Safety Tech [Episode 5] – "Enough is enough": how online gaming is changing its reputation for toxicity

Tue, 4/19 11:28AM • 40:49

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

game, people, gaming, community, behaviour, online, players, play, safety, space, industry, challenges, companies, important, online gaming, trust, opportunity, developers, platform, harassment

SPEAKERS

Reckit Raven, Carlos Figueiredo, Ben Whitelaw, Robert Hornbeck, Kimberley Voll

Ben Whitelaw 00:00
Welcome to the safety tech podcast brought to you by the safety tech innovation network. My name is Ben Whitelaw, and I'm the founder and editor of everything in moderation, a weekly newsletter dedicated to online safety, and content moderation. Online gaming is one of the fastest growing industries on the planet, and worth billions of pounds in revenue. In today's episode, we'll explore how this well established industry shed its reputation for online harassment. And look at how some of the most innovative companies in the space approach the challenge of protecting players and streamers across the world. Thanks for joining us.

Reckit Raven 00:57
Twitch is a live streaming platform in which you know creators can sit behind the camera, play games, they can make music, create art, just chat. And so it really is just a place for anyone and everyone to kind of gather, build community and create memories.

Ben Whitelaw 01:19
This is Raven, or Reckit Raven to give her her full online pseudonym. Raven has over 6000 followers on Twitch, a live streaming platform where people watch her play games and chat with other fans.

01:31
So I stream Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, for four hours. Hate and toxicity and harassment have always been a thing on the platform. So even like back in my baby streaming days, like I'd have people come in and throw the N bomb at me or tell me I was fat or that, you know, I had boobs or whatever. And then there was one time where I was taking a break from streaming and I was talking to people like Hey, I had just lost my dad. I'm not going to be on for a while. And somebody raided in with their community to blow up my chat with hateful rhetoric. So I took a break for a while but it got really,

really bad over the summer of last year with hate raids targeting marginalised communities on the platform everywhere daily. And I had messages for months of these bots just coming in and saying things like we're going to hang you like Lynch All Blacks, threatening my children. So it was it was a lot

02:45
A hate trade is when the chat messages of a streamer is bombarded with harassment, either by bots, or real users. Women and marginalised streamers are most frequently targeted. And sometimes the harassment spills out into the real world.

Reckit Raven 02:59
People were getting swatted, which is these people would call in a bomb threat or like a really, really, really heinous crime to these people's addresses. So that way, the police would come and knock on the door, break it down, do whatever

Ben Whitelaw 03:18
Raven decided something had to be done. She started an online campaign called Twitch do better.

03:24
So Twitch do better was literally just a hashtag that I thought of because I had gotten hate raided twice in a week. And that's when I was like, You know what, enough is enough. This is widespread enough that it's an issue. And then I was calling out to people I was like, We need to get this trending, we need to get this trending, we need change. I didn't expect it to blow up the way it did.

Ben Whitelaw 03:49
The campaign went viral, and eventually led to her having a meeting with representatives from the platform, where she was able to explain her concerns. To its credit, Twitch launched a number of new safety features.

04:02
After that conversation, like we did see some of the change start to happen. We did see, you know, the need to verify an email address and a phone number that you were allowed as the creator to put into your chat if that's what you wanted. So it gave power back to the creators to allow access to their channel and their stuff in a way that they wanted to. We've seen them crack down on names, you know, we've seen them put other tools into place like monitoring or restricting users based off account creation age, we've seen them put gates in for allowing a certain account if they can't verify themselves because they don't have an email or phone number or whatever. So we've seen a lot of really positive things come out of it. Obviously, you know, Twitch is going to be a work in progress. In an online world. You can't get rid of it 100% but the fact that we have seen so much change and a dip in like these hate raids speaks volumes.

05:04
Twitch is just one platform taking a stand against abuse and toxicity in gaming. Many other leading gaming companies, including Riot Games, which created the hugely popular League of Legends, and

Clash of Clans creators Supercell have introduced anti harassment measures over the last few years. But sometimes, even global gaming companies need some help.

Carlos Figueiredo 05:26
What we do is, we ensure that our customers communities are free from harassment from abuse and other types of online harms across many types of content. So text chat, comments, user names, images and videos.

05:45
Carlos Figueiredo, is a senior Trust and Safety evangelist at Two Hat, a content moderation company recently acquired by Microsoft, he's been working in the trust and safety sector for 14 years, and has seen it come a long way since Gamergate, in 2014, when 1000s of male gamers targeted female developers with misogynistic abuse.

Carlos Figueiredo 06:05
And how we do that is by bringing together two very important things, technology and human insights,

Ben Whitelaw 06:12
and explain a bit more for us about how that actually works. In practice,

06:16
we do this by putting a very thoughtful approach on the proactive side. And what do I mean by proactive side, our customers get to define their community settings, their chat settings, the filter settings, what is appropriate in their community, they get to set that so there is automation. And what do I mean by automation, if somebody is sharing a text message, there's proactive classification and action on that message. So, for example, if anybody with any of our customers has a very clear line that certain types of hateful conduct or speech is not acceptable within their community, once that's automatically flagged by our system, they can proactively prevent that from ever reaching the community. So that never makes its way to the community, right. It's very similar for images as well. But different topics. In that case, we're talking about images that could be perhaps pornographic and content, or it could be have an element of drugs or radicalization. And those images never make their way to the community. And very important. Also, moderators are not exposed to that sort of content, right. So that's on the automated technology side. But what people don't see sometimes is the fact that there is an incredible human nuance behind that, at two hat, we have an amazing team of language and culture specialists, right. So it's not a simple translation from English to... let's use my mother tongue. It's not a simple translation from English to Portuguese, right? When I joined two hat more than seven years ago, I built the Portuguese dictionary from the ground up, right. And now it's maintained by an amazing person on the team, and evolved by that amazing person. So it's each of those languages, has a human being who understands the culture, the pop culture, the cultural nuances, and all those elements that really make our classification and that pre emptive proactive approach that I mentioned to you so powerful, right? Because context, especially when we're talking about different cultures, is very important.

08:37

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And who are some of your clients that are coming to two hat and requesting your services to help with their toxicity problem on their platform or service,

Carlos Figueiredo 08:49
the biggest gaming platforms in the world, literally platforms that have millions of players, right? In some cases, we're talking about gaming population that is larger than a country population. If you if we take some examples of countries in Europe and other places. It's quite amazing. But we also work with tech education companies, we work with travel apps, with social apps, you name it, anywhere where their customers, right, our customers, customers can exchange images, stacks videos and have a conversation. They come to us because they realise that safety is table stakes. It's an important thing to do. It's the right thing to do. And they want to make sure that they have a welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy community.

Ben Whitelaw 09:41
What are the specific challenges then when it comes to online safety as far as gaming is concerned? Can you lay out some of those for us?

09:50
Absolutely. Gaming is very dynamic, right? You're talking about instant communication, which is quite important to understand. When we're talking about safety tech, you can't introduce any delay, right? Because as gamers, you know, I'm a gamer too, if you're if you're playing, you want to have communication with your, your friends, I play with friends, you know, who are in Brazil, who are here in Canada as well. And it's important that if we're playing a game that requires strategy or anything like that we are communicating. And we are, you know, either via text or voice in that case, right. But very important is that people playing games, they don't use what we call natural language. So that's the first big challenge there, then, so it's like we're talking about this situation are people using acronyms? Or emojis? Pop culture, right? If there's a new pop song tomorrow, it might change the meaning of a word like, overnight. And then there's gaming lingo as well. There's that particular community and game lore and you know, way of speaking in specific words, as well. And I can tell you, expanding on the challenge. As soon as people typically know that there is a filter in place, it's a very human thing to push the boundaries. Right? As soon as you know, especially for kids and teenagers, this is very true, but it is true of human beings that we like to push boundaries, when we see that there is a limit there. Okay, there's a filter, how can I be creative here to get something through upside down characters, unique code, borrowing letters from different alphabets, using accents from different, you know, languages, and just to finalise with a third point here, but of course, we could talk about all their challenges, there's so many, there is the fact that when you are in an online space like that some of those platforms and games allow you to even change the physical space around you, if that makes sense. Like, there are games that allow you to create a room or create your own virtual space for people to come play a game with you. And sometimes people get very creative in not so great a way to decorate or arrange the the items, the virtual assets in that place, in a way that conveys like a radicalization symbol or particular offensive word or things like that.

12:25

And can you give an example, perhaps from your own experience, of a game or a gaming platform that you feel is really prioritising online safety?

Absolutely. I'm a big fan of the work of the EA team, and Electronic Arts teams, for sure. Like they do amazing work in this space. And they even have like a whole team called positive play. Right. And I am fortunate to know a lot of them, you know, over the years in my work in the industry, and just amazing, passionate people who really care about this space and what they have done in terms of their positive play charter. Right, their commitment to this, it's quite inspirational to me and encouraging. They have made one of their systems that's like their property, right? Like they developed a pinging system in one of their games that allows you to... it's a shooter game. So when you're playing, you can ping the map and let your teammates know what you're going to do next. Right. It's a really creative communication system, that then removes the need for you to tax something, right? Like it just streamlines communication. And that's a really cool way to tackle this space as well to make communication easier, you know, very enjoyable as well, I would even say, and they have made that system publicly available for others to other companies who will average the how they have designed that system of pinging right in the game. So I love that right? There's this mentality of we are doing our best for the betterment of the industry of players everywhere. And here, we're going to share some ways to do that. So yeah, I'm a big fan of their team.

You touch on a point there that I think is really important across categories, but it seems like a particularly in gaming, about how game design can encourage positive behaviour among the people playing. Can you talk about some of the other ways that you've seen companies and games do that through the kind of gameplay itself?

There are games that are doing things like using the community guidelines, the code of conduct, that system exists in the game, which largely has been reserved for a part of the website, maybe where maybe a lot of players don't really look at and people are surfacing it in the game. Now, different games are surfacing it with bite size, simple language compelling language that's aligned with the ethos of the game. And then as a player you have to click on that to accept, right. But even more than that, there are educational games, for example, that have quests in the game to teach about health and safety in the game. How cool is that? Right? Like that's, that's a part of the game, right?

Ben Whitelaw
Where would I find that?

I can mention one game that I know that's doing this really well. Adventure Academy is the name of the game by age of learning. ABC Mouse, they're a game that has that. And the way that they surface the community guidelines in the game is very creative. But that is a whole educational game, right? The game is about education. So they have taken the opportunity to teach kids about digital civility about

health and safety. And they have done that in a very thoughtful way. So they are amazing. companies doing this many other companies, for sure.

Ben Whitelaw 16:12
That's very cool. It certainly seems to me that gaming companies have recognised the benefits from a kind of economic perspective, in terms of the growth of a game and the revenue that can be made from creating safe online experiences. Why do you think that - If that is true - It's been ahead of other companies and other categories in doing so?

16:37
That's such a good question. And I think it will require a little bit of nuance to answer. It's so hard to get new players to play your game, right? There's so many games available and there has been for a long time. So for a game makers, the whole idea of engagement and retention is critical, right? And depending on the vertical in gaming even more so mobile games, like wow, that's super important, right? Nobody wants you to lose players, and nobody wants two people to have like a bad experience in your game. Let me share some stats that are publicly available from the anti Defamation League. They have done a survey now three years in a row in the US right. The first time they did the survey, they found that 19% of players they interviewed quit free to play games in reaction to harassment. So it's almost one in five, right? That's 2019. 2020 22% of players said they quit games in reaction to harassment. Then last year, we went to 28%. So you see, like, there is an important thing here for us to consider, which is the ROI for you bring it all together now full circle, the same gaming leaders were very aware of the hardships of the business itself. When you understand while you're care about safety, you care about health of your community, you understand that that's connected to the longevity of your game and your metrics as well, right? The way I like to see it is, it's like it's very important. We know it's the right thing to do. But there is also the ROI of doing such things. It's like it's important that we are having this, this joy of playing games and protecting people but we know that it's also what's going to lead to a very healthy and long standing game.

Ben Whitelaw 18:44
Gaming is somewhat unique. In this it both understands the importance of healthy online environments, and has people like Carlos who have been working to eradicate disruptive behaviour for many years. I asked him to put me in touch with other people that knew the importance of safer gaming.

Kimberley Voll 19:00
My name is Dr. Kimberly Voll

Robert Hornbeck 19:02
and I am Robert Hornbeck

19:04
Kimberly and Robert are both games developers. And alongside Carlos help to lead the Fair Play Alliance.

19:11

We are cross industry initiative of over 250 game developers located around the world. Together, we focus on fostering healthy online play collaboratively together. We do that through a lot of different means predominantly through design and research to create or identify best practices in game development and community management and equitably lift those up and distribute them across the industry so that all developers have access to these sorts of tools. Overall, we feel like there's really a lot that we can do as developers to both reduce the chance of problematic behaviour occurring in the first place, but also in terms of addressing what does occur. So we do everything from webinars, white papers, conferences, consulting, design, development resources, you name it, we really run the gamut

19:59
Why did you decide to found the Fair Play alliance in the first place? Can you tell me a bit about the history of your organisation?

20:07
Yeah, we started back in 2017, that time I was the head of player behaviour at Riot Games. So I was doing a lot of work in and around the space of trust and safety and moderation and design and player dynamics, and all of that fun stuff. And I noticed it through a lot of conversations with my colleagues in the space, of whom, you know, there weren't that as nearly as many back then that we were just asking a lot of the same questions and that there wasn't really a lot of resources or awareness of the methods and best practices that we were trying to leverage or trying to pull from our own backgrounds. And that fundamentally, I think we all aligned around the concept of - we really ultimately shouldn't be competing on the basis of who has a healthier community, you know, in the end, that just hurts players. So this was something that we felt like we needed to really come together for around the betterment of society, kind of was one of our driving ethos at the time. But also, you know, as a way to take a lot of our different backgrounds in social psychology, and cognitive science and design and all of these different aspects and really start to put our heads together as developers and say, What could we do differently? What's being done differently that people don't know about right now? And what are the things that we could learn from what we know about human behaviour in digital spaces, and bring that to bear on the challenge of game development. So that was really where we started. We're not an advocacy group, you know, we don't do any lobbying or anything like that we really exist to provide our best practices and to challenge the status quo of how games are being made for the betterment of players everywhere.

Ben Whitelaw 21:42
Who are the members of the FPA? And how do they come together to kind of learn from each other in the ways that you're mentioning?

Robert Hornbeck 21:52
Yeah, I mean, the members of the FPGA are industry professionals. There are a lot of community managers and people working directly with the communities that we're trying to improve on. There's also a lot of people who are working within those kinds of solutions spaces providing the tools from voice moderation, image moderation, you know, all kinds of moderation type tools, as well as just people who provide services that, that deal with large groups of people that need that sort of support.

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Kim I want to ask about your experience as a woman in the gaming industry, and ask you to kind of lay out some of your own experiences, if you wouldn't mind about what it's like, playing games, being a gamer, but also working in the industry and trying to address some of these harms.

Kimberley Voll 22:47
Yeah, I mean, it's such an interesting perspective to be in, in part, because I think, you know, I grew up in the 70s and 80s. So my multiplayer gaming experiences were really the arcades. And I was usually accompanied by my dad. So you know, not a lot of stuff went down in that context. But, you know, later, as I was playing a lot more couch based games with with my friends, you know, I was I was really into Mario Kart and Goldeneye 64. You know, all of that was was reasonably, I think, well isolated from a lot of the challenges because I was playing in very known environments, surrounded by very known people, so was pretty sheltered. But when online multiplayer started becoming a thing, you know, I think I was already in grad school at that point. And, you know, at that point, I hadn't really put a lot of thought into the fact that I didn't have many female identifying friends, they just were just my friends. You know, I hung out with those who liked what I liked, which happened to be video games and role playing, and sci fi and fantasy and martial arts and research. And I just sold myself as a complete nerd. But I validate nerds everywhere, because I think those are wonderful pursuits. But going online, totally changed that, you know, as multiplayer, online multiplayer became a thing. I was almost instantly othered I was subject to all sorts of terrible treatment, you know, things that I just had never encountered before and didn't really understand why I was suddenly the subject of such hatred. So pretty much just wrote off online plays as largely too damaging for my soul, and didn't really come back to it for many, many, many years. Even though I remained an avid gamer, you know, I just didn't play online games. So the first half of my career was largely academic. So I was a professor of teaching computer science, which gave me some really interesting insights into some of these mechanisms and dynamics that occur around the areas that are typically male dominated, if you will. And that really started, I think, a shift in my mindset for how I was looking at these problems because I had the opportunity as a professor, to remove myself from my own personal experiences and instead have the opportunity to observe what was transpiring among my students and to be able to see those trends and two occurrences happening from a very different perspective. And honestly, from a very, almost, if my student, former students would allow me like paternal perspective, you know, I was like, Hey, that's not okay, what's happening there, you know, it suddenly shifted everything. And that really was sort of my first time I started doing a lot more research into gendered aspects of technology and gaming, and all of that, and that through a very convoluted way was my walk back to multiplayer gaming. And ultimately, I won't bore you with the details, I, you know, seeing a lot of game development on the side way back then. But I ended up jumping full time into industry and found my way to Riot Games, which then gave me a very different perspective in terms of the scale at which we were operating in terms of the global audience that we were dealing with, and the intersection of, you know, just this myriad of cultures and just wonderful people struggling to have a good time online. Because, you know, as humans, we kind of, we kind of suck at that, as well as all of the interesting challenges of just simply being a female, largely female identifying developer in this space, and what that meant. And, you know, I'll just say it with just sort of one overarching thing, which is, I think that one of the most important things for us, as an industry and largely as a society is that we are continuing to invest in looking hard at the values we

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bring to work every day, and how we operationalize that through our work, because that has far reaching consequences for the success of the communities that we foster within our gaming spaces.

26:27
And maybe I can prod that a little bit more when you talk about the values that you bring to work as a game developer, what do you mean by that? And, and which companies do you think epitomise some of those values that that should be core to their work?

26:42
I mean, a lot of this sits in the the diversity and inclusivity efforts, you know, I think that the concept of bringing your whole self to work of recognising that for many folks, and in many jobs, not least of which the games industry, there's not that same clear divide of you know, work Kim and not work Kim, you know, et cetera, that sort of really clear distinction, like I come to work as a complex individual, as we all do, that are affected by things that are transpiring in the world, and that also, through my work want to affect change in the world. And so I think being able to understand that about people being able to shine a light on what might otherwise exist as unconscious biases, or assumptions or misunderstandings, that then colour the work that we do, if we lack diverse perspectives at work, then we just end up systematising those biases and baking them in with good intention. It's not that people are like, I'm going to go do these terrible things to people. I mean, I'm sure they're probably out there, maybe in some world, at least in cartoons. But for the most part, all of the companies that I've had the opportunity to work with and for have had wonderful people there, and all of whom are authentically motivated to do better, not just in gaming, but in the world at large. And a lot of times when I see those breakdowns, it's because something has become baked into rules in a way that is harming others, or that has preventing us from asking the right sorts of questions or really exploring how well we are serving our audiences or that we even understand and have I properly identified our audiences or the ways in which like, one of the biggest challenges for game development is that as far as diversity is, if we don't have diverse audiences to begin with, then all of our metrics and everything that we measure are measuring this very limited subset. And so it's very hard to get a signal on who we're leaving behind, or how that might be affecting people or the longer reaching consequences of that. So all of that I think comes to bear on how we approach both our roles and responsibilities as well as our opportunities as game developers for lasting change.

Ben Whitelaw 28:54
Robert, I mean, Kimberly, there has kind of explained some of the challenges as far as audiences go in those communities, what others do you come across in your work on a regular basis.

29:07
I think that at least internally, within the companies that I've worked with, at the very least, is a lot of people not understanding the impact that this sort of work or even just mindset kind of has on the community. When I was working on Sky Children of Light, they have this wonderful feature where the characters can hold each other's hands and fly around. The intention was to give experienced players the opportunity to guide newer players or even just the people that they care about through the world and take them to places they couldn't yet reach and all kinds of exciting things, which is an absolutely, you know, beautiful sentiment. But the first iteration of that was being able to just take someone's hand

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and fly off with them. And I mean, it should be obvious but you know, when you're so locked on to the beauty of it, and the altruism and the good sentiment of it, you know, you might miss the fact that there is an opportunity to grab another player's hands, especially someone who doesn't know what they're doing, and fly them right into a volcano, you know, or even with good intentions. We had cases of people trying to show other players, fun, interesting things. But the other player just not knowing how to say, No, I'm okay. You know, I like where I am right now. And the simplest solution, which they ended up doing is basically adding a step to that, which was the player offering their hand. And there's a full animation to it, there's this beautiful gesture of you know, will you come with me, and that really empowers the people on the other end. So, I think, from the development side of things, just getting into the mindset and the process, and thinking about how even the greatest things could be weaponized against players how to make it better. And also just see it as a responsibility that you have to have as a developer. Another kind of shortcoming is just thinking that players will sort themselves out. And they'll they'll be able to, you know, if they don't like it, they'll still say something, or they'll they'll change the behaviour in some way. But, you know, again, to Kim's point, and, you know, using even her experience and the experience of so many people as an example, often the reaction is to just not do it, just step away and never play again. And that's, you know, obviously not fair to the people. And if you're a company, at the very least, that's one less customer that you have, but it more importantly, that's another person who is not going to be able to experience your amazing product.

Ben Whitelaw 31:59
And what digital protocols do you think we're missing? Can you give an example.

32:06
For me, there's, I have two big ones. If, for example, we all go to the park to play, and, you know, we decide to throw the ball around, and I don't know, you do something I don't like and so I take the ball, and I throw it in the bushes, and I have a little fit, you know, you and Robert can kind of side on each other and, you know, be like what was that about what's going on there, and you just had a moment where you gave each other the confidence of this not being okay. But in an online space, you don't necessarily have that. If I do something in a game that you disagree with or whatnot, you know, I say something maybe a little bit inappropriate, even just borderline inappropriate, where you might be able to trust in your friends or social environment, kind of giving you the nudge that that wasn't okay, and that changes your behaviour going forward. If that doesn't happen in that moment in that digital space, you don't get that signal, and therefore you continue to propagate that behaviour. And that can lead to worse things. But at the very least, you continue to do the same thing. So I think that that is a really big one that we're we're missing those nonverbal aspects. And then I think the other one is, you know, I think there's a million things, but I think there's a really big one is a lack of trust, you know, we are thrusting strangers together in online environments, and acting like somehow humans will just get along in those environments. That's not how humans work. You know, when we we have a tendency to be very tribal, for better or for worse, sometimes that leads to really good things, you know, it leads to great communities and supporting each other and a lot of wonderful things. And sometimes at least, not so good things, you know, where we are very othering and exclusionary and hurtful and harmful and worse to other people. So what we need to think about is how do we facilitate trust, you know, we know the ingredients of trust, right? It's proximity, its similarity, its familiarity, it's reciprocity, like, these are the things that when we have these, these are the ingredients that allow trust to form, but trust takes time

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as well. So a lot of our online gaming experiences are very ephemeral. And in the moment, I drop in with a bunch of randos, I have that experience, and I never see you again, you know, cat lover 56. So we lack that ability to have these repeat connections and grow the seeds into actually a foundation of trust. Instead, we thrust people into situations that extend beyond the limits of the current level of trust. And then of course, it causes a whole bunch of problems and breakdowns and then those further germinate other challenges as people now are getting frustrated with each other. And, you know, bad actors are able to jump in and take advantage of vulnerable actors because we don't have robust, resilient communities on the basis of this. So for me, those are the two really, really big challenges that we're facing as a society.

34:49

I mean, yeah, those are definitely big ones. Another that I think about a lot, especially with some of the games that I've worked on is the ability to communicate to the offenders what it is they've done wrong, and give them the opportunity to make corrections. Because at least up to this point, there are a lot of the response to bad actors is a slap on the wrist or just an outright banning. And that can address the problem, sometimes only temporarily. But, you know, the goal isn't to just, you know, segregate everybody into the good people and the bad people. Because it's not that simple, in most cases. And so I see there really being a huge opportunity to educate these people on first and foremost, what it is that they did that was inappropriate, and give them the opportunity, even just with some form of education, how they can correct that behaviour. And as someone who has worked directly in community management, and with these people, we've had people say things that are so outrageous in our communities, and then we spoke with them directly, you know, made it clear what it was that they did wrong, explained to them and talk to them about how they can make it right. And they become some of the best community members that we have. And they're sometimes even champions for that sort of positive behaviour.

Ben Whitelaw 36:27
Yeah, and as you both outline, you can see how so many platforms have have issues, because they're that's common in not just gaming situations, but also in social media and in dating, and in all these other online spaces, right? We're still not getting the basics, right, it feels like as to how humans experience the digital world.

36:49

Yeah, well said. And I think that we have a tendency all of us do, and it's totally understandable, to want to silo things, like we talk about games, we talk about social media, we talk about online dating, just to use the examples that you gave, which, you know, has a purpose, I think, but ultimately, at the end of the day, this is about us coexisting in online spaces and online spaces serving a large part of our social needs as human beings, you know, and we get that, you know, you can think of games as their own form of social media, a lot of kids today, that is how they interact. A lot of people come home from a long day of work, even if you know in COVID days, that means walking down the hallway, and jump online with their friends in a game largely to socialise and spend that quality time. You know, games today are really the malls and the rumpus rooms of your you know, they're how we gather and we need to be thinking about them with the same degree of maturity that we think about all of our shared social spaces.

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Ben Whitelaw 37:43

What's clear from speaking to Robert and Kimberly, is the thought that goes into creating fulfilling online gaming experiences in the design, in the prioritisation of inclusivity, and diversity, and in the communities that surround the games when they are out in the world. I'm sure it's not perfect. But there seems to be reason to be hopeful that the kind of mass harassment that Raven has experienced, will one day be a thing of the past.

Carlos Figueiredo 38:08

I'm very optimistic about that. I'm, you know, I'm very passionate about this space. And I've been working in this space for almost 14 years now. And I really believe so much in the power of online communities, specifically online gaming communities, I think there's so much joy and belonging and connection. So I'm very optimistic that in the future, what we will continue to see and let's say five years from now is a very vibrant global community of players, more players, more people playing, because they will feel empowered to play, they will feel like they can be their most authentic selves, and they can be free of abuse and harassment, they can connect with others. So I think we're gonna see that breaking those walls of offline and online more and more in people understanding the value of those online experiences and coming together in a joyful way. And I think safety and health and wellness and all those things will be an incredible centrepiece of game development. It will be just like second nature. You know, it's something that's part of how we develop games. We care about this. We care about people being safe and having healthy experiences. And I'm very optimistic that we'll get to that point where it is being built from the ground up.

39:33

With global internet penetration, and the number of people owning smartphones set to increase dramatically. The online gaming industry shows no signs of slowing down. And with more people of all ages, expected to take up gaming in the future. It's vital that gaming companies prioritise online safety from the get go. Luckily, with the likes of Raven, Carlos, Robert and Kimberly leading the charge, there's no reason to expect anything different. If you'd like To hear more about the way safety tech is combating disruptive behaviour in online gaming, head to the safety tech innovation network, an international network dedicated to the promotion, collaboration and industrial application of online safety technologies. Become a member to receive the latest information about safety tech events, and reminders about future episodes of the safety tech podcast. Thanks for joining me, and I'll see you next time. This has been a 4kicks production