

Male Gamers: how gaming behavior and choice of words works as ways of expressing masculinity

Ida Martine Gard Rysjedal

The Department of Information Science and Media Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Bergen

Ida.Rysjedal@student.uib.no

INTRODUCTION

Earlier research on gaming masculinity tends to rely on notions of toxic and hegemonic masculinity (Consalvo, 2003; 2012; Gray & Leonard, 2018; Massanari, 2017). There is no doubt that problematic practices and power structures in game culture have been identified due to critical research on diversity in games. However, scholarly descriptions of game culture as something “toxic” have eventually alienated certain gamers (Chess & Shaw, 2015). As stated by the “Understanding Male Gamers”-project (*UMG*), the current theory of the relationship between the gamer identity and masculinity has been based on reductionist ideas of toxic masculinity (2023). The goal of the *UMG*-project, as my project is a part of, is to contribute to a more holistic understanding of masculinity and gaming, that goes beyond reductionist ideas of toxic masculinity.

In an attempt to understand male gamers and gaming masculinity, I will conduct both a forum study and a study of male gamers’ streams. My main approach will be to focus on how masculinity is expressed through both gaming behavior and rhetorical elements in videos on chosen YouTube- and Twitch.tv-channels, as well as on two selected forums - one open access and one closed. My main research question is: How do male players refer to gender issues, and in what way are behavior in games and rhetorical devices used as an expression of masculinity?

This paper will aim to present my theoretical framework of the upcoming project that I plan to conduct during 2024. I will provide a general approach to my theoretical framework, focusing on expected relevant perspectives tied to the approach to, and analysis of, the data material.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The PhD-project’s theoretical framework will be in accordance with the *UMG*’s theoretical approach, which consists of several theories from both game studies, as

Proceedings of DiGRA 2024

© 2024 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

well as masculinity studies. It will be important to discuss an understanding of the term «masculinity», and thus explore central perspectives within gender theory.

Gender theory and game studies

Different understandings of masculinity, i.e. “geek masculinity” (Massanari, 2015; Salter, 2018), “toxic masculinity” (Consalvo, 2003; 2012; Gray & Leonard, 2018; Massanari 2017), “hegemonic masculinity” (Braithwaite, 2016; Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Kafai, Richard & Tynes, 2016), and “hybrid masculinity” (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), will be useful in the discussion of the term. It will also be necessary to state a definition of the term in order to be able to work with the concept. The book series *From Barbie to Mortal Combat* offer a viewpoint of games and gender, as it was one of the earliest publications who provided important perspectives about the gendered aspects around game and game culture, i.e. about gender expectations and hegemonic masculinity (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Kafai, Richard & Tynes, 2016). Generally speaking, there are many valuable theories concerning this topic within gender studies. For instance, R. Connell will be an important gender theoretician, as her work in gender studies discuss the concepts of masculinity, hegemony and gender.

Gender studies will contribute to the development of a framework of different understandings of gender and masculinity, including how gender can be considered as something that is culturally constructed (Connell, 2009). Further on, this framework will aid us with developing an understanding of how masculinity is expressed in different forms, depending on context and culture (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Connell, 2009; Connell, 2016). The awareness of contextual and cultural dependency will be important when we are going to examine how people express masculinity through games and rhetorical concepts through the mediums of streaming channels and online forums.

As Kafari, Richard and Tynes (2016) emphasizes, after Christensen (2006), in practices of play some gender ideals might be exaggerated, and the masculinity that is performed in the real life may be less rigid than the reproduction of masculinity in online gaming (p. 114). Gaming masculinity has been conceptualized as something aggressive, violent, misogynist and homophobic, which is quite a stereotypical understanding of gaming masculinity, according to Christensen (2006) (in Kafai, Richard & Tynes, 2016, p. 114). Therefore, theoretical framework concerning gaming behavior, or interaction in games, will be useful. I will also make use of theories discussing gaming behavior in coherence with gender studies. Such perspectives may be helpful in the process of recognizing gendered aspects of behavioral choices.

Rhetorical theories

Fundamental rhetorical theory will be an important part of the theoretical framework when identifying and exploring the rhetorical elements of the data, in both the videos and the forums. I do expect some form of humor to be present in the material, most likely in combination with other rhetorical tools. For instance, we might expect to encounter some form of ironic or sarcastic rhetorical elements (Hasnat, 2022). Sarcasm is characterized by conveying a meaning different from the literal one and is often used in a satirical context (Hasnat, 2022, pp. 1), as it is utilized to express something different than what you actually mean (Wallace et al., 2014, pp. 1).

Sarcasm is a quite common part of communication in forum culture, and on online social arenas (Hasnat et al., 2022, pp. 1).

Also, theories about gendered rhetoric, or gendered communication, will be especially useful to identify and understand the gendered aspects of communication (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Romaine, 1999). This will also be an important tool in understanding how communication can contribute to the expressions of masculinity.

CONCLUSION

As presented in this description, there is a need for a new approach to the male gamers, that focus on the broader aspects of gaming masculinity, and not just the toxic elements. An interdisciplinary framework will therefore be helpful in the process of how one could approach gamer masculinity, and how masculinity is expressed in the forums and videos.

REFERENCES

- Braithwaite, A. (2016) It's About Ethics in Games Journalism? Gamergaters and Geek Masculinity, *Social Media + Society*, 2(4), 1-10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116672484>.
- Bridges, T. & Pascoe, C. J. (2014) Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities, *Sociology compass*, 8(3), 246-258. DOI: 10.1111/soc4.12134
- Cassel, J. & Jenkins, H. (1998) *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. Available from: https://books.google.no/books?id=Y5_cbfm3YfYC&printsec=frontcover&dq=from+barbie+to+mortal+kombat&hl=no&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=from%20barbie%20to%20mortal%20kombat&f=false (Read: February 20th 2023).
- Connell, R. (2009) *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. (2016) Masculinities in global perspective: hegemony, contestation, and changing structures of power, *Theory and Society*, 45. p. 303-318. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-016-9275-x>.
- Consalvo, M. (2003) The Monsters Next Door: Media Constructions of Boys and Masculinity, *Feminist Media Studies*, 3(1), p. 27-45. DOI: 10.1080/1468077032000080112.
- Consalvo, M. (2012) Confronting toxic gamer culture: A challenge for feminist game studies scholars, *Ada: Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology*, 1. DOI: 10.7264/N33X84KH.
- DeFrancisco, V.P & Palczewski, C.H. (2007) *Communicating Gender Diversity: A critical approach*. United Kingdom: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gray, K.L. & Leonard, D.J. (2018) *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice*. Seattle: University of Washinton Press.

- Hasnat, F. et al. (2022) Understanding Sarcasm from Reddit texts using Supervised Algorithms, *EEE 10th Region 10 Humanitarian Technology Conference (R10-HTC)*, p. 1-6. DOI: 10.1109/R10-HTC54060.2022.9929882.
- Kafai, Y.B., Richard, G.T. & Tynes, B.M. (2016) *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming*. Pittsburg: ETC Press.
- Massanari, A. (2015) *Participatory Culture, Community and Play: learning from reddit*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Massanari, A. (2017) #Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures, *New Media and Society*, 19(3), p. 329-346. DOI: 10.1177/1461444815608807.
- Romaine, S. (1999) *Communicating Gender*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Salter, M. (2018) From geek masculinity to Gamergate: the technological rationality of online abuse. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 14(2), p. 247- 264. DOI: 10.1177/1741659017690893.
- Understanding Male Gamers* (2023). University of Bergen: The Department of Information Science and Media Studies. Available at: <https://www.uib.no/umg> [Accessed 13. November 2023].
- Wallace, B.C. et al. (2014) Humans Require Context to Infer Ironic Intent (so Computers Probably do, too), *Proceedings of the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (Volum 2: Short Papers)*, p. 512-516. DOI: 10.3115/v1/P14-2084.