

Visual Representations of Alternative Masculinities in a Mexican Gaymer Community's Instagram Content

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INTRODUCTION

Gaming culture has long been shaped by straight geek masculinity, producing gendered spaces that marginalize women and queer players (Kocurek, 2015; Salter & Blodgett, 2017; Shaw, 2014; Taylor, 2012). Gay male gamers, or gaymers, have developed online and offline communities that challenge traditional masculine gaming norms (Bikowski, 2020; MacKnight, 2013). This study analyzes the Instagram content of Gaymer Nights, a Mexican gaymer community that organizes in-person gatherings, to examine how masculinities are represented and negotiated through visual communication related to gaming culture and community identity.

Instagram functions as a platform for aesthetic self-presentation and community identity formation (Leaver et al., 2020), with likes indicating social approval (Kim, 2018). We analyze a representative sample of visual content and employ a masculinities framework focused on geek and gamer masculinity (Jørgensen & Lindtner, 2024), and Halperin's (2012) theory of gay subjectivity.

Formed in 2023 in Monterrey, Mexico, Gaymer Nights aims to build an inclusive gaming community. Members are primarily gay men from varied social backgrounds who, through an affordable event fee, participate in activities like casual gaming, tournaments, karaoke, board gaming, and sporadically others like drag performances. The community's code of conduct (Gaymer Nights, n.d.) prohibits hate speech, harassment, explicit sexual language, and unsolicited sexual advances. By early 2026,

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Gaymer Nights had also hosted events in Mexico City, Saltillo, Puerto Vallarta, and Aguascalientes, with a vision to expand nationwide.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Connell's (2005) masculinities framework identifies hegemonic, complicit, marginalized¹, and subordinate masculinities; social constructs in a gender order that oppresses women and disempowered men. In a Mexican context, hegemonic masculinity is linked to hyperviolence, heteronormativity, and dominance (Valencia, 2023).

Masculinities in gaming spaces are usually analyzed as geek masculinity, which valorizes mastery, skill, or knowledge about niche interests (Salter & Blodgett, 2017; Taylor, 2012) and can result in gatekeeping to preserve "real" gamers' cultural capital. Current gamer masculinities, though, can also be flexible, based on community building and shared enthusiasm for the medium (Jørgensen & Lindtner 2024).

Although gay men have been historically subordinated to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), they can both reproduce and challenge masculine norms. Halperin (2012) argues that some expressions of gay culture combine traditional masculine ideals with feminine-coded aesthetics such as camp², drag, or diva worship, which can simultaneously signify pleasure, irony, and political resistance.

METHODOLOGY

Instagram was selected because it is Gaymer Nights' most popular platform, maintaining separate accounts by city with a combined follower count of 13.4k by October 18, 2025. Using an automated Python script, we retrieved 2,867 images dated between August 11, 2023 and October 6, 2025 within the posts, reels, and tagged posts tabs. After removing duplicates and outliers, the final image dataset was N=1,825. A randomized sample of n=318 was selected using a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ margin of error.

After preliminary browsing, thematically grounded categories based on communicative intention were formed to be interpreted through the selected masculinities framework: (1) gaymers and community members, (2) Gaymer Nights advertisement, (3) videogaming, (4) non-videogaming activities, (5) gaming and other news, and (6) humor and memes. Through a custom Python interface images were classified into one or more categories, storing metadata into a spreadsheet. Data was graphed to compare category frequency and average likes.

Masculinity was interpreted through self-presentation, interaction, humor, aesthetics, text, and identifiable (gaming) practices. The community's founder consented to the analysis of its publicly available content. Stories were excluded for ethical and technical reasons. Interpretations focus on community representation rather than identifying individuals.

RESULTS

Represented community members are mostly adult males in their 20s and 30s. Clothing styles range from traditional geek to more expressive forms such as tank tops, pup play gear, cosplay, and drag. Displays of affection, like handholding, hugs,

and kisses, appear alongside poses emphasizing physique or playful gender non-conformity.

Gaymer Nights advertisement represents the most numerous content with a frequency of 109 (followed by community members and humor with 64). Flyers employ colorful palettes, decorative motifs, or Nintendo imagery, often using inclusive Spanish. Other advertisement includes past event memories or occasional sponsors such as Scruff, a dating app associated with more masculine gay subcultures.

Gaming content centers on mainstream titles like *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* (Nintendo, 2018), with tournaments that highlight skill hierarchies; or the *Just Dance* (Ubisoft) series, framing gameplay as collective dancing and social bonding rather than competition. Non-videogaming activities such as drag shows, karaoke, and Pride marches signal community cohesion. Geek news posts aim to nurture gaming knowledge, but do not necessarily generate high engagement.

Humor and memes often relate to sexuality or gender-nonconformity, and utilize campy imagery related to Pokémon or other mainstream franchises. As the category with the highest average likes (138), far surpassing all others (~56), it suggests followers may resonate with humorous confrontations of normative masculinity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Gaymer Nights content displays alternative forms of gamer masculinity that are less rigidly aligned with hegemonic and geek masculinities. Its Nintendo-heavy visual language, bright color palettes, and camp humor frame gaming culture through familiarity and playfulness rather than toughness or seriousness. Instead of elevating overtly LGBTQ+ titles, mainstream or nostalgic franchises are queered, prioritizing approachability.

Displays of varied gender expressions like drag or pup play are normalized alongside eroticized male bodies and competitive gaming, echoing Halperin's (2012) coexistence of masculine and feminine aesthetics in gay male culture. Community formation activities encourage belonging and downplay gaming mastery, in line with Jørgensen and Lindtner's (2024) gamer masculinity approach, even as tournaments do reproduce elements of geek masculinity.

Gaymer Nights' imagery remains predominantly male-focused and homosocial, reflecting continuity with traditional gaming cultures while reimagining how those environments feel and function. This curated community representation showcases how alternative forms of gamer masculinity emerge through shared use of the medium, renegotiating gaming as a space for queer self-presentation and intimacy.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Associated with race or class, which are not the focus of this work.
- 2 Sensibility valuing artifice, irony, and playfulness.