refers to a number of interconnected misogynistic communities. It encompasses multiple types and severities of misogyny—from broader male supremacist discourse to men's rights activism (MRA) and 'involuntary celibates' (incels).

Misogyny · ISD draws upon the definition of Kate Manne, who argues misogyny operates to uphold a patriarchal social order, policing gender norms to ensure that women and marginalized gender identities conform. Misogyny works to justify violence when there is deviation from these norms. Misogyny includes what might be considered a type of deeply held prejudice toward women and marginalized gender identities.

Narratives, harms, and impacts · This playbook distinguishes *harms* including online harassment and intimate image abuse (IIA), their sub-harms, including body-shaming, slut-shaming, or doxxing (online harassment) or deceptive synthetic media, unsolicited sexual content, or non-consensual pornography (IIA), and impacts, which can include economic, psychological, sexual, social and political harm; self-censorship; abuse normalization, and fear and distress. Further information can be found in ISD's harms taxonomy: understanding the continuum of technology-facilitated gender-based violence to violent extremism. This playbook will further address the *narratives* which underpin these diverse forms of harm and impact.

NOTE · These distinctions matter for intervention design: a campaign which seeks to challenge beliefs and narratives alone may not be capable of changing conduct where certain beliefs or incentive structures are ingrained for potential perpetrators.

Streamer · A streamer is an individual who broadcasts themselves online, usually live, to an audience. For more information see here.

Targeted Hate and Violence (TH&V) · Following the Project Catalyst definition, targeted hate and violence is any activity that dehumanizes other people by seeking to elevate the position of members in one group while diminishing that of non-members based on a particular protected characteristic of those people; advocates for or uses violence to realize that dehumanization; and tolerates, supports, actively calls for, or directly uses violence against civilians or critical civilian infrastructure.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) · Any act that is carried out via information and communication technologies or other digital tools, which results in (or is likely to result in) physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.

Violent Extremism · Activity that promotes ideological, political or religious aims while advocating for or using violence to achieve those aims, and that tolerates, supports, actively calls for, or directly uses violence against civilians or critical civilian infrastructure. This definition of violent extremism is layered against ISD's social identity-based definition of extremism, which is understood as the advocacy of political and social change in line with a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over an 'out-group.' Extremism advances a dehumanizing 'othering' mindset incompatible with pluralism and universal human rights. It can be pursued through violent or non-violent means.

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The pilot interventions designed and delivered through Project Catalyst generated a number of practical lessons for future interventions seeking to leverage the role of streamers and gaming communities. These lessons span four areas: research and intervention design; working with streamers and gaming communities; safeguarding and responsible implementation; and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Research and intervention design

Intervention design should be grounded in both research evidence and lived experience. Academic literature reviews are only one part of understanding misogyny in gaming. Gamers and streamers of different genders provided critical insights into what they experience on platforms, which messages resonate, and how interventions can engage authentically with gaming communities. Focus groups and messaging workshops helped ensure that the intervention was grounded in both existing evidence and the lived experiences of the communities it sought to reach.

The research we did, as well as the discussions we had with streamers and gamers, also highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying dynamics that enable misogyny, rather than misogyny in isolation. Throughout the intervention development process, gamers and streamers identified a broader culture of toxicity within gaming platforms and influencer communities, particularly in competitive and hypercompetitive environments. This pointed towards the importance of addressing behavioral and cultural dynamics—including poor emotional regulation, competitive toxicity and the boundary between banter and genuine harm—that can create permissive conditions for misogyny.

Working with streamers and gaming communities

A key takeaway from our pilot interventions is that **streamers should be treated as co-creators**, rather than distribution channels for ready-made messaging. Giving streamers ownership over how the strategic message was translated into content helped ensure that interventions were authentic to their individual styles and communities. Streamers repeatedly noted that paid promotions and externally designed campaigns can be easily identifiable and may miss the mark because they lack an understanding of the audiences streamers interact with every day, and may also lead to interventions creating unintended consequences or significant pushback.

The co-creation process also provided important insights into what culturally resonant positive interventions can look like in practice. The five campaign concepts developed through the streamer workshop **overwhelmingly drew on empathy and humor in responding to toxicity and misogyny**. Whether through self-deprecating humor or meaningful interactions with strangers, streamers gravitated towards content that felt human, open and entertaining rather than institutional or corrective.

They also overwhelmingly preferred to model positive behavior rather than prescribe it, demonstrating empathy, emotional regulation and positive interaction rather than telling audiences how they should behave. This allowed healthier norms to be communicated through participation and example.

Streaming can also provide a space for deeper and more sustained intervention, rather than simply a channel for campaign distribution. One streamer incorporated the messaging approach and narrative design into a more focused intervention with at-risk young people. During streaming sessions, organically occurring incidents of poor sportsmanship or "crashing out" became opportunities to discuss emotional regulation and alternative responses, with participants reporting a qualitative shift in behavior over time. This suggests that the relationships and interactions surrounding streaming can themselves provide opportunities for sustained engagement. It also allows for deeper engagement with fan communities on Discord servers or other gaming-adjacent environments.

However, **interventions should not rely solely on creators' goodwill or existing capacity.** Three of the five streamers involved in the co-creation process went on to implement interventions despite receiving no payment for content production or delivery. While this provides an encouraging indication of the feasibility of the approach, it also highlights the limitations of relying on voluntary participation. Future interventions should resource streamers appropriately, including budgeting for their time and providing the practical, institutional and safeguarding support needed to move from co-creation to sustained implementation.

Safeguarding and responsible implementation

Safeguarding should be built into intervention design rather than treated as an additional consideration. Streamers described the mental-health pressures associated with streaming and highlighted a tension between wanting to create more humanizing and empathetic content and lacking the training or institutional support to manage difficult conversations or disclosures that might result. Interventions that ask streamers to take on a greater community role should therefore provide appropriate training, safeguarding infrastructure and ongoing support.

Safeguarding approaches should also recognize that streamers face different levels and forms of risk. Streamers are not equally exposed to harassment, abuse or targeted hate. Factors including race, gender and other aspects of identity can shape both the forms and intensity of abuse

streamers experience, while participation in an intervention may increase their visibility or expose them to further targeting. Risk assessments and safeguarding plans should therefore be tailored to the individual streamers involved rather than assuming a uniform level of vulnerability or applying the same support model to everyone.

Practitioners should similarly prepare participants for sensitive discussions and potential disclosures. Workshops addressing misogyny, sexual violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) or related harms should include clear content warnings in advance, regardless of the gender composition of the group. Men and boys can also be victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and facilitators should not make assumptions about participants' lived experiences. Safeguarding protocols should anticipate the possibility of disclosure, establish how facilitators will respond, and provide appropriate signposting and support without requiring participants to disclose personal experiences.

Importantly, relevant safety and wellbeing guidance already exists for researchers and practitioners working with harmful online content, including resources developed by VOX-Pol[5] covering issues such as exposure to harmful material, harassment, operational security and psychological wellbeing. However, this guidance has not yet been systematically adapted for streamers, who occupy a distinct position as both public-facing creators and community leaders. Adapting existing good practice into streamer-specific guidance on safeguarding, boundaries, disclosures and managing targeting therefore represents an important area for future work.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Intended outcomes and potential unintended harms should be determined before deciding how success will be measured. Intervention evaluation should begin with a clear understanding of what the intervention is intended to change, rather than defaulting to readily available platform metrics. Depending on the intervention, meaningful outcomes might include changes in attitudes, confidence, behavior, community norms or audience responses. Establishing these outcomes at the outset makes it possible to identify appropriate indicators and collect relevant baseline data against which change can be assessed.

Evaluation should also consider whether an intervention generates unintended consequences, such as backlash or increased toxicity. In this pilot, audience analysis found that positivity remained broadly stable during intervention periods. While this cannot demonstrate attitudinal or behavioral change, monitoring for adverse audience responses provided an important indication of whether the intervention itself introduced additional risk.

Finally, practitioners should combine different forms of evidence to understand reach, reception and impact. No single metric can determine whether an intervention has been effective. Platform metrics can provide useful information about reach and engagement, but should be combined with other forms of evidence, including pre- and post-intervention research, qualitative feedback, streamer reflections and analysis of audience responses. Where interventions generate large volumes of audience engagement, automated approaches such as LLM-assisted classification can support analysis at scale, but should form part of a broader mixed-methods evaluation approach rather than being treated as a measure of effectiveness in themselves.

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Online Misogyny, Violent Extremism and Gaming

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This chapter outlines the evidence base on the harms this intervention playbook seeks to address: online misogyny in gaming and its intersections with targeted hate, violence and violent extremism. It first examines the harms women experience in gaming environments, before exploring how misogyny, interpersonal grievance and gaming-related conflict can intersect with extremist forms of violence. It then considers the relationship between gaming and extremism, including how extremist actors use gaming communities and gaming-adjacent spaces to reach audiences and how harmful narratives and tactics circulate across these environments.

Women's participation in gaming is widespread, yet research consistently demonstrates that women experience gaming environments differently from men, particularly through gender-based harassment, sexual harassment and exclusion. The statistics on the right indicate how widespread this is.

Such existing research and insights gleaned from gamers and streamers (male and female) engaged in developing this playbook show how misogyny in gaming manifests in a broad range of forms:

- Gendered slurs and abusive communication, particularly in voice chat where gender is audible, or where gender is perceived as female through tone and pitch.
- Sexual harassment, sexualized commentary and unsolicited sexual approaches, including towards players' in-game characters.
- Gatekeeping, and claims that women are not "true gamers" or do not belong in competitive spaces. This includes comments like "is your boyfriend playing for you" or male players acting as saviours and protecting women in games, preventing them from playing equally.
- Humiliation and dehumanization, including the reduction of women to appearance or sexual availability.
- Threats, intimidation and coordinated harassment, including doxxing[13], which is the act of searching for and publishing private or

HARRASSMENT IN GAMING ⚠

3 out of 4 gamers face harassment
76 percent of adult players and 75 percent of young people aged 10-17 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games in 2023.

3 out of 4 women face gender-based hostility
77 percent of women surveyed reported dealing with gender-based hostility while gaming, most commonly judgements of their skill (70 percent), gatekeeping (65 percent) and patronising comments (50 percent). A further 44 percent had received unsolicited relationship approaches while playing.[6]

59 percent of women surveyed use a non-gendered or male identity when playing online specifically to avoid conflict and harassment.[7]

In controlled testing of live multiplayer sessions in 2025, hate and harassment was recorded in almost half of the sessions played using identity-signalling usernames.[8]

Exposure to extremism is frequently focused on specific titles
ADL survey data reported to the US Senate identified the titles in which adult players most frequently encountered white-supremacist extremism, led by Call of Duty (44 percent), Grand Theft Auto (35 percent) and Valorant (34 percent).[9]

Fortnite exodus
ADL's 2019 survey found that 36 percent of Fortnite players had quit or avoided the game as a result of harassment.[10]

Gender difference in perceptions of toxicity
There is also a significant gender difference in perceptions of toxicity on gaming platforms. 10.4 percent of male respondents feel that toxicity is culturally acceptable and 3.9 percent that it is justified, with only 5.1 percent of female respondents feeling toxicity is culturally acceptable, and 1.4 percent feeling it is justified.[11]

Responses to hate speech in online games
Teenage players aged 14–17 were significantly more likely than older players to laugh in response to hate speech in online games.

Male players were significantly more likely than female players to respond in ways that perpetuated the behavior, while female players were significantly more likely to withdraw, including by leaving in-game chat, taking a break or leaving the match.[12]

identifying information about a particular individual on the internet, typically with malicious intent. In extreme cases, misogyny also manifests as swatting, which is the act of making a hoax call to the emergency services in an attempt to bring about the dispatch of a large number of armed police officers to a particular address.

- Dogpiling[14], hate raids[15] and community mobilisation against individual targets. Dogpiling refers to the coordinated targeting of an individual by large numbers of users, and hate raids to the organised efforts to flood a user's or community's online space with abusive content.
- Sustained targeting of women streamers and competitors, including review bombing and organised campaigns against their work.
- Misogynistic "banter" presented as ordinary competitive conduct, where impact is dismissed on the basis of stated intent.
- Harassment that affects streamers' reputations, professional opportunities and income.
- Convergence with racism, homophobia, anti-LGBTQ+ hate (negative attitudes, rhetoric, or actions targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority communities)[16], including racialized misogyny directed at Black women.
- Exposure to extremist content and narratives across gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms, including through in-game communication, gaming-related propaganda and communities on platforms such as Discord, Steam and Twitch.[17]
- Normalization of hate, harassment and identity-based discrimination within gaming communities, which can reinforce divisive in-group/outgroup dynamics and potentially increase vulnerability to extremist narratives.[18]

The consequences of such harmful activity are behavioral as well as psychological. Women conceal their gender, avoid voice chat, decline to play with strangers, or leave particular titles and communities altogether. This produces a self-reinforcing demographic effect that streamers involved in focus groups identified, specifically that women concentrate in cosy and cooperative game spaces, leaving competitive environments to perpetuate the cycle of toxicity.[19]

For women streamers, the harm is also economic. Streamers described a precarious industry in which every decision to speak out carries a real cost—lost followers, lost credibility or lost income—and in which gatekeeping between streamers can escalate into bullying and harassment campaigns with direct consequences for a streamer's ability to earn a living.[20]

> "Sexism is rampant especially in the gaming community. It's so bad to the point where if you are a woman playing certain games you have to go out of your way to not let that be known.
>
> **CANADIAN GAMER, 19–21**

Key Misogynistic Narratives

ISD's ethnographic analysis identified a consistent set of misogynistic narratives across gaming platforms.[24] Misogynistic tropes framing women as inherently flawed, deceptive or deserving of contempt were especially common among Manosphere accounts, frequently using analogy and exaggerated stereotypes to depict women as demanding, emotionally draining or opportunistic. A recurring theme involved ranking women by perceived attractiveness and questioning their worth. Other content promoted disrespectful and coercive behavior as a legitimate dating strategy, positioning poor treatment of women as effective and desirable.

These findings sit within a much wider body of ISD research into the Manosphere and online misogyny across different geographic and cultural contexts. ISD's research has consistently shown that the Manosphere is a transnational ecosystem: narratives, terminology, influencers and tactics travel across borders and platforms, while being adapted to local political, social and cultural contexts.[25] Research conducted across Europe, as well as ISD's wider work on online misogyny, has identified recurring narratives around women's sexuality and perceived 'hypergamy'[26], the systematic disadvantage of men, opposition to feminism and women's rights, and rigid ideas about masculinity and gender roles.[27] At the same time, the prominence, framing and expression of these narratives vary significantly between national contexts. ISD's forthcoming research with Equimundo and UN Women examining Manosphere ecosystems in Brazil and South Africa further develops this comparative understanding, while Project Catalyst's accompanying research report examines how misogynistic and Manosphere narratives manifest within the distinct contexts of Canada and Jordan.

RECENT FLASHPOINT: 'GAMERGATE 2.0' AND ITS AFTERMATH

The 2014 Gamergate campaign provides an example of how gaming platforms have been used to harm women. Women developers, critics and journalists were subjected to sustained and coordinated trolling, harassment and violent threats under the pretext of defending ethics in games journalism and established a template that has been reused repeatedly.

A decade on, commentators, academics and journalists have described a sustained resurgence, widely labelled 'Gamergate 2.0'. The following are illustrative rather than exhaustive:

- **March 2024—Sweet Baby Inc.** A coordinated backlash against a women-owned narrative consultancy, and against developers associated with it, was compared to Gamergate by outlets including The Week, WIRED and The Verge.
- **Late 2024—Dragon Age: The Veilguard.** The title became a focal point for organised campaigns targeting games perceived to centre diversity and progressive values, with researchers noting the direct continuity of "anti-woke" and "anti-DEI" framing with Gamergate-era rhetoric.[21]
- **2025—Bethesda and The Elder Scrolls VI.** The visibility of women in senior creative roles was itself treated by some online communities as evidence of ideological subversion, despite the individuals concerned having worked at the studio for decades.
- **2025–26—Collective Shout.** Following a 2025 campaign that led Steam and itch.io to remove or deindex games depicting sexual violence, the organisation's all-women team reported a sustained wave of abuse including rape and death threats, doxxing and AI-generated deepfake imagery. Two reports analyzing what the organisation characterizes as coordinated technology-facilitated violence were launched at the Australian Parliament in August 2026.[22]

These events highlight a number of new dynamics. In particular, the targets of harassment have broadened. Where Gamergate focused on a small number of women in and around the games press, contemporary campaigns target consultants, studios, individual developers, advocacy organisations and, increasingly, anyone visibly associated with them. Additionally, the use of AI to create intimate image abuse to target women, for example the use of nudification apps[23], represents a new form of TFGBV.

For practitioners, the implication is that interventions cannot be designed as responses to a single past event. They must be built for a recurring, adaptive dynamic in which gaming grievance provides both the vocabulary and the mobilising audience for campaigns that extend well beyond gaming itself.

Anti-feminist narratives were also not confined to explicitly misogynistic or Manosphere influencers but were amplified by accounts associated with extremist ideologies. Recurring frames included rigid prescriptions for male behavior, with politeness and vulnerability cast as weakness; the normalization of male aggression as biological inevitability; and calls to roll back women's rights and depictions of feminism as a societal threat. This reflects a wider finding across ISD's work: online misogyny does not exist within a neatly bounded Manosphere, but can intersect with broader identity-based hate and extremist ecosystems, ranging from everyday misogynistic content through to more overtly supremacist and violent worldviews.

Within gaming specifically, these broader narratives take on forms shaped by gaming culture and its particular social dynamics. Women are portrayed as incompetent players or as participating for attention rather than for the game; diversity and inclusion are framed as an attack on gaming culture; and women's participation can be presented as an encroachment on a space imagined as inherently male. The narratives identified through Project Catalyst should therefore be understood both as expressions of wider, transnational misogynistic narratives, and as shaped by the particular cultures, communities and dynamics of gaming spaces.

PLATFORM SNAPSHOT

ISD's ethnographic research found that misogyny is a pervasive and cross-cutting theme across all platforms examined, but that individual platforms played distinct roles in amplification, ideological engagement and community formation.

TIKTOK

TikTok accelerates harmful narratives through design. Short-form, highly shareable content and algorithmic amplification share gaming content that normalizes misogyny and extremist rhetoric, with trends and humor used to make gender-based hostility aspirational. Enforcement gaps allow banned influencers to remain visible through repost accounts.

RUMBLE

Rumble provides a permissive environment in which misogyny intersects with conspiracy theories, antisemitism and White supremacy. Livestream interactivity creates feedback loops rewarding inflammatory behavior, while cross-platform promotion extends reach and provides resilience against deplatforming elsewhere.

DISCORD

Discord acts as a gateway to extremist worldviews. Large public servers with limited oversight normalize misogyny, racism and anti-migrant hate, often layered with humor. Fast-moving text channels and unarchived voice chat make harmful activity difficult to capture after the fact.

TWITCH

Twitch functions as a secondary node rather than a primary hub. Despite substantial follower counts across relevant accounts, activity was low and many influencers redirect audiences to less moderated platforms. Gaming dominates, but "Just Chatting" streams enable longer-form ideological engagement.

Tactics of Abuse: The Harms Women Face in Gaming

The tactics that carry these narratives are, for the most part, indistinguishable in form from ordinary online content. Through our research, we found the following tactics to be prolific on gaming platforms:

SHORT-FORM CLIPPING AND SENSATIONALISM

Harmful actors post highly shareable clips optimised for algorithmic engagement—"debate" clips, podcast segments framing women as unintelligent or hypocritical, and condescending reaction videos to women describing their own experiences.

HUMOR, IRONY AND MEMETIC PACKAGING

Jokes, memes and audiovisual content carrying hostile ideas while providing plausible deniability.

"COGNITIVE OPENINGS"

Gamification and memification of extremist and misogynistic narratives can facilitate "cognitive openings", making audiences more receptive to ideas or content they might otherwise be predisposed to reject. By embedding harmful narratives within humor, memes, gaming references and other familiar forms of participation, extremist content can become more socially accessible and less immediately recognizable as ideological or extremist material.

PSEUDO-INTELLECTUAL FRAMING

Long-form, citation-laden posts lend credibility to anti-feminist claims, appealing to audiences who would reject cruder expressions of the same argument.

RAGE-BAITING WITHIN THE PERFORMANCE ECONOMY

Some streamers adopt deliberately provocative positions for engagement without regard to consequence; unknown players target high-profile streamers to provoke a reaction, treating a resulting block or callout as a badge of honour.[28]

DIRECT HARASSMENT OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND STREAMERS

We documented clips of a female journalist spliced with mocking commentary, including material dismissing and belittling the death threats she had received.

EVASION OF CONTENT MODERATION

Repost networks keep the content of banned figures in circulation when accounts are banned by platform moderation teams. This ensures the longevity of these communities and their content to keep proliferating swiftly after accounts are struck down.

The Intersection of Extremism and Gaming

In parallel with research on misogyny, there has been a growing research base on how extremist actors use gaming communities, platforms and cultural forms to build networks, spread propaganda and recruit. Typologies developed in recent years by the Radicalisation Awareness Network and the Extremism and Gaming Research Network provide a useful structure. Lamphere-Englund's 2024 typology of harms associated with extremism and gaming identifies five principal categories[29]:

Extremist video games and modifications	Games produced by extremist groups, first appearing in the 1980s and growing steadily since, alongside "mods" that insert extremist content into existing titles.[30] Researchers disagree on their recruitment value: because such games must be sought out in specific forums, there is a clear selection bias among those who play them, which suggests they may function more to consolidate an existing base than to draw in newcomers.
Gamification as a radicalization tool	The use of game elements in non-game settings—leaderboards ranking attacks, badges, and memetic imagery depicting perpetrators "levelling up" on the basis of their atrocities. This can be top-down, through products built by extremist organisations, or bottom-up, emerging organically in online communities, as with the scoreboards ranking attacker "body counts" observed on 8chan.[31] The impact of gamification on radicalization remains contested and under-evidenced.[32]
Use of gaming pop culture references	Extremists appropriate gaming aesthetics and language to make propaganda legible and shareable. The Christchurch attack[33] was livestreamed in the style of a first-person shooter, with weapon iconography likened to "Easter eggs" inviting viewers to decode hidden messaging; the 2022 Buffalo attacker,[34] who partially livestreamed his attack on Twitch, directly credited Christchurch as inspiration.
Use of online games for communication	In-game chat is used to spread messaging and, in particular, to identify potential recruits through racist language or dark humor. Those who respond well are invited into private channels, where they gain access to more radicalized communities and broader networks.[35] ISD's own review of cases of a nexus between gaming and real-world (extremist) violence found live chats in gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms being used to plan violent activity and, in some cases, to attempt to recruit, radicalize or groom.
Use of gaming-adjacent platforms and ecosystems	Platforms built to support gaming community-building and livestreaming—Steam, Twitch, Discord and others—have been found to host extremist content and communities.[36]

How extremists target gamers

ISD's digital ethnography research across a range of gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms—alongside existing research on gaming-related violent extremist activity—highlights a recognizable set of targeting practices. There is rarely a single recruitment strategy; instead targeting involves gradual and sociable interactions, designed to feel like ordinary participation in a community.

It is important not to position gaming itself as a driver of misogyny, targeted hate or violent extremism. Rather, gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms form social ecosystems in which wider societal attitudes, grievances and prejudices are reproduced and can be amplified through technological features, community norms and social dynamics.[37] As with other online environments, these spaces can be exploited by harmful actors precisely because they provide existing communities, shared identities and cultural reference points through which narratives can travel.

This distinction is particularly important when considering the relationship between misogyny and violent extremism. Project Catalyst's harms taxonomy[38] identifies circumstances in which misogyny can intersect with targeted hate and violent extremism, including where gendered hostility develops into dehumanizing or exclusionary understandings of women as an outgroup, becomes embedded within a wider ideological worldview, or is used alongside other grievances to legitimize hostility or violence. These harms should not be understood as interchangeable, nor does exposure to misogyny or toxicity constitute a linear pathway to extremism. Instead, the overlap lies in particular narratives, behaviors and underlying dynamics—including dehumanization, grievance and hostile in-group/outgroup constructions—that can connect misogynistic, hate-based and extremist worldviews.

The following page identifies the tactics through which extremists exploit gaming spaces.

Forthcoming research explores how misogyny and gender-based violence manifest across extremist games, game modifications and user-generated content, including within sandbox and virtual reality gaming environments.[39] It examines how online misogyny can operate both alongside violent extremist ideologies and, in some contexts, as a standalone form of violent extremism and socialising force within gaming subcultures. The research aims to strengthen understanding of gaming as a site of ideological contestation and inform policy and platform responses to terrorist and violent extremist exploitation of gaming environments.

Taken together, the preceding sections demonstrate that misogyny, targeted hate, violence and violent extremism can intersect within gaming environments in different ways but should not be treated as interchangeable or as forming a single pathway to harm. The harms women experience in gaming exist, while misogynistic and gendered grievance can also intersect with interpersonal conflict, targeted violence and extremist worldviews. At the same time, gaming environments can provide points of contact, communities and competitive dynamics through which grievances are reinforced, challenged or, in rare cases, escalated. To better understand how these dynamics interact in practice, ISD analyzed ten cases in which gaming or gaming-adjacent environments intersected with real-world violence.

Tactics of Abuse: The Intersection of Extremism and Gaming

The following section identifies the tactics through which extremists exploit gaming spaces:

CONDITIONING THROUGH HUMOR, SLURS AND AMBIENT HOSTILITY

Recruitment within gaming chats can include subtle conditioning of targets towards a reactionary outlook that is hostile to outgroups including women, religious and ethnic minority communities, LGBTQ+ people and other perceived targets.[40] Even without deliberate recruitment, the widespread nature of misogynistic attitudes and hate speech helps incubate communities that promote extreme ideas and exposes new and young players to an environment where hateful and extremist tropes are normalized.[41] Humor and irony are frequent in this environment, lowering the social cost of hostile content while providing plausible deniability for those circulating it.

FUNNELLING INTO PRIVATE SPACES

Individuals who actively engage with hateful and extreme ideas are moved into private servers and closed communities where messaging becomes more explicit and social ties tighter.[42] Previous ISD research has shown how Discord has played this dual role, both hosting large and lightly moderated public servers, as well as linking users onward to more extreme material on other platforms.[43]

TARGETING OF MINORS ON YOUTH-HEAVY PLATFORMS

This dynamic is most acute where platform demographics skew young. GNET research analyzing extremist ecosystems on Roblox found incidents of recruitment into right-wing extremism on the platform. On a platform with a high proportion of minors, extremist content is both produced and consumed by underage users.[44] Documented cases show a consistent pattern in which older users build trust with children through shared gameplay and in-game symbolism before moving them to Discord servers for sustained ideological indoctrination.

MAINSTREAMING THROUGH INFLUENTIAL STREAMERS

Influential gamers mainstream extremist talking points both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, extremists infiltrate discussions started by mainstream gaming influencers to spread their messaging. Directly, streamers who began with apolitical gaming content have shifted towards far-right and misogynistic material, carrying established audiences with them; others have been repeatedly sanctioned for misogynistic conduct on stream. ISD's ethnographic analysis identified streamers who do not meet the definition of extremist or Manosphere influencers, but whose commentary regularly veers into that territory, and around whom communities normalizing misogynistic attitudes have formed.

CROSS-PLATFORM USE

Targeting is rarely confined to one service. ISD found relevant actors using different platforms based on the functionality they afford, for example short-form clipping and algorithmic reach on TikTok; interactive, lightly moderated livestreaming on Rumble; sustained community formation on Discord; and Twitch as a secondary node redirecting audiences elsewhere.

ISD's Case Study Analysis: Gaming and Violence

Early public debate about video games was shaped by a moral panic which held that violent games would radicalize young people into real-world violence or make them more aggressive. That claim has not been borne out by the evidence.[45] The relationship between gaming, misogyny and violent extremism is therefore neither straightforward nor linear. Exploring patterns across ten case studies of gaming-related violence analyzed by ISD experts, we find several ways gaming plays a role in real-world harms, from misogynistic harassment to credible threats of offline violence. Gaming can provide a point of contact between individuals, create competitive environments in which grievances escalate, and form communities whose norms influence what behaviors are tolerated or challenged. Most of the incidents reviewed occurred or became visible through online multiplayer games[46] and their associated forums, and all identified perpetrators were male.

Gaming as a point of contact for grooming and exploitation

Like other online social environments, gaming spaces can connect individuals who would otherwise never encounter one another. This creates opportunities for positive relationships and community, but can also facilitate grooming, exploitation or extremist recruitment. The targeting of children by 764-linked networks[47] on Roblox, for example, demonstrates how gaming environments can become points of contact for actors seeking to manipulate or exploit young people.[48] This makes digital resilience—including recognizing grooming behaviors, protecting personal information and knowing when and how to seek help—an important component of prevention.

Misogyny and gendered grievance can intersect with violence

Several cases demonstrate how hostility towards women, entitlement and rejection can coexist with or contribute to trajectories towards violence. In Brazil, 19-year-old *Call of Duty Mobile* player Ingrid Oliveira Bueno da Silva was murdered by an esports competitor who subsequently circulated footage of the killing alongside a document containing references to terrorism and other murders.[49] The case-study research identifies both misogyny and violent extremism as contributing factors. In another case, an individual travelled from Canada to California and attacked a woman he had met through online gaming and her boyfriend following years of apparent obsession and romantic rejection.[50] Another individual, meanwhile, identified himself as an incel while making repeated homicidal and suicidal statements within a Discord community, although his threats appeared to be driven primarily by feelings of exclusion and jealousy within that community.[51] These differences matter: misogyny, extremist ideology, personal grievance and violent ideation can overlap, but should not be treated as interchangeable or as forming a single pathway to violence.

The intersection of competition and interpersonal grievance can provide another route to violent harm

The cases also repeatedly highlight poor sportsmanship, competitive frustration and unresolved interpersonal conflict. After losing a game of *Fortnite*, a man in France reportedly directed his anger towards an unrelated 11-year-old girl, whom he subsequently murdered.[52] In the US, an individual travelled from New Jersey to Florida and attacked another *ArcheAge* player with a hammer following an online gaming dispute.[53] A dispute following a *Call of Duty* match escalated into a swatting incident that resulted in the death of Andrew Finch[54], who had no involvement in the original conflict, while the 2018 Madden tournament shooting followed the perpetrator's loss in a professional competition.[55] These cases demonstrate how conflict originating in gaming can, in rare and extreme circumstances, move beyond both the game and the individuals initially involved.

Gaming communities can make warning signs visible, providing intervention opportunities

The social nature of gaming also means that peers may encounter concerning behavior before other institutions do. In 2025, a young gamer overheard two teenagers discussing a school shooting while playing online and provided law enforcement with sufficient information to identify them; subsequent searches uncovered explosive devices and evidence of planning.[56] Other Discord users repeatedly attempted to report the individual's violent statements, although difficulties identifying him delayed intervention. These cases point to an important distinction between the presence of warning signs and the systems available to act upon them: community members may recognize that behavior has crossed a line while still lacking effective reporting or escalation pathways.

Gaming communities can serve as protective environments

This potential extends beyond reporting explicit threats. Following a 2024 double-murder-suicide in Washington State, members of a close-knit gaming community were able retrospectively to identify changes in the behavior of two highly active members—including withdrawal from their usual online communities—and it was ultimately an online friend who initiated the welfare check that led police to the scene.[57] The case illustrates the depth of relationships that can develop through gaming and raises the possibility of equipping communities to recognize and respond to changes in behavior or signs that an online friend may need support, rather than focusing solely on overtly violent content.
Taken together, these cases reinforce why gaming should not be characterized as uniquely dangerous or inherently radicalising. Instead, its relevance lies in the combination of social interaction, competition and community that gaming environments facilitate. These same characteristics can contribute to the escalation or normalization of harmful behavior, but they also create opportunities for prevention. Strengthening sportsmanship and conflict resolution, reducing tolerance for misogynistic and violent rhetoric, improving recognition and reporting of credible warning signs, and empowering bystanders are therefore potential points of intervention that emerge directly from the case-study evidence.

This work found that gaming-adjacent platforms can act as a gateway where vulnerable individuals encounter extremist material, but gaming is more accurately understood as a cultural touchpoint which facilitates that content than as a specific driver of violent extremist activity. This distinction means that a prevention approach that works with gaming culture is both possible and necessary.

②

Gaming Communities as Sites for Prevention

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The previous chapter focused on the harms and risks relevant to gaming communities. This chapter turns to the characteristics and features of gaming culture, platforms and communities that create opportunities for prevention, drawing on ISD's research with gamers and streamers.

Gaming communities can play an important role in young people's social lives, both by reinforcing existing relationships and creating opportunities to form new ones. Canadian research indicates that 37 percent of young gamers play with people they already know, highlighting how gaming can function as an extension of existing friendship networks rather than a separate online social world.[58] Similar findings emerge from research with adolescents in the United States: 46 percent reported frequently playing two-player games with friends or family, while 44 percent frequently played multiplayer games with them; when playing online with a group they already knew, 67 percent played with offline friends and 52 percent with friends they had met online.[59] Gaming can also provide spaces for forms of connection that may be more difficult offline. Australian research with young men found that online spaces could provide opportunities to express feelings and discuss personal experiences they might otherwise withhold because of concerns about judgement.[60] Taken together, these findings underline the importance of understanding gaming communities not simply as channels for content, but as meaningful social environments in which relationships are maintained, new connections are formed, and young people can find opportunities for belonging and emotional expression.

Gaming as a mainstream, livestreamed and streamer-led culture

Gaming has advanced as a mainstream cultural force over the past decade.[61] A pandemic-accelerated shift has diversified gaming's audience and given rise to streaming as entertainment in its own right, and to gaming-adjacent platforms such as Discord functioning as third spaces for socialising and community-building that extend well beyond any single game. Livestreaming is a core component of this shift in culture, acting as a real-time, interactive communal experience with audiences sharing experiences with streamers through voice, in-game chat and activity, and also through specialist community spaces ('servers'). Livestreams can also be recorded and therefore rewatched in various forms, for example through clips on TikTok or YouTube.

> "It's very much an open door nowadays. It's very acceptable. It's no longer this closed little space for, let's be honest, what it used to be: nerdy little dudes. That's not the case anymore. It's a very different landscape."
>
> MALE STREAMER

But while gaming has moved seamlessly into mainstream culture, its norms have not always kept pace with its increasingly diverse audience, particularly in relation to female gamers. Gaming is now deeply integrated into wider popular culture, intersecting with music, film, fashion and major consumer brands, while gaming livestreams and creator content have become forms of entertainment in their own right.[62] Gaming should therefore be understood not simply as an activity, but as a wider cultural and social ecosystem encompassing players, creators and audiences. This tension, between an increasingly mainstream and demographically diverse player base and certain gaming communities carrying cultural norms drawn from an earlier, narrower gaming identity, defines much of the current landscape and sits at the heart of why positive intervention is both necessary and possible.

Streamers as norm-setters

Streamers occupy a distinctive position of influence. Gamers are drawn to them first as aspirational, skilled players, but this appeal quickly extends into a broader role as a behavioral role model. Both streamers and their audiences recognize that this influence cuts both ways.

> "Even if you weren't that kind of person originally, it's easy to get negatively influenced."
>
> CANADIAN GAMER, 19–21

> "If the streamer seems successful in games or life it makes me wanna watch more, knowing I would probably gain something from it, and makes me admire them."
>
> CANADIAN GAMER, 19–21

Streamers exercise this through behavioral modelling, as gamers absorb the way streamers treat others, handle frustration and navigate conflict, and as a cultural filter, translating and packaging

broader norms and messages into content that is appealing and digestible for their audience. Where streamers actively curate their space, this influence can entrench overwhelmingly positive norms. Where toxicity becomes part of a streamer's content strategy, rewarded by an attention economy in which rage goes viral, the same influence can normalize hostility, including towards women.[63]

Parasocial relationships, intimacy and shared identity

Community was frequently identified by the gamers we spoke with as a core driver of gaming's appeal, and both streamers and gamers described a dynamic where the game acts as a hook for bringing in audiences. In this, the streamer provides a focal point by inspiring their audience. The broader community establishes itself around a streamer providing a sense of belonging with a shared love of gaming sitting at the core.

Streamers who took part in our research described their communities in terms that go well beyond the ordinary streamer–audience relationship. This included identifying the broader community as a safe haven from the pressures, judgement and division of the outside world. Interestingly, some streamers characterized these as spaces where people from radically different backgrounds are united not by tolerance of differences but by a deliberate indifference to them. Repeatedly, both streamers and gamers characterized these communities as a form of family built on a strong sense of belonging.

> “Everyone gets on like a house on fire because we've got all these shared interests... A bad actor coming from outside, they don't even really get the opportunity to do anything, because they can tell very, very quickly that those views aren't welcome.
>
> MALE STREAMER

This intimacy is a strong protective asset which ISD identified as a core avenue for intervention design. It makes it easier to identify early warning signs of concerning behavior and can allow for intervention to occur organically before harm occurs. However, this does also bring with it the risk of parasocial attachment, causing pressure on streamers from misread intimacy. It can also make communities feel protective of their own culture, including behaviors such as banter and trash-talking which feel harmless from the inside, but which can underpin harmful activity.

The role of gaming-adjacent platforms

Much of gaming's community life happens off the game and primary streaming platform, in gaming-adjacent spaces such as Discord, forums and Steam community hubs. These spaces sustain conversation, coordination and belonging over time, allowing communities and their norms to become deeply embedded. The same infrastructure can support both healthy and harmful communities: for example, Discord servers rely heavily on community moderation, with significant variation in verification requirements, moderation capacity and policy enforcement between servers. This makes gaming-adjacent spaces particularly important for intervention. Nurturing positive communities and establishing healthy norms early can help communities become more resilient to misogynistic, hateful and extremist worldviews.

Competitive dynamics, anonymity and platform incentives shape behavior

Three structural features of the gaming ecosystem were repeatedly identified by the streamers and gamers who participated in focus groups as well as in the literature around gaming and extremism as being core facilitators of hostile and harmful behaviors.

FEATURE 1 **Competitive intensity**	Toxicity can be particularly pronounced in competitive, ranked and team-based games, where players' outcomes depend heavily on teammate performance. Ranking systems, competitive pressure and high levels of player interdependence can create emotionally charged environments in which mistakes or perceived underperformance are attributed to individual teammates, creating opportunities for blame, scapegoating and harassment.[64] For women, this can become explicitly gendered: rather than criticism remaining focused on gameplay, poor performance or disagreement can trigger misogynistic stereotypes and gender-based abuse. Research with women in esports has found that some avoid voice chat altogether in ranked games because revealing themselves as women can change the nature and intensity of the harassment they receive.[65]
FEATURE 2 **Anonymity and unaccountability**	Voice chat gives players direct access to one another to vent frustration, while affording little accountability. Where the gender of a gamer is identifiable, or assumed, through audio chat or other signifiers, misogyny becomes a default means of attacking other gamers. Playing with strangers removes the social guardrails that govern behavior among friends, adding to a broader environment of toxicity where extremist rhetoric and abuse on the basis of gender, sexuality and race are frequently experienced by gamers.[66] Free-to-play games lower the stakes further, as removal or banning does not bring with it a financial loss, whilst the skew towards younger players with less emotional regulation can lead to higher concentrations of harmful behavior.
FEATURE 3 **Platform incentives and fragmented moderation**	Chat and livestream features that prioritize engagement can make toxic and provocative content more visible rather than less. Monetization features can create an additional incentive structure, allowing creators to financially benefit from attention and engagement generated by provocative or controversial content. Content moderation, meanwhile, varies enormously across the gaming ecosystem,[67] with some platforms maintaining meaningful enforcement against harassment and extremist material, while others combine growing popularity with comparatively lax moderation, becoming more permissive environments for harmful activity.[68]

The role of gaming communities in norm reinforcement

The same structural features that create risk also create opportunity. Close-knit gaming communities have, in practice, functioned as an early warning system, and in several real-world cases reviewed in Chapter One, it was a fellow player, teammate or online friend who first noticed concerning behavior and raised the alarm, in one instance providing a sheriff's office with the gamertags and photographs needed to identify two teenagers planning a school attack.[69] Streamers describe the trust and self-regulation built within

a well-managed community as a kind of immune system, in which members increasingly challenge or report harmful behavior themselves, reducing the burden on any one individual to intervene. This dual character, where communities are capable of both normalizing harm and building resilience to it, is a core dynamic for this playbook and one of the key levers for interventions.

Working with gaming culture, not against it

The evidence set out in this chapter points towards the need for interventions to work with gaming culture. Messaging that ignores the role of competitiveness and banter in gaming's appeal, or that frames behavior and culture as pathological rather than correctable, is likely to be dismissed as out of touch. Messaging rooted in the same infrastructure, communities and streamer relationships that already shape behavior in these spaces has a far stronger foundation to build on.

③

Approaches to Online Interventions

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This chapter provides an overview of positive intervention models being piloted or applied in gaming spaces. It examines a range of approaches that offer useful lessons for intervention design, including how communities can be equipped to challenge harmful behavior, how positive norms can be made more visible, and how trusted messengers can support healthier community dynamics. It focuses on three intervention models—bystander and community resilience, norm change, and community engagement—drawing on existing evidence and practical case studies to identify actionable lessons for applying positive interventions in gaming environments.

Bystander and community resilience interventions seek to strengthen a community's capacity to identify and respond to harmful behavior from within. Rather than placing responsibility primarily on those targeted by abuse, these approaches equip peers, moderators, streamers and other community members to recognize harmful behavior, intervene proportionately and reinforce shared expectations about what is acceptable.

Bystander and community resilience interventions have been used widely offline to address a range of societal challenges. Community resilience models, drawn from disaster preparedness, have helped prevent extremism[70] and violence[71] by enhancing a community's collective capacity to withstand, adapt to, and recover from harmful influences or incidents. Bystander intervention programmes have also been shown to reduce harmful behaviors, such as sexual violence.[72] Their application in online gaming is still comparatively nascent, but the approach offers clear opportunities to strengthen healthier and more resilient gaming communities.

As Chapter 2 established, gaming communities already contain influential individuals and informal mechanisms through which behavior is modelled, challenged and reinforced. Bystander and community resilience interventions can build on these existing structures rather than attempting to impose entirely new forms of community governance. This may involve working initially with moderators, streamers and influential players to establish and model positive norms, while building the confidence and capacity of the wider community to reinforce those norms themselves.

Supporting moderators and streamers can include educational resources to improve their understanding of relevant harms; training on how and when to intervene; guidance for establishing and reinforcing shared community norms; safety training to manage risks to their own security and wellbeing; and ongoing support to navigate difficult or unfamiliar situations. When working with younger gamers, relevant trusted adults, including parents, teachers and youth workers, may also have an important supporting role.

Ultimately, however, community resilience depends on positive behaviors extending beyond individual streamers or moderators. Community members themselves need to be able to recognize when behavior has crossed a line, understand their own role in responding, and have practical and proportionate options for doing so. Bystander intervention models provide a useful framework for understanding how this can be supported.

Understanding bystander intervention

The bystander intervention model dates to the work of social psychologists Latané and Darley, who identified five stages through which an individual moves before intervening.[73]

Failure at any stage can result in inaction. Intervention programming therefore needs to consider each stage separately. In gaming environments, players need to be able to recognize problematic behavior, understand when it warrants a response, see themselves as having a role in responding, know what a proportionate intervention looks like, and feel sufficiently confident and supported to act. When it comes to responsibility, this can be particularly hard in gaming environments. Given various actors are responsible for moderation, for example in-game moderators, or platform's content moderators, it is recommended that collective responsibility is promoted in gaming cultures, rather than pinpointing one particular actor.[74]

The same social barriers that inhibit intervention offline can also operate in gaming communities. Latané and Darley's work identified three particularly relevant barriers[75]: diffusion of responsibility, where individuals feel less personally responsible when others are present; evaluation apprehension, where people fear negative judgement from their peers; and pluralistic ignorance, where the apparent inaction of others is interpreted as evidence that a situation is acceptable.

These dynamics are particularly important in gaming environments where banter, trash talk and provocative behavior may already form part of established community culture. Interventions therefore need to help community members distinguish between accepted forms of competitive interaction and behavior that causes harm, while making clear that challenging harmful behavior is itself compatible with belonging to the community.

Intervention programming should also be realistic about what it asks community members to do. Consistent bystander action is more likely when responses are proportionate, practical and compatible with existing patterns of interaction. Overly onerous or confrontational interventions may be avoided because they are difficult, socially costly or disruptive to ordinary community participation. Effective programmes should therefore identify low-risk forms of intervention that can become socially acceptable defaults, alongside clear escalation routes for more serious behavior.

FIGURE 1

Bystander intervention model



Case Study: Christchurch Call Foundation's Bystander and Community Training

In May 2026, the Christchurch Call Foundation launched two sets of free e-learning resources in the United Kingdom as part of Project Catalyst to help address misogyny, violence and extremism in online gaming. It also published a background report that grounds these interventions in robust research.[76]

Level Up Safely[77] was designed for parents, caregivers, educators and other practitioners to help them better understand online gaming spaces and support the young people who inhabit them. By improving adults' understanding of the challenges young people may encounter online, the programme seeks to strengthen their ability to help young people navigate those challenges and build resilience to future harms.

Digital Bystanders[78] was designed for online community moderators and Trust and Safety practitioners, building their capacity to prevent and respond to online harms. With a particular focus on gender-based violence, the course addresses barriers that can inhibit intervention online, including uncertainty around warning signs and social norms, gaps in knowledge and training, diffusion of responsibility across users and platforms, and fears of causing additional harm through intervention. It equips participants with the 5D model—Direct, Distract, Delegate, Delay and Document—as a practical framework for responding safely and proportionately to harm and fostering healthier online communities. The model has subsequently been incorporated into the Digital Leadership Community's Bystander Intervention programme for digital community leaders, piloted with 84 students collectively representing communities of more than 200,000 members, and is being extended to volunteer community moderators through a partnership with Discord.[79]

A companion podcast for Digital Bystanders and Level Up Safely was launched in August 2026[80], extending the learning beyond the courses themselves. Both courses also incorporate a Find a Helpline tool, connecting participants with emotional and mental health support where needed.

Tips for Interventions

CO-DESIGN WITH THE TARGET COMMUNITY

Combine practitioner expertise with the lived experience of community members to identify the most salient challenges and develop responses that fit existing community cultures and practices.

DESIGN FOR EVERY STAGE OF BYSTANDER ACTION

Treat awareness, recognition, responsibility, skills and confidence as distinct potential failure points. Raising awareness alone will have limited impact if community members do not know how to respond or do not feel able to act.

KEEP INTERVENTIONS PROPORTIONAL AND PRACTICAL

Proposed behaviors should be realistic within ordinary gaming interactions and should account for the potential social cost of intervening. Low-key, low-risk forms of intervention can help establish socially acceptable defaults without requiring public confrontation.

BUILD ON EXISTING SELF-REGULATION

Communities already have ways of signalling approval and disapproval, correcting behavior and establishing boundaries. Where appropriate, interventions should work through these existing mechanisms rather than introducing practices that feel externally imposed.

SUPPORT BYSTANDER WELLBEING

Even proportionate interventions can expose gamers, moderators and streamers to harassment, brigading or targeted abuse. This risk may be particularly acute for younger gamers and members of marginalized communities. Interventions should therefore include appropriate safety guidance, support and clear escalation pathways rather than shifting responsibility for community safety onto individuals without protecting them.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCALIZATION

Intervention programming is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is critical that content and approaches are localized to the population(s) they serve. Translating a course or resources from English to other languages is rarely sufficient to effectively engage other populations. Alongside translation, lexicons of key terms need to be developed so that terminology is appropriate for the audience you seek to reach—particularly around terms such as “misogyny” and “Manosphere”. Similarly, localizing resources such as studies that provide an evidence base (where possible) is important, and then ensuring participants are directed to reliable partners for further support in their language or region also ensures interventions have efficacy. Engaging local subject matter experts where possible, particularly in the gaming space, helps to ensure credibility and authenticity, as cultural norms, gaming trends and access to technology vary significantly in different countries.

Social Norm-Change Interventions

Norm-change interventions seek to shift behavior by changing perceptions of what others in a group do, approve of or expect. Rather than directly targeting an individual's underlying beliefs, they can make positive behaviors and expectations more visible and salient at the point of decision. Understanding how social norms influence behavior is therefore important for designing interventions in online gaming.

Norms are specific to particular groups and are actively and collectively negotiated.[81] People are influenced by them in two principal ways: through descriptive norms, or perceptions of how peers behave in a given situation, and injunctive norms, or perceptions of how peers expect them to behave. Descriptive norms can signal that a behavior is common and therefore acceptable, while injunctive norms influence behavior through anticipated social approval or disapproval.

Importantly, norms can conflict. Individuals belong to multiple social groups, each of which may carry different expectations, while descriptive and injunctive norms can also conflict within the same group. In gaming, for example, the descriptive norm of trash talk or banter may conflict with formal expectations around player conduct. In these moments, research suggests[82] that the norm most salient at the point of decision is more likely to influence behavior. This is particularly relevant where trash talk serves not only as provocative behavior but as a form of bonding and identity formation:[83] the perceived norm of banter may carry greater immediate social meaning than more abstract rules around appropriate conduct. Similarly, where different aspects of an individual's identity carry competing expectations, the identity most salient in the moment can shape which norms influence behavior.[84]

For intervention design, this means it is not enough simply to state what behavior is desirable. Practitioners need to understand which norms are already operating within a particular community, how they are activated, and which people and behaviors make alternative norms credible and visible.

Several findings from social-norm research are particularly relevant to interventions in online gaming:

Norms are established through visible peer examples, not abstract statements	People learn new behaviors and attitudes by observing others[85], whether through direct interactions or indirectly (e.g. through online forums). This is especially important in modelling norms since the perception of how peers behave exerts a strong influence on a person's behavior. This modelling is particularly meaningful when it comes from respected and credible members of the community.
Identity threat can strengthen attachment to existing group norms.	When people perceive a valued group identity to be under threat, that identity can become more salient and exert greater influence over behavior.[86] This is particularly relevant where narratives frame men or gamers as unfairly attacked or culturally displaced. Interventions that appear to condemn a community or identity as a whole may therefore generate defensiveness rather than reflection.

Anonymity can alter the balance between community and wider social norms	Research suggests that anonymity can strengthen conformity to norms within an online group while weakening the social accountability that ordinarily discourages transgression.[87] In intervention terms, this increases the importance of making positive community norms visible and socially meaningful.
Normative influence can be short- or long-term	Research distinguishes between conformity produced by immediate social pressure and norms that become internalised and reshape a person's longer-term frame of reference.[88-89] Interventions should therefore consider not only whether they produce an immediate behavioral response, but whether they help establish durable expectations about acceptable behavior.

Taken together, these findings suggest that norm-change interventions in gaming should not simply tell players what not to do. They should make healthier behaviors visible, credible and socially meaningful within the communities where behavior occurs. This can include modelling empathy, collaboration and community responsibility; reinforcing examples of peers already demonstrating these behaviors; and avoiding approaches that shame or problematize gamers, men or boys as a group.

Case Study: PERIL's Peer Learning Training

As part of Project Catalyst, the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) developed and piloted a three-day training programme in Canada, Jordan and Kenya. The curriculum, *Peer Learning and Support Training: Online Harms, Gender, and Technology*, authored by Amee Wurzburg, MPH, covered gender norms and socialization, TFGBV, online manipulation, and approaches to productive dialogue for challenging misogyny.

PERIL's pilot trained 59 participants aged 18–35. Its process and outcome evaluations found increased participant confidence, skills and commitment to having conversations about masculinity, gender norms and online harms.

In follow-up sessions in Kenya, participants reported facilitating an average of eight conversations with people in their lives to counter TFGBV and misogynistic content. Participants particularly valued the interactive content and opportunities for peer discussion, while some expressed interest in longer and more in-depth training, including further material on digital literacy and reporting mechanisms for survivors of TFGBV.

Tips for Interventions

AVOID INADVERTENTLY REINFORCING HARMFUL NORMS

Simply emphasising how prevalent harmful behavior is can create a boomerang effect by making that behavior appear common and therefore normal. Where possible, foreground positive behaviors that already exist within the community and make their prevalence and acceptability visible.

DISTINGUISH PERCEIVED NORMS FROM ACTUAL ATTITUDES

What appears to be widely accepted behavior may not reflect what most community members privately believe. Audience research should therefore explore both what people themselves think and what they believe their peers think before an intervention is designed.

IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT COMMUNITY

Gamers are not a homogeneous group, and norms are most influential when attached to a meaningful reference group. Interventions should therefore identify the specific communities, games, streamers or peer groups whose expectations matter to the intended audience rather than relying on an abstract category of “gamers”.

AVOID IDENTITY-THREATENING FRAMING

Communities already have ways of signalling approval and disapproval, correcting behavior and establishing boundaries. Where appropriate, interventions should work through these existing mechanisms rather than introducing practices that feel externally imposed.

MAKE POSITIVE NORMS VISIBLE THROUGH CREDIBLE PEOPLE AND BEHAVIORS

Rather than relying only on statements about appropriate conduct, work with influential and trusted community members to model behaviors such as empathy, collaboration, emotional regulation and community responsibility.

Community Engagement with Men and Boys

Community engagement interventions seek to create sustained opportunities for men and boys to build relationships, discuss their experiences and develop healthier community norms within spaces they already use.[90] Unlike one-off messaging interventions, these approaches are typically long-term and multi-touch, building trust, shared ownership and the collective capacity needed to sustain change over time.

In gaming contexts, this means recognizing online gaming spaces not simply as sites in which potentially harmful behavior occurs, but as important environments for socialization, identity formation and emotional expression. Community engagement approaches can build on these characteristics by fostering positive social norms and relationships within existing communities, or by creating new spaces that retain the social benefits of gaming while providing greater support and structure.

When addressing harmful behaviors, community engagement can combine structural and environmental change—such as stronger community norms, moderation practices and governance—with individual-level engagement that builds empathy, belonging and accountability.

Effective community engagement should also be rooted in community members participating directly in modelling and reinforcing desired behaviors. Research with gamers in Hungary, for example, found that exposure to peer testimonials and examples of adaptive responses to toxic behavior improved participants' own adaptive responses and reduced maladaptive responses to toxicity.[91] This illustrates the potential of positioning gamers as part of the solution and making positive responses to harmful behavior visible within the community.

Community engagement can also target the structures through which communities govern themselves. Community codes of conduct, for example, can establish shared expectations and provide a basis for peer-led accountability.[92] One study of three Minecraft servers found an association between server rules and levels of toxicity, with rules appearing to matter more than moderation enforcement in shaping communication norms.[93] Effective codes of conduct can therefore combine aspirational expectations about positive behavior with clear mechanisms for responding when community standards are breached.

Community engagement can also involve creating new communities specifically designed to provide healthier spaces for male gamers, as demonstrated by Next Gen Men.

Case Study: Next Gen Men

Next Gen Men (NGM), a Canadian non-profit working with men and boys on healthy masculinity, runs a Discord-based community called NGM Alliance[94], first launched in 2020. The server is open to “masculine-identifying youth in middle and high school” and is facilitated by a small, trained youth staff team. There is a careful screening process to ensure the space is safe and the community operates under a documented ‘System of Safety’, including a confidential reporting channel.

Communities are set up around games, including Minecraft, Jackbox and Dungeons & Dragons, making them the entry point rather than the purpose of the space. They are maintained for a prolonged period where participants can feel safe and moderators can build trust. NGM's work demonstrates that sustained engagement and shared play can create opportunities for more difficult conversations about wellbeing, relationships and harmful ideas to surface between peers. According to NGM’s director of programs, Jonathon Reed, “this vulnerability happens over months and years of not just gaming together, but navigating how to talk about feelings, how to challenge harmful ideas, and how to really show up for each other".[95]

“This vulnerability happens over months and years of not just gaming together, but navigating how to talk about feelings, how to challenge harmful ideas, and how to really show up for each other.

Tips for Interventions

RECRUIT FROM WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, NOT AROUND IT

Programme leads should be identified from existing gaming communities, such as influencers, streamers or content creators, rather than brought in as outside experts. Credibility in gaming spaces is earned through participation, not authority, and messages carry more weight when they come from someone players already trust and want to be like.

COMMIT TO THE LONG TERM

A single workshop or one-off session is unlikely to shift entrenched norms; meaningful behavior change requires sustained contact over months. Design programmes with a multi-touch structure from the start with regular sessions designed to create meaningful connections.

INVOLVE PLAYERS IN SHAPING THE RULES, NOT JUST FOLLOWING THEM

Give community members a genuine role in developing or revising behavioral guidelines, rather than presenting rules as fixed and externally imposed. Ownership over shared standards tends to produce stronger buy-in and more consistent peer enforcement than top-down mandates.

FRAME THE WORK AS BUILDING SOMETHING, NOT CORRECTING SOMEONE

Avoid opening engagement with boys and young men by naming them as a problem population; this risks defensiveness that shuts conversation down before it starts. Instead, position participants as partners with a stake in the health of their own community. The goal is a better space they help create, not a behavior they are being made to fix.

BUILD SAFETY INTO THE PROJECT

Any youth-facing gaming community needs documented safety protocols, trained facilitators, and a clear, confidential reporting pathway before it launches. This is not incidental to community engagement; it is what allows genuine vulnerability and disclosure to happen safely.

④

The Catalyst Pilot

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Co-designing a Positive Gaming Intervention

ISD led an experimental four-stage pilot intervention to test models for the different ways gaming streamers could develop and test messaging and deploy strategic communications campaigns focused on positive gameplay as a means to tackle online misogyny. The interventions delivered during this pilot were not meant to be exhaustive, but were instead designed to test the effectiveness of an influencer-led co-creation model. The insights derived from this process hold valuable lessons for practitioners, organisations, and platforms seeking to launch similar or larger-scale initiatives focused on gaming influencer-led social campaigns.

Developing the Intervention

Influencer-led gaming interventions targeting online misogyny are not new. For over a decade following #GamerGate, gaming, gamers and gaming streamers have been the focus of online campaigns meant to challenge toxic norms in gaming spaces.[96-97] Research around these campaigns have typically noted high engagement and reach metrics, but few have provided detailed evaluations of the immediate or long-term impact of those interventions. Many of the campaigns have relied on one-way communication, discouraging or limiting the possibility of give and take between streamers and the wider audience they seek to influence. Similarly, campaigns have typically hyper-focused on men and boys, while failing to address the underlying dynamics of gaming that can contribute to hyper-competitiveness and toxic online behavior.

With these challenges in mind, ISD used a four-stage strategic communications campaign framework to test approaches for innovating and integrating co-designed messaging led by gaming streamers—framed by insights from focus groups with gamers—in an effort to co-create, rather than force-feed messaging. The approach drew on the research and analysis outlined in the chapters above to frame the specific harms being addressed; understand the audiences and environments that dictate the tone and shape of messaging; and work with streamers on co-designing and delivering the messaging based on their understanding of the audiences and communities they have cultivated.

This approach included the steps listed on the right.

FIGURE 2

Steps: Developing the Intervention

1. **Literature review, research and analysis**

   ISD researchers with subject matter expertise in gaming, hate and extremism reviewed the existing evidence, mapped the gaming landscape, identified cultural dynamics, audience needs and behavioral drivers that interventions should address.

2. **Audience research and narrative development**

   Conducted focus groups with nine male and female streamers and 21 young male gamers to explore experiences of gaming culture and online misogyny, test potential narratives, and refine final messaging.

3. **Streamer co-creation**

   Worked with streamers at an in-person workshop to co-design authentic, platform-appropriate content ideas, tailoring messaging to suit each streamer and their community.

4. **Pilot rollout and evaluation**

   Supported streamers to deliver content as a pilot intervention and measured its effects through pre- and post-intervention research, platform metrics, audience responses and streamer reflections.

Literature review, research and analysis

A review of relevant literature, case-study analysis, and ethnographic research (outlined in Chapters 1 and 2) provided granular insights on the specific manifestations of the spectrum of harms on gaming platforms—namely misogyny, targeted hate and violent extremism—relevant to Project Catalyst.

Audience research and narrative development

The literature review was complemented with focus group discussions that provided the real-world experiences of nine male and female streamers, and structured Discord-based discussions with 21 young male gamers in the United Kingdom and Canada. The focus groups were also used to segment the lived experiences of audiences based on age. The young male gamers were divided into two distinct age groups, 16-18 and 19-21, to better understand the realities faced by boys as compared to young men. The responses by both sets were also compared to the lived realities of young women gamers, who detailed misogyny they faced in gaming spaces.

The primary insights from these focus groups indicated that younger men do not see women gamers in their everyday experiences, and hence view misogyny as a representation issue, rather than a cultural one. The older subset of young men acknowledges the representation issue but sees the misogyny in gaming as an extension of social polarization, toxic online culture and misogynistic streamers. Where the two groups ultimately agree is that young male gamers today have fewer boundaries, and significantly more aggressiveness and inability to manage emotions.

Together the groups noted that young men understand that competitive dynamics amplify online toxicity and legitimize misogyny, that there is a dividing line between competitiveness and genuine harm, and that messaging focused on not crossing those boundaries and keeping composure had considerable potential. The groups frequently noted that “tilt” (emotional dysregulation and loss of control) was at the root of the misogyny and abuse encountered within gaming communities.

Step 3: Streamer Co-Creation

Stress-Tested Narrative Development

Following the analysis phase and the focus group discussions based on the lived experiences of gamers and streamers, ISD developed four broad narratives[98], which were tested with male and female streamers in co-creation sessions. The messages were stress-tested against the experiences of both gamers and streamers, and were consolidated into three narrative strands, each with a set of three distinct messages, grounded in streamers' voices, practical needs and cultural insights. The distinct messages under each of the narrative strands were intended to elicit possible discussions in each streamer's respective community. The three principal narrative strands tested were:

STRAND 1 **Remember the Human**	
Rehumanizing other players and activating empathy	
Sub-narratives of the message territory include:	You do not know the day someone has had. Be the reason gaming makes it better, not worse.
	Behind every screen, there's a gamer who is charged up to game, have fun and unwind—like you.
	The most aggressive players are usually dealing with something outside the game. Think twice before you fan the flame.

STRAND 2 **Tackle the Tilt**	
Promoting emotional regulation and self-awareness	
Sub-narratives of the message territory include:	When you get tilted, you are not yourself. Recognize the signs, check in with yourself and take a 10-minute break.
	Iron sharpens iron. Strong opponents give you the opportunity to sharpen your skills and come back stronger.
	Bad games do not make you a bad player, they give you information to help you improve.

STRAND 3 **Build the Community You Want**	
Encouraging collective responsibility for community norms	
Sub-narratives of the message territory include:	Joybaiting hits different. Bad vibes lead to bad plays, but when we hype each other up, we all move forward.
	The best players make everyone around them better. Everyone on your team has a unique role—help bring out their best play.
	The way you act toward other gamers creates the community you are a part of. What chain reaction do you want to make?

The narrative strands and corresponding messages were assessed for resonance, emotional impact, authenticity, credibility, actionability and alignment with gaming culture. Both "Tackle the Tilt" and "Build the Community You Want" were seen by streamers as less able to galvanize their respective communities or address misogyny. Streamers instead landed on "Remember the Human" because it activates a set of core shared values of empathy and treating others well.

Conversations with both streamers and gamers surfaced strong evidence around this narrative's potential to deliver on the intervention objective of building resilience against online misogyny and gender-based violence in the gaming space.

The following criteria were identified as crucial when creating a message territory:

CRITERION 1	**Foundational**	Addresses permissive cultural environment beneath surface symptoms
CRITERION 2	**Empowering**	Focuses on young men's agency rather than moralizing
CRITERIONA 3	**Transferable**	Culturally relevant touchpoint inside and outside of gaming
CRITERION 4	**Actionable**	Specific and clear; expansion potential beyond prevention to active support
CRITERION 5	**Relatable**	Builds on existing values (empathy) and beliefs (there's a line between humor and harm)

Both gamers and streamers agreed that misogyny thrives in a permissive cultural environment that normalizes toxicity. A successful narrative for a campaign, according to the audience and the streamers, would disincentivize young men from engaging with misogyny and tackle the cultural norms at its foundation. "Remember the Human" was seen as having the most potential to interrupt gaming-fuelled toxicity and address the root causes of misogyny.

The Streamer Workshop

Once gamers and streamers had agreed on a preferred narrative based on their lived experiences online, ISD convened a workshop with five streamers to validate the findings from the audience and streamer-led research, while also seeking to launch co-created campaigns that could use the "Remember the Human" narrative in effective messaging to their audiences.

A key part of this process required understanding how streamers view themselves, their communities, and the issues that arise from being public figures with large online followings. The streamers involved in the workshop focused on different gaming genres, used different platforms to stream, and provided insight into different environments in the overall gaming ecosystem:

Fighting games	Youtube and Twitch
Variety[99]	Twitch and Discord
Variety and Cosy[100]	TikTok
Sports	Twitch
Variety	Twitch and TikTok

"Variety streamer" refers to a creator who streams a range of different games rather than specialising in a single game or genre.

"Cosy gaming" broadly refers to lower-stakes, relaxing games that typically emphasise exploration, creativity or community over highly competitive gameplay.

The streamers involved with the workshop noted that they often feel the weight of balancing their public profile, personal life, and the communities they have built online. Managing the toxicity in these communities came with its own unique challenges, namely upholding their own values without inviting backlash, and protecting their own mental health while also protecting their community. Streamers noted they often lacked the necessary safeguarding training, emotional capacity and institutional support required to manage vulnerable disclosures or difficult conversations.

To deal with these issues, streamers described three specific moderation techniques they use to manage toxicity in their communities, namely:

TECHNIQUE 1	**Course correction**	Using quips like "that's not funny" or "chill, that's not how we do it around here" is their first response to a toxic interaction, rather than banning a community member. This is both to delineate the boundaries of right and wrong and preserve a community built on mutual respect.
TECHNIQUE 2	**Shared values**	Creating a tight-knit community with a well-preserved culture that can become its own immune system. By cultivating a shared sense of values, abusive behavior is regulated by the community's members.
TECHNIQUE 3	**Empathy building**	On a livestream, both streamers and viewers are more exposed and there is less opportunity for genuine self-reflection. But in more intimate community spaces, some streamers describe being able to have richer conversations that disarm perpetrators by going beyond the behavior and into the driver.

Streamer perceptions of their communities and issues

Streamers are passionate about creating online spaces focused on high belonging and low judgement. They view their communities as an oasis from the real world and seek to create online spaces that are free from the pressures, judgements and divisions of the outside world. They similarly view their communities as diverse, and places where people from different social, ethnic or economic backgrounds can unite. They also feel a strong sense of intimacy and conviviality that goes beyond the streamer-audience dynamic. However, they identified misogyny, racism and homophobia as pervasive primarily in competitive, ranked games—highlighting the duality of gaming spaces.

Streamers also raised the issue of gatekeeping—not just amongst players but between streamers. They agreed that policing who belongs in gaming spaces and who is given space to ascend as an influencer creates the conditions for bullying and harassment campaigns. Streamers also identified two interconnected issues with the "performance economy" around streamers.

The first issue was that streamers often felt left to navigate challenging issues alone. Streamers indicated that they needed networks that would allow them to build collectives and access support in addressing challenges across the gaming ecosystem.

The second issue was the perception that the structure of the streaming platforms rewards streamers who lean into the extremes. Streamers were clear that individual and collective streamer effort cannot substitute for institutional-level change. As long as the algorithm rewards extremes, positive content will struggle to cut through and reach the right people. The streamers collectively agreed that the following principles were required to build successful movements or campaigns:

PRINCIPAL 1	**Content needs to feel real, unscripted and authentic**	Any attempts at heavy-handed messaging will be rejected by streamers and audiences alike. Streamers seek to elicit feelings, rather than deliver lessons.
PRINCIPAL 2	**Collective action is the foundation**	Individual streamers cannot carry the weight of the issues that arise on platforms alone and need to know they are part of a movement, or collective, that can provide support.

PRINCIPAL 3	**Streamers need institutional support, not just an intervention brief**	Streamers who want to go deeper with their audiences need frameworks, resources and skills to do so in a way that is responsible towards their audiences and themselves. This includes safeguarding toolkits, guidance on trigger warnings and protocols for disclosure.
PRINCIPAL 4	**Platforms need to play a role in this movement**	Individual and collective action among streamers cannot replace structural shifts in algorithmic prioritization and policy enforcement. Incentives and platform design must shift in tandem.

Streamers on identity

The workshop also highlighted how streamers' experiences of harm are shaped by their own identities. Black streamers participating in the workshop described experiencing significant levels of racial abuse and targeted hate alongside the wider toxicity they encountered as streamers. This showcases the compounding nature of intersectional abuses, where for example, women of color are also more at risk of racialized and sexist abuse (also called misogynoir).[101] This reinforced the intersection between misogyny, targeted hate and other forms of identity-based abuse within gaming environments: while the intervention focused on misogyny, neither the harms experienced by streamers nor the communities in which interventions take place fit neatly within a single category of harm. These experiences also underscored that streamers themselves may be targets of the behaviors an intervention seeks to address.

Streamer co-created interventions

During the co-creation workshop, five streamers worked with ISD to translate the Remember the Human strategic message into interventions that would feel authentic within their own content and communities. Rather than asking creators to reproduce predetermined campaign materials, streamers were given ownership over how the overarching message could be expressed through their existing formats, relationships and styles of engagement.

The concepts developed through the workshop centred on three complementary approaches: norm modelling, positivity and community participation. Three of the five streamers subsequently implemented interventions. This is an important lesson, as the workshop was funded but the intervention was not, highlighting the need for appropriate funding. This will be reflected on more in the next chapter. While all three were grounded in the same overarching strategic message, they differed considerably in format, audience size and intended mechanism of change. This allowed the pilot to test both creator-led interventions designed to engage comparatively large existing audiences and a smaller, more sustained model centred on community participation.

STREAMER 1

Norm modelling

Streamer 1, a variety gaming creator, used norm modelling to demonstrate positive behavior through their own conduct rather than explicitly instructing audiences how they should behave. The intervention challenged the streamer to maintain positivity in situations where frustration or negativity might ordinarily be expected, using humor and relatable moments to make positive behavior visible and socially credible. Intervention content was delivered across TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

The model built on a central finding from the co-creation process: streamers already act as informal norm-setters within their communities. Audiences are familiar with their personality, humor and typical reactions, allowing creators to model alternative responses within the same cultural environment in which negative behaviors may otherwise occur. Rather than presenting positivity as an externally imposed standard, the intervention sought to make it feel recognizable and achievable within everyday gaming culture.

Streamer 1 had approximately 58,200 followers on TikTok, more than 1,100 on Instagram and 1,660 YouTube subscribers, giving the intervention access to a potential platform audience of approximately 60,960 followers and subscribers across the channels used for delivery. These figures represent platform-level audiences rather than verified intervention reach: not every follower will have encountered the intervention content, and individuals may follow the creator on more than one platform.

To assess audience response, ISD collected the streamer's Instagram, TikTok and YouTube posts and a selection of comments between 1 June and 26 August 2026. This covered approximately one month before the intervention, the July intervention period, and approximately one month afterwards. In total, the analysis covered 139 posts and classified 996 comments: 700 from Instagram, 173 from TikTok and 123 from YouTube.

Analysis did not identify a discernible pattern in audience-response posture over time. When responses were grouped into broader categories of agreement, neutrality and disagreement, TikTok showed a small decrease in agreement while YouTube and Instagram showed small increases; none

of these changes were statistically significant. This does not demonstrate that the intervention reduced toxicity or changed community attitudes, but provides an important baseline for understanding the scale and duration of intervention that may be necessary to generate measurable shifts in audience response.

STREAMER 2

Positivity

Streamer 2, a fighting game creator, developed an intervention centred on positivity, connection and healthy expressions of masculinity. The intervention used moments of kindness, warmth and connection to bring audiences into a narrative in which behaviors that might sit outside conventional expectations of masculinity could be approached positively rather than defensively. The intervention was delivered through Twitch, Instagram and YouTube.

As with Streamer 1, the model was deliberately adapted to the creator rather than applying a standardized campaign format. The strategic objective of rehumanization remained consistent, but its expression reflected the creator's personality, content and relationship with their audience. This was an important part of the pilot: creators were not simply used as distribution channels for institutional messaging, but were responsible for translating the strategic message into something they believed would resonate within their own community.

Streamer 2 had an audience of approximately 46,000 followers on Twitch, 21,000 on Instagram and 17,000 subscribers on YouTube, representing a potential platform audience of approximately 84,000 followers and subscribers across the channels used for intervention delivery. Again, these figures indicate potential audience rather than unique reach or verified exposure to the intervention.

ISD applied the same audience-response methodology to the creator's Instagram and YouTube content, analyzing 1,853 comments: 1,550 from Instagram and 303 from YouTube. No discernible patterns in audience-response posture were identified over time. When responses were collapsed into the three broader categories, agreement declined on both Instagram and YouTube, but neither change was statistically significant.

The intervention was also delivered live on Twitch. While this provided an important space for direct interaction with the creator's community, the livestream could not be captured for quantitative analysis, given Twitch's Terms of Service do not allow ISD to scrape such material. Qualitative observation of the live intervention provided additional insight into how the community responded but should not be treated as equivalent to the systematic comment analysis conducted on Instagram and YouTube.

STREAMER 3

Community participation

Streamer 3 tested a substantially different intervention model, prioritizing sustained community participation over broad creator-led reach. Rather than primarily seeking exposure to a message, the intervention created space for young men to participate alongside the streamer, using gaming and conversation to normalize everyday experiences and provide opportunities for discussion and connection.

This approach reflected the wider community-engagement model explored through the project: healthier community norms are not only communicated but can be reinforced through repeated participation, relationships and shared experiences. The intervention therefore treated the community itself as part of the mechanism of change.

Streamer 3's Twitch community was considerably smaller, at approximately 535 followers. However, direct comparison with the potential reach of Streamers 1 and 2 would obscure the fundamentally different intervention model. The intervention was designed around a smaller and more targeted community, prioritizing repeated interaction and participation rather than maximizing exposure to campaign content.

This difference also shaped the evaluation. ISD downloaded and transcribed all available clips from the creator between 1 June and 30 August 2026. Fifteen clips were identified, containing 718 words in total, with an average of approximately 48 words per clip. The relatively small volume of spoken material meant that topic modelling was not methodologically appropriate, while manual labelling of the transcripts was not considered a meaningful way of assessing the intervention. References to "Good Game" or "GG", which formed part of the intervention, were nevertheless identified in clips on 7 and 16 August.

The experience illustrates the limitations of applying evaluation approaches designed for large-scale creator content to smaller community-engagement interventions. For interventions in which repeated participation, trust and community relationships constitute the mechanism of change, future evaluation should be designed around those outcomes from the outset rather than relying primarily on content or comment analysis.

Analysis

Taken together, the three interventions reached very different types and scales of gaming community. Based on follower and subscriber figures across the channels used for intervention delivery, the three creators had a combined potential platform audience of approximately 145,495 followers and subscribers. This figure is useful for understanding the scale of the communities accessible through the pilot, but should not be interpreted as 145,495 unique individuals, verified intervention views or actual reach. Audiences may overlap across platforms, and only a proportion of followers will have encountered specific intervention content.

For the two interventions where systematic audience-comment analysis was possible, ISD developed a bespoke LLM-assisted classifier to examine how audiences responded to creator content. The classifier distinguished between disagreement, hostile disagreement, ambivalent or unclear responses, requests for clarification, agreement and escalatory agreement. Across Streamers 1 and 2, 2,849 comments were analyzed. The evaluation found no statistically significant changes in audience-response posture over the periods examined.

These findings should be interpreted in the context of an exploratory pilot. They do not demonstrate that the interventions reduced misogyny or toxicity, nor does the absence of statistically significant change mean that the interventions were unsuccessful. Short-term changes in audience-comment posture are only one possible measure of an intervention whose intended mechanisms include norm modelling, empathy, rehumanization and community participation. The pilot instead provides important evidence about the feasibility and practical requirements of creator-led interventions, while highlighting the need for longer-term and intervention-specific evaluation where the objective is to demonstrate changes in community norms or behavior.

Importantly, five streamers participated in the co-creation process and three went on to deliver interventions, despite participation and content delivery being unpaid. All five streamers also reported feeling better equipped to run prosocial or social-impact campaigns following the process. This suggests value not only in the content ultimately delivered, but in building creator capacity to undertake this type of work. At the same time, the participating

streamers were already invested in building positive communities, meaning the findings should not be generalized to the wider streamer population or to creators operating in communities with substantially higher levels of misogyny or toxicity.

The pilot also demonstrates that streamer-led interventions should not be treated as a single model. Streamers 1 and 2 used established creator relationships to introduce and model positive norms across comparatively large audiences, while Streamer 3 tested a smaller and more sustained form of community participation. Neither model is inherently preferable: they seek to achieve change through different mechanisms and should consequently be evaluated differently.

The central lesson is therefore not simply whether a campaign “worked”, but what the pilot tells us about how this type of intervention can be designed and tested. Streamers can translate strategic messages into culturally credible content, model positive behavior within communities in which they already hold trust, and create opportunities for participation and discussion. However, demonstrating deeper changes in attitudes, behaviors or community norms requires evaluation methods matched to the intervention model, sufficient time for change to occur, and platform-specific data collection established before delivery begins.

⑤

Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Interventions

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The design and delivery of positive interventions in gaming spaces requires careful consideration of how interventions are evaluated, how streamers and participants are safeguarded, and how potential ethical risks are anticipated and managed. Drawing on ISD's experience co-designing and delivering this pilot, this chapter outlines key considerations for monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding and ethics, before setting out the practical lessons and recommendations that emerged from the intervention process.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Interventions should establish clear measures for monitoring and evaluation from the outset. These should be grounded in a theory of change that sets out the intended outcomes of the intervention, how the activities are expected to contribute to them, and the indicators that can provide evidence of progress. For this pilot, an important early outcome was whether participating streamers recognized toxicity and misogyny as problems within gaming spaces and were willing and able to translate that recognition into action by developing and delivering interventions within their own communities.

Reach, retention and engagement should not be treated as proxies for impact. However, where they form part of an intervention's theory of change, they can provide important evidence about whether content reached and engaged its intended audience. These measures can be complemented by analysis of comments, chats and other audience responses to understand how intervention narratives are received and whether community dynamics change over time.

Where possible, practitioners should establish a pre-intervention baseline and monitor relevant content and audience responses before, during and after delivery. This can help identify whether indicators such as hostility, slurs or harassment increase, remain stable or decline, alongside positive indicators such as supportive comments and constructive engagement. Depending on the intervention and available data, analysis can combine manual coding, qualitative or ethnographic monitoring, and automated or LLM-

assisted classification. Indicators should be selected according to the intervention's intended outcomes rather than relying on generic measures of positive or negative sentiment.

Data collection will necessarily differ across platforms. APIs or other forms of structured data access may enable larger-scale analysis on some platforms, while closed communities, livestreams or ephemeral content may require prospective data capture or qualitative observation. For example, monitoring a Discord community will require a different approach from analyzing public comments accessible through an API.

Finally, evaluation should be proportionate to the duration, scale and intended mechanism of the intervention. Short interventions may be able to demonstrate immediate outcomes such as creator participation, audience exposure or responses to content, but are less well suited to demonstrating sustained changes in attitudes, behaviors or community norms. Longer-term interventions create greater opportunities to examine whether such changes emerge and persist. Practitioners should therefore distinguish between outputs, immediate responses, intermediate outcomes and longer-term impact, and avoid drawing conclusions about behavioral or attitudinal change from short-term engagement data alone.

Safeguarding

Throughout the campaign process it was necessary to bear in mind the safety and the safeguarding of both streamers and the gaming community being addressed through the campaigns. Through discussions with gamers and streamers prior to the campaigns and during the workshop phase of the project, it became clear that gamers and the streamers need practical resources and support. Streamers identified that institutional support such as workshops on delivering interventions around mental health issues faced by their communities was a key missing element to their ability to address toxicity. Streamers also identified that parasocial relationships developed by their audiences result in anxieties around whether audience members were likely to harm them based on perceived connections they had developed watching and interacting with their streams.

The streamers similarly mentioned the need for compensation and training for community moderators, some of whom are paid by the streamers themselves, and most of whom are primarily volunteering to guard their communities from harm. Streamers with larger communities and more opportunities through paid partnerships noted that they were often moderating while streaming, ultimately taking a toll on their mental health. Hence, safeguarding procedures around campaigns involving streamers should include project or campaign funds to support moderators as well as streamers delivering interventions.

Ethics

Throughout the campaign design and delivery process ISD sought to ensure there were central ethical guidelines when delivering the intervention. The team sought informed participation from both gamers and streamers, and informed them they did not have to take part if they did not see the need to address toxicity in the gaming space. The team also had to ensure that they were working to protect minors who may be either on the receiving end of messaging or direct interventions and that there was informed consent from parents or guardians.

Throughout the focus group process ISD applied privacy and anonymity protections to all participants and ensured that transcripts and protocols protected the identities of both gamers and streamers of all ages were applied. In the same vein, ISD was upfront about the funding and focus

of the project as well as its primary objectives, a key element that ensures all participants are informed of the desired outcomes and issue sets addressed through the campaign development process.

ISD similarly provided payment for any travel or expenses that were incurred by streamers as well as gamers involved in any of the campaign design and development processes. If a given campaign seeks to pay streamers and gamers for their involvement it is best practice that fair payment principles are applied and that paid partnerships are clearly disclosed during a campaign process.

ISD also applied principles that centred women's experiences as key to understanding the toxicity in gaming spaces, and ensured that men's discomfort with the issue of online misogyny did not dominate discussions about the issue set. Campaigns should avoid amplifying harmful narratives as part of an intervention and seek to instead provide healthy alternatives for harmful behavior.

Conclusion

Gaming communities are important spaces for connection, identity and belonging, but they can also reproduce and amplify misogyny, targeted hate and other harmful behaviors. This playbook has argued that these challenges cannot be addressed through moderation and enforcement alone. Positive interventions offer an opportunity to work upstream, strengthening empathy, healthier social norms and community resilience before harmful attitudes and behaviors become entrenched or escalate.

Project Catalyst's pilot demonstrates the potential of working with streamers and gaming communities themselves as part of this effort. Streamers are not simply channels through which interventions can be distributed: they are community leaders and norm-setters with their own relationships, credibility and understanding of their audiences. The pilot also underlines the importance of designing interventions with, rather than for, gaming communities; adapting approaches to different streamers and platforms; providing appropriate safeguarding and support; and matching monitoring and evaluation to the intended mechanism and outcomes of an intervention.

This remains an emerging area of practice, and further testing and longer-term evaluation are needed to understand which approaches are most effective in different gaming environments. However, the experience of Project Catalyst provides a foundation for that work. Gaming communities should not be understood simply as sites of risk, but as spaces in which streamers, players, moderators, platforms and practitioners can actively help build healthier norms and more resilient communities.

ENDNOTES

1. Project Catalyst is a scalable 18-month consortium project tackling online misogyny and gender-based violence as pathways to radicalization and violent extremism. Led by the Christchurch Call Foundation with implementing partners including ISD, Meedan, Search for Common Ground, PERIL at American University, and the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford, Catalyst delivers prevention programmes across Canada, Jordan, Kenya, and transnational gaming communities. See more here.

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13. The act of publicly revealing private or identifying information about an individual or organisation without their consent, often with the intent to harass, intimidate, or harm them. Please see ISD's public toolkit for more information.

14. Dogpiling entails the cumulative and sometimes coordinated online targeting of an individual by multiple users, typically through a high volume of hostile, abusive or harassing messages or interactions over a short period. Please see ISD's public toolkit for more information.

15. Coordinated networked harassment targeting a victim's livestreamed content. Please see ISD's public toolkit for more information.

16. Activity which seeks to dehumanize, demonise, harass, threaten or incite violence against an individual or community based on their LGBTQ+ identity. Please see ISD's public toolkit for more information.

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20. Ibid.

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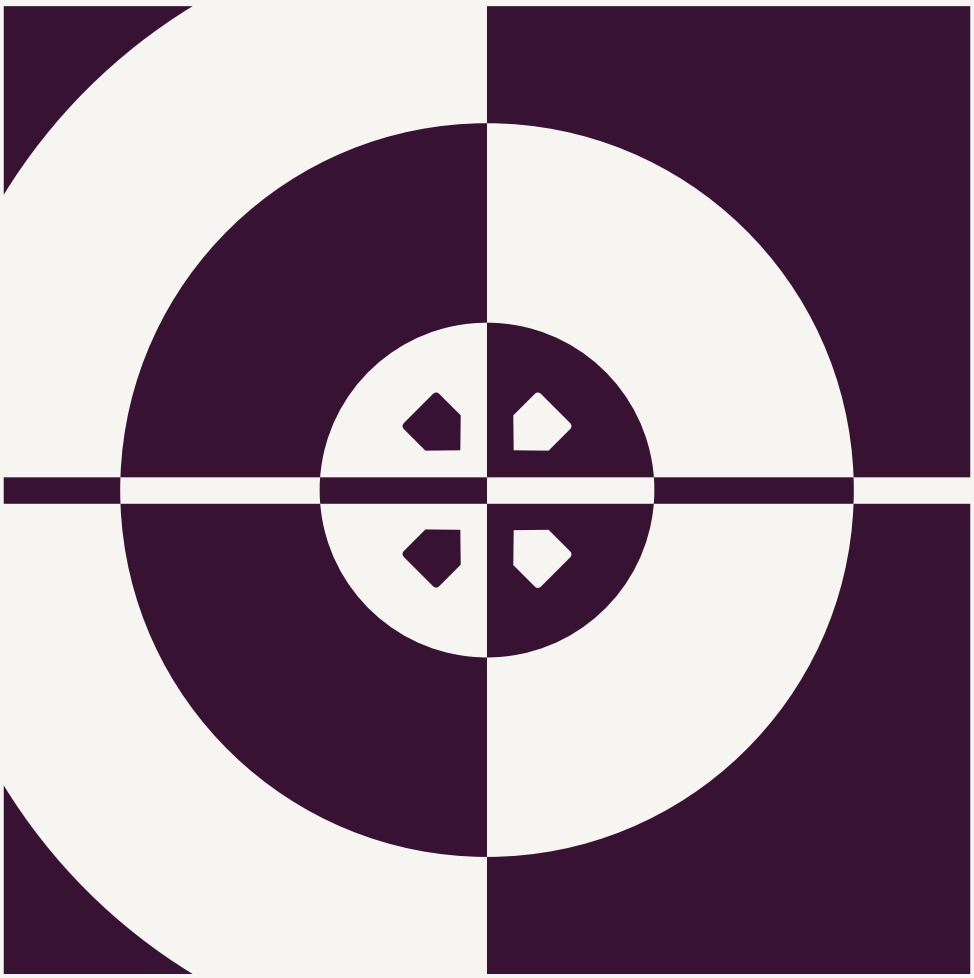
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