

Masculinity in gaming discourses: A general overview of an ongoing project, and some early findings

Ida Martine Gard Rysjedal

Dept of Information Science and Media Studies

University of Bergen

ida.rysjedal@uib.no

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INTRODUCTION

In this extended abstract I will provide an overview of my ongoing doctoral project, named *Masculinity: aiming to understand expressions of masculinity in gaming discourses*. The project is part of the *Understanding Masculinity in Gaming* (UMG), led by Kristine Jørgensen at the University of Bergen, Norway. My project is part of UMGs work package 2, which is about exploring how masculinity is expressed in game culture discourses. The aim of my project is to understand how masculinity is expressed through gaming behavior and rhetorical elements. I am therefor studying two men gamers, and how they express masculinity through their online game streams. By exploring how they make sense of themselves, identities and masculinity, the goal is to contribute to a more nuanced picture of masculinity in the context of gaming.

In addition to the general overview of the project, I will present some early findings from my data collection.

BACKGROUND

Few studies explore masculinity and men gamers, and tend to focus on differences between genders (Jenson et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2018). Representation of men and masculinity in gaming have been studied (Blackburn et al., 2019; Ivory, 2006), but tend to rely on notions of toxic (Consalvo, 2003; 2012; Gray et al., 2018; Massanari, 2015) and hegemonic masculinity (Braithwaite, 2016; Chess et al., 2015). Critical research on diversity in games have undoubtedly uncovered problematic practices within the areas around gaming, including game culture. But research on men and masculinity is underdeveloped (Taylor et al., 2018), failing to include the many notions of masculinity. Thus, there is need for research on how men understand and express masculinity themselves.

My overarching research question is as follows: How is masculinity expressed in game culture, and in what way are behavior in games and rhetorical devices used as expressions of masculinities? By looking at two men game streamers on Twitch.tv and

their communities in two selected forums, the aim of this project is to contribute to a better understanding of how masculinity is expressed in gaming discourses.

METHOD AND DESCRIPTION OF CASES

As mentioned above, I will be studying 2 men streamers and their communities. The two men streamers are amongst Norway's most popular streamers on Twitch.tv. Their communities on a popular forum platform will also be studied. Each of the streamers have a forum connected to their channel, where their fans socialize outside of the streams. The choice of the streamers have been based on four criteria involving popularity, activity, availability, and gender. This is to ensure that the channels uphold a certain level of standards that will be important when conducting the study. The criterion of gender is chosen on the fact that I will be focusing on men gamers, and their understanding and expression of masculinity. The forums are mainly chosen because they are connected to each of their twitch channels. However, the same criteria, except for gender, is also needed for the to ensure a certain level of popularity activity and availability with the forums. The criterion of gender is not applied to the forums, as I cannot ensure or identify the forum participants' gender.

DATA COLLECTION: EARLY FINDINGS

During October 2024 I contacted the streamers, the moderators and the forum participants, informing them about the project, as I will not be gathering informed consent in this study. Before informing the forums, I received positive and helpful responses from one of the streamers and both. The second streamer never replied to me, despite several contacting attempts, but did not explicitly communicate any refusal of being studied. His community was mostly positive to the project, but one of the forum participants were asking some critical questions about the ethical dilemmas in the project. These questions included if it was correct to consider the forum as public, and that people might have private conversations not intended to be shared outside the forum. The participant also criticized the lack of consent in the project, and noted that not everyone can, want to or have the possibility to participate in a project like this. I found the participant's questions fair and well-reflected, giving me an opportunity to explain some of the ethical considerations that I had to do, and am doing during the data collection. The ethical dilemmas that the participant addressed have been thoroughly discussed with the Norwegian agency that ensures that data collection is following the Norwegian legalization of data treatment. The raising of these questions also shows us that forum studies requires thorough reflections and navigations of ethical considerations, and that the researcher has to be well aware of how to treat the data in order to ensure the participants' anonymity.

In the other forum, the first forum, I also received some critical responses to my project, however these responses showed critical and negative approaches to the project, through personal comments and hostile behavior towards me – the researcher. Only a few minutes after I published the information in the forum people reacted with strong emotions that a researcher was present in their forum. There were also some positive or more neutral participants, who did not react as strongly as the critical participants. The negative responses included skepticism towards the project, screenshots from my work profile and work address - indicating they wanted to 'visit' my office, critique to my education and intentions - undermining my knowledge, and negative comments on my appearance.

CONCLUSION

As described in this extended abstract, I have provided a general overview of my project, as well as some findings from the early stages of my data collection. Focusing on how the forums reacted to the information about the project, I wish to address some methodological challenges and how researchers might have to face different participants and emotions during our work.

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