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“MORE FEMINIST BULLSHIT”

Exploring Sexism and the Battle Over Gender
Construction in Video Game Discourse
Communities

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Abstract

Title: “*MORE FEMINIST BULLSHIT*” – *Exploring Sexism and the Battle Over Gender Construction in Video Game Discourse Communities*

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Abstract: This study explores gender construction in video game discourse communities, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework together with a quantitative, corpus linguistic methodology. Discourse samples were taken from five online content creators for *World of Warcraft* (WoW) who react to the four *Shadowlands: Afterlives* trailers for the WoW expansion released in November of 2020. The collected data consist of gender discourse both from the content creators themselves, as well as a corpus of viewer comments collected from their respective communities. The central findings of this discourse analysis corroborate previous studies, which indicate the existence of a widespread patriarchal discourse hegemony within ‘gamer’ culture. The study also gives qualitative descriptions of how this hegemony enforces its views in the face of counter-hegemonic renegotiation attempts, and analyses women’s social status in online gaming. This study demonstrates that women are relegated to a ‘second class’ status compared to men, both in regards to their perceived competencies as gamers, but also in the way that gamers discuss fictional depictions of women in the game itself. Finally, this study also finds that in the absence of gender expressions to challenge patriarchal hegemony, the latter attempts to enforce other ideological values that are not directly related to gender. The paper concludes by recommending this apparent trend as a potential topic for future research, and discusses possible venues for pilot studies on the topic.

Keywords: Video games, Women in games, Gender, Gender construction, Critical discourse analysis, Corpus linguistics, Feminism, Transgenderism, World of Warcraft

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1. Introduction

For as long as they have existed, video games have featured prominently in popular culture. Through the process of social osmosis, an average English-speaker who has never played a video game in their life is still likely to recognize classic titles such as *Super Mario*, *The Legend of Zelda* and *Donkey Kong*. Indeed, they may even be able to recount the dramaturgy that these titles all share: the story of a male hero that sets out to save the archetypal ‘damsel in distress’.

The replication of the same gender roles and power dynamics in these titles can be understood in light of the fact that historically gaming¹ culture has been a male-dominated space. This is, however, changing; the total number of female gamers reached relative parity with male gamers in the early 2000s (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006), although this was not reflected in the gender representation of contemporary games, wherein female characters were underrepresented and – when included – overwhelmingly sexualised for the sake of straight, male gamers (Burgess, Stermer & Burgess, 2007; Miller & Summers, 2007). Since then, video game developers such as Bioware and Blizzard Entertainment have responded by gradually moving towards more diverse gender and LGBTQ representation (Campbell, 2017; Lima, 2017).

This on-going transformation of the video games industry has repeatedly caused friction with the gaming community itself, periodically leading to forceful pushback (Consalvo, 2012) such as the 2014 ‘Gamergate controversy’ during which a largely male-dominated gaming community collectively targeted a feminist media critic and two female game developers with online harassment and death threats (Hudson, 2014). Other examples include online harassment and threats towards the game developer Amber Scott in 2016 over the inclusion of a transgendered character in *Baldur’s Gate: Siege of Dragonspear* (Duffy, 2016), as well as fan backlash against Blizzard Entertainment in 2020 over the inclusion of multiple new LGBTQ characters in *World of Warcraft: Shadowlands* (Taliesin & Eitel, 2020a), prompting a subsequent statement from Blizzard’s lead narrative designer Steve Danuser that homophobia officially does not exist in the Warcraft universe (Perculia, 2020).

One could infer, therefore, that gender expression – and gender construction more broadly within gaming culture, is currently in a state of flux. However, this process is not well

¹ Although ‘gaming’ can be understood as broadly referring to any kind of game, this study

understood from a sociolinguistic perspective, as gaming culture and the speech conventions within it have yet to become the target for any extensive studies. Thus, gamer discourse about gender represents a sociolinguistic research gap, which this paper sets out to explore.

2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore the sociolinguistic process of gender construction within English-speaking segments of video game culture. Specifically, this study considers the way in which gamers respond to different forms of gender expression as presented by characters from the games they play, in order to explain how gamers talk *about* gender while amongst other members of their community. In order to direct the study towards this aim², it is guided by two primary research questions:

1. How do gamers respond to different forms of gender expression in the games they play?
2. What descriptors and attitude markers do gamers use to express or reinforce their own gender constructions?

² For a more in-depth account of how the aim of the study was achieved, see sections 4 and 5.

3. Literature review

The sociolinguistic study of video game culture is as of yet a comparatively new field of research. An early attempt was made by Thornborrow (1997), who performed a qualitative discourse analysis of the language used in the gaming magazine *Mean Machines Sega*. The study found that, although some of the readers' letters featured by the magazine were from young girls, the discourse was strongly male-dominated and tended to objectify or even otherise female game characters, while constructing an assumed reader identity that often conflated the reader with male video game characters. Thornborrow (1997) argues that her findings demonstrate how women – at least in the 1990s – could only exist within video game culture by placing themselves in a discourse that was entirely male-centred.

More recently, Salter and Blodgett (2012) re-examined the same trend by observing how a common gamer identity is constructed and defined online through gendered discourse in social networks. The study found that female gamers who attempted to renegotiate gender roles by standing up against aggressive male discourse faced otherisation, ridicule and hostile reprisals from their community, which was further amplified as influential actors called their followers to action against the female targets. Furthermore, feminine characteristics were found to commonly be associated with 'casual' gaming, used to imply a lower skill-level than that of 'hardcore' male gamers. Salter and Blodgett (2012) argue that the results are an indicator of a widespread notion of male essentialism – or 'hypermasculinity' – within gaming culture, through which male-centred discourse has become overtly hostile towards women and actively discourages female gender expression and participation by associating femininity with a type of 'second-class' gamer.

The trend of belittling women's skill-levels in games is further explored by Kasumovic and Kuznekoff (2015) whose data samples from the competitive multiplayer game *Halo 3* indicate that low-skilled male gamers are more likely to engage in hostility and disparaging language towards female players because they perceive themselves to be in a male-dominated hierarchy, where the prospect of a woman either matching or outperforming them is viewed as a direct threat to their status. These, as well as Salter and Blodgett's (2012) findings appear to corroborate Thornborrow's (1997) results while also expanding on them, but all three studies are too limited in scope to draw any broad or definite conclusions about gendered discourse within the gaming community at large.

Indeed, Sveningsson (2012) offers a meaningfully different perspective on the topic. While she affirms the uncontested view that gaming culture is dominated by a male-centred discourse, she also demonstrates how this view can lack nuance. By drawing data from a thematic analysis of discourse that took place on three Swedish online gaming forums and triangulating her findings with a qualitative interview study of seven female gamers, Sveningsson's (2012) study indicates that women are gradually becoming more accepted in certain segments of gaming culture. She reasons that within gaming culture there are multiple contexts such as game genre, gaming scene, and perhaps most significantly, the cultural background of the gamers engaged in gender construction, which act as determiners for how welcomed women will be. As Sveningsson's (2012) study was performed in a Swedish culture context, she argues that Swedish equality discourse is what played a significant role in the more positive perception of female gamers.

Nevertheless, these findings do suggest an apparent shift towards inclusivity in the video game discourse community, for which Harvey and Fisher (2015) provide additional evidence, which also demonstrate that this change is not unique to the Swedish culture context. The primary focus of the study is on gender-based discrimination and resistance towards feminist thought within the North American video games industry, which in itself is merely of peripheral applicability to the aims of this paper. However, of special note is Harvey and Fisher's (2015) conclusion that a growing counter-movement of feminist discourse has started to emerge within video game culture, which they base on the increased attention on social media platforms and video games sites to structural sexism within the video games industry, as well as the formation of grassroots community groups aimed at enabling female game developers to enter the profession and fight back against tokenisation. This mobilisation would not be possible without the support of actual gamers, which suggests the presence of such a counter-movement within gamer discourse communities as well.

To the question of how large this counter-movement truly is, Nardi's (2010) ethnographical discourse analysis of a North American game server for *World of Warcraft* (WoW) suggests it is still in its infancy – or at least, that this was the case in 2010. She notes that the game contains a significant minority of female gamers and that the design of the game itself offers a relatively nuanced presentation of feminine gender expressions, but that the discourse amongst WoW gamers themselves remains heavily male-dominated and that, while female players are acknowledged, they are expected to conform to the discursive tone set by the men, which normalises sexualised, sexist and homophobic language. Nardi (2010) does however point out that women have the option to escape this discourse by joining

‘guilds’ – smaller communities within the game itself, that have the option to enforce their own rules on language. This would indicate a notable development from Thornborrow’s (1997) findings in that women have at least become acknowledged as participants within video game culture, and although the expectation to submit under a male-dominated discourse remains the public norm, women now have the option to ‘opt out’ of the public discourse by isolating themselves in smaller sub-sections of the community.

The studies mentioned so far serve to highlight the significance of further discursive analyses, since the exact relationship between hegemony and counter-movement in video games culture remains unclear. While there are not many more studies of a similar nature to draw from, another relevant aspect of the gaming community was recently explored by Diwanji et al. (2020) – the interaction between audiences and content creators on gaming media platforms. Salter and Blodgett (2012) have previously established that influential actors in a gaming community can amplify the behaviour of the community at large, and Diwanji et al. (2020) look specifically at the interplay between influential gamers and their followers on the live-streaming platform Twitch.tv. The mixed-method study finds that Twitch users treat content creators’ live-streams as a community space, establishing a communicative ‘co-presence’ between influencer and viewer in which information is received in both directions. While the study did not specifically intend to explore gaming culture so much as *live-streaming* as a phenomenon, Twitch.tv is explicitly a platform for gaming streams, which the authors also point out. As such, there is important overlap here, which can be utilised in understanding gamers’ behaviour in this type of community space.

This knowledge should also be understood in context to Potts’ (2014) discursive study of video game content creators on another social media platform: YouTube. Potts conducts a triangulation of three different data sets; videos produced by content creators, the comments on those videos, as well as a qualitative interview with a gamer, which seem to indicate that some content creators have started to overtly push back against hypermasculine marginalisation strategies, and that this in turn changes the behaviour of their communities. Potts concludes that the content creators’ counter-discourses have resulted in a minority gaming community that “advocates for acceptance and rejects bigotry” (163), showing not only that the counter-movement discussed by Harvey and Fisher (2015) and Sveningsson (2012) includes major influencers, but that this makes it possible for counter-narratives to exist on public media platforms, and not just in self-isolating communities such as discussed by Nardi (2010).

4. Theoretical framework

Since this study explores conversations related to gender in online gaming culture, its success is contingent on the application of a theoretical framework capable of highlighting the ideological aspects of speech through a qualitative analysis of data. Consequently, this study was conducted through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which presupposes that discourse is the tool with which social actors create dominant groups, manipulate public opinion and monitor acceptable social behaviour (van Dijk:1993:251, 257, 268), thereby generating a “socio-cognitive interface” (van Dijk, 1993:280) that connects language use on the micro-level to institutional power on the macro-level. CDA is primarily used to study injustices, power-imbalances and power abuses that stem from ideological language use (van Dijk, 1993:252, 254-255), which makes the theory especially suited for this study in light of the patriarchal discourse that past research show to be prevalent in video game communities (Harvey & Fisher, 2015; Nardi, 2010; Potts, 2014; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Sveningsson, 2012; Thornborrow, 1997).

In regards to the potential use and limitations of CDA, one ought first to outline its intended use of the term ‘discourse’, which Cameron (2001) defines as a social reality created and upheld by intersubjective language use; it is the interplay of *what* words are used and *how* they are being said in order to generate a distinct way of perceiving or representing the world (Cameron, 2001:13-15), regardless of whether this is done consciously or not by the speaker (McGregor, n.d.). CDA, then, is the framework through which this behaviour can be viewed from a meta-perspective, in order to catalogue and extract the social views of a discourse community that may not always be explicitly stated, but still discernible through the community’s use of language. As stated before, CDA focuses particularly on identifying the *ideological* underpinnings of a discourse community’s constructed reality (Cameron, 2001:123, 125), and can also be used to analyse how *different* constructions of reality create, challenge, and compete for power within society and social groups (van Dijk, 1993:249-250).

Another important aspect of CDA is the concept of ‘naturalisation’, which refers to the repeated *patterns* of speech expressed within a discourse community. In other words, a sociolinguist who employs CDA as a theory cannot simply point to an isolated example of an expressed belief and say that it is indicative of the discourse community’s discursive construction of reality, but must first establish a systematic display of the same language-use amongst its speakers in order to demonstrate that said perception of reality is indeed

naturalised within the community, and taken as conventional truth or praxis (Cameron, 2001:129, 137).

With a requirement on demonstrable, repeated patterns for its conclusions, one could argue that CDA rests on a strong empirical foundation. Furthermore, one of the greatest strengths of the theory lies in its allowance for observational studies wherein the active speakers are not aware that they are, in fact, being observed. This means that the theory is not particularly vulnerable to the introduction of outside variables that may alter the participants' way of speaking, which may otherwise be the case (Cameron, 2001:14-15). Since this paper is best served by observing gamers in an unaltered, 'natural' environment, this has helped to secure the validity of the data used in this study.

As for the reliability of the study, a potential difficulty with CDA arises with the question of what constitutes a "correct" interpretation of discourse, especially in regards to its ideological implications (Cameron, 2001:137). Any interpretation by a human is, after all, by its very definition subjective. Cameron counters this criticism by pointing out that there is still a finite number of plausible interpretations of any given text, and it would be a mistake to assume that these interpretations were all *equally* plausible. Additionally, through a holistic reading, the analyst should be able to identify any contrasting, possible interpretations, and be expected to discuss them honestly in context to one another in order to arrive at the most reasonable conclusion (Cameron, 2001:138, 156-157). More importantly, however, van Dijk (1993:252-253) points out that CDA actually *necessitates* the analyst to take an ideological stance in relation to their data, because the ultimate goal of the theory *is* normative: to achieve societal change through the critical identification of inequality and injustice. This, he concludes, is actually no more of a political stance than that of an academic who *rejects* the intermingling of academia and ideology, because choosing 'impartiality' is still a political choice; one that arguably translates into a tacit endorsement of whatever political injustice this happens to overlook (van Dijk, 1993:254).

A more noteworthy limitation of the theory, however, lies in the fact that this paper is not based on sufficient data to explore the *longitudinal evolution* of discourses – i.e. how the discourse amongst gamers has changed over time. Since social changes and how they relate to changes within discourse communities is something that CDA is commonly used for (Cameron, 2001:129-130), this means that the theory cannot be *fully* utilised due to the limited scope of a BA thesis. However, this drawback has been mitigated by the existence of prior discursive research, which has been covered in the literature review of this paper. Just as those studies captured the state of video games discourse in different, specific years, this

paper has explored that same discourse in 2020, and can therefore be contrasted with older findings in order to discuss what appears to be on-going social changes within the gaming community (Harvey & Fisher, 2015; Nardi, 2010; Potts, 2014; Sveningson, 2012).

5. Material and method

This section begins with a presentation of the material used in the study, as well as an account of how it was collected. This is done in subsection 5.1, which is followed by a discussion of how the material was used in subsection 5.2.

5.1 Selection process and description of material

In order to find a representative selection of data, this study has chosen to examine the language of gamers from the *World of Warcraft* (WoW) online community – deemed large enough to produce a broad base of discourse while also showing potential, based on prior research, to have a presence of both a discursive hegemony and a counter-hegemony (Nardi, 2010). In order to capture discourse specifically related to gender, the data collection was further narrowed down to instances in which gamers were talking about four trailers for the WoW expansion released in November 2020 – *World of Warcraft: Shadowlands*. The four trailers, *Afterlives: Bastion* (World of Warcraft, 2020a), *Afterlives: Maldraxxus* (World of Warcraft, 2020b), *Afterlives: Ardenweald* (World of Warcraft, 2020c) and *Afterlives: Revendreth* (World of Warcraft, 2020d), introduce eight named characters that feature prominently in the game – four men and four women – each displaying different gender characteristics both in appearance and personality.

Discourse samples discussing these characters were taken from five of the largest WoW content creators³ that produce online media entertainment for fans of the game. The choice to select data from the largest possible content creators was based on the reasoning that their reactions to the four *Afterlives* trailers were likely to prompt a rich and easily accessible source of discourse around gender from their respective communities. The discursive material collected for this study consists of transcriptions from videos in which the five content creators discuss the trailers, as well as chat logs and comments from their viewers who watched the content. The material was gathered from Twitch.tv and YouTube respectively, depending on where the content creator uploaded it, and was found by reviewing the content uploaded by the creators following the release of each trailer.

All YouTube videos collected as material for this study were made specifically to discuss the trailers, and as such were used in their entirety, along with all YouTube comments

³ These content creators are accounted for in greater detail under subsection 5.1.1.

left by viewers within two weeks of each video's respective release dates. However, some creators brought up the trailers for only a few minutes at a time during hour-long live-streaming sessions on Twitch. When this happened, those specific moments were transcribed in full, and the only viewer comments gathered for the study were those made *during* that particular segment of the live-stream, and within two minutes after the content creator had moved on to a new topic. In total, the material collected for this study consists of approximately 6 hours and 50 minutes of video logs from the content creators themselves, as well as 31,897 viewer comments.

5.1.1 Introducing the five content creators

The five content creators used in this study were – by necessity – selected based on who actually chose to cover the four *Afterlives* trailers. In addition, two main principles for selection were employed: community size, and likelihood that each creator represents a different sub-section of WoW gamers, since an overlap of viewers between the different creators would give a less nuanced picture of the WoW community at large. The five creators finally selected were *Sloot* and *Naguura* from Twitch, *Nobbel87* from YouTube, as well as *Taliesin & Eritel* and *Asmongold*, who have a presence on both platforms.

Sloot is the fourth most watched WoW streamer on Twitch (Twitchmetrics, n.d.a), with an average of 1,600 live viewers between July and September of 2020 (Twitchtracker, n.d.a). He generally streams himself playing or testing out different aspects of the game itself (*Sloot*, n.d.). *Naguura* mainly also streams gameplay content (*Naguura*, n.d.), but was selected in order to include a female streamer. While she is the largest female WoW streamer on Twitch, she is only 23rd most watched overall (Twitchmetrics, n.d.a). However, her viewership is still comparable to that of *Sloot* – averaging just over 1,000 viewers between July and September of 2020 (Twitchtracker, n.d.b).

Nobbel87 produces content with a significantly different appeal. Rather than technical gameplay aspects, his YouTube channel is dedicated to covering and discussing the storyline of the game, as well as background story from books and older games in the *Warcraft* franchise. His YouTube channel has just over 600,000 subscribers (*Nobbel87*, n.d.).

Taliesin & Eritel is a significantly smaller, cross-platform channel with about 280,000 subscribers on YouTube (*Taliesin & Eritel*, n.d.), where they cover WoW-related news in pre-produced, scripted videos. They also live-stream on Twitch, where they rank as the 78th most watched WoW channel (Twitchmetrics, n.d.a), but due to a surprisingly dedicated

viewer base they still average the same amount of live viewers as Naguura, despite having less than half her amount of followers (Twitchtracker, n.d.c). What truly sets Taliesin & Evtel apart from other channels however – and the reason for their inclusion in this study – is the fact that they have overtly, and repeatedly, staked out a strong counter-hegemonic position for themselves, in which they challenge hypermasculine discourse and advocate for a gaming community that is more inclusive towards marginalised groups (Taliesin & Evtel, 2020a; 2020c; 2020d).

Finally, Asmongold is arguably the most prominent of all content creators included in this study. He is mainly a live-streamer on Twitch, but also uploads highlights from his Twitch streams to YouTube, where he has just over 350,000 subscribers (Asmongold TV, n.d.). His Twitch channel is the most watched WoW channel by far, and the 7th most watched English-speaking channel on the entire platform (Twitchmetrics, n.d.b), averaging 42,000 live viewers between July and September of 2020 (Twitchtracker, n.d.d). Asmongold streams a variety of WoW content, ranging from gameplay to news and reaction videos, and with his 1,6 million followers on Twitch (Asmongold, n.d.) he is arguably the content creator with the broadest appeal to the WoW community. As such, his commentary and viewer chat logs have served as a useful reference point to the other content creators in this study.

5.1.2 Demographics of Twitch and YouTube

There is not enough data available to conclusively say how representative the WoW communities on Twitch and YouTube are of the WoW community in the actual game, but it could be argued that the likelihood of a close overlap is quite high. As noted by Nardi's (2010) ethnographic study of WoW, the game has a male-dominated discourse community with a minority segment of female gamers, and this seems to also be the case on Twitch. The most recent estimates made by the Global Web Index suggest that Twitch users are comprised of about 65% men and 35% women (Kavanagh, 2019). Estimates of YouTube's demographics are surprisingly similar, with 62% of users being men and 38% being women (Omnicores, 2020). Therefore, one can presume that the discourse communities in this study are majority-male, just like in the game itself.

5.1.3 Accessibility of data

The YouTube videos used as data samples are expected to remain online indefinitely, along with any user comments. They are thus easily accessible to anyone that wishes to verify the

way in which the data is presented in this study. As for the video logs from Twitch, they were still accessible at the time that this paper was written, but will only remain on Twitch for 60 days following their initial broadcast (Kollar, 2014) before they are permanently deleted. Therefore, the author of this paper has transcribed both the video logs and user chats, and saved them in Google Docs. The transcriptions are too long to include as an appendix, but can be requested through email by contacting ola.nenzelius@gmail.com.

5.1.4 Ethical considerations

Since the data samples presented consist of speakers who were never aware that they would be the objects of a sociolinguistic study, one would be amiss not to acknowledge the ethical concerns that this presents. Firstly, one could question if it is at all ethical to use these data samples without the expressed consent of the speakers that produced them, and secondly, one ought also consider whether the participants have a right to be anonymous when they are directly quoted.

To the first issue, the content creators selected for this study are public figures. They have uploaded their video logs on public domains that can be accessed without a login or password. As such, these samples are fair use data (Jaszi & Aufderheide, 2010), and can be used by anyone. Similarly, the users who have commented on these video logs know that their names and commentary will appear next to the video – the users on Twitch are even fully aware that their comments show up on the live-stream itself. Since they have made these comments publicly, they too are treated as fair-use data. Therefore, it has not been necessary to gather verbal or written consent for the data to be used, either from the content creators or their viewers.

As for the question of letting participants be anonymous, both content creators and viewers have already chosen a username for the platform they are using, and this pseudonym has been kept for the study in order to guarantee anonymity.

5.2 Method

To a certain extent, the theoretical framework of CDA outlines the methodology of the study as well, insofar that it requires the collection of discursive data to analyse. However, CDA does not necessarily dictate *how* this data is analysed. Baker (2012:247) argues that the use of a corpus linguistic methodology can synergise well with CDA, strengthening the reliability of the study by adding a quantitative dimension to what is largely a qualitative theory, and as

such, the theoretical framework of this study was supplemented with a corpus linguistic approach to the presentation of the 31,897 viewer comments collected. The transcriptions from the content creators themselves were left out of the corpus, due to being of a more qualitative nature. The transcripts were instead used to nuance the analysis with qualitative examples and context to the comments found in the corpus.

The corpus of viewer comments was categorized into separate documents on Google Docs based on what community the data was taken from, and was then used to highlight trends in the material of the study by counting ideologically charged word frequencies, which served to provide more robust evidence of certain language patterns being naturalised within each content creators community. Google Docs was utilised to organize the comments because the software AntConc – normally used for categorizing and analysing corpora – was unable to handle the large number of emoticons and links tied to the chat logs when they were copied into the software.

The search function in Google Docs was used to quantify different word frequencies and thus demonstrate the naturalisation of language use, but before this could be done, the material had to be reviewed manually in order to determine the presence of discourse hegemonies within each content creator's community. This manual reading was by far the most time consuming step in the writing of this paper, but it allowed for the grouping of all viewer comments into different ideological categories, which helped establish the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic contexts of different word-frequencies in the corpus.

During the manual reading of the corpus, the comments that discussed gender tended to fall quite naturally into one of the following four categories: **Hegemony-enforcing** (openly aggressive or misogynistic comments that enforce patriarchal hegemony, for instance by describing the inclusion of women as “feminist propaganda” or by calling transgenderism “disgusting”), **Hegemony-enabling** (containing patriarchal presuppositions or providing cover for hegemony-enforcing comments by either excusing or encouraging them, e.g. someone responding to a misogynistic comment with “lol”, or reproducing an assumed masculine identity by addressing the totality of other viewers as “gentlemen” or “bros”), **Hegemony-Breaking** (exhibiting behaviour or values not in line with hypermasculinity, for instance by identifying with a female character) and **Counter-hegemonic** (challenging patriarchal hegemony outright by calling it out and/or arguing against it).

6. Results

The ambition of this study is to first establish larger trends in its data before making any qualitative claims about it. Therefore, this section begins with a quantitative analysis of the corpora used in the study. This is also done to provide an outline of the ideological variance between the different streamers and their audiences. Following this quantitative analysis, a qualitative, critical analysis of discourse samples continues under subsection 6.2.

6.1 Frequency analysis of corpus

This study has used discourse data from five different content creators. They were selected partly based on the likelihood that they would represent different ideological attitudes towards gender. These divergent attitudes are first evident in the overall frequency of audience engagement on the trailers with renegotiated gender roles that these content creators have reviewed, as this gives an indication of how important the concept of gender identity is to their viewers. This variance can be seen in Table 1, below:

Table 1: Total audience engagement on trailers⁴

	Asmongold	Naguura	Nobbel87	Sloot	Taliesin & Evitel	TOTAL
Comments	19,964	814	3,517	767	6,835	31,897
Words	136,312	5,727	117,154	2,944	164,170	426,307
Twitch Emotes	6,386	190	n/a	181	732	7,489

The variance in engagement is noteworthy. Asmongold, who has the largest viewer engagement, received 26 times as many comments as Sloot, who had the lowest viewer engagement on his coverage. Remarkably, the total length of their coverage is about the same; both streamers have watched the trailers live, given a quick summary of their impressions, and then moved on with other content on their respective Twitch streams. Although

⁴ (Asmongold, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; Asmongold TV, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; Naguura, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Nobbel87, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Sloot, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Taliesin & Evitel, 2020e; 2020f; 2020g; TaliesinAndEvitel, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d)

Asmongold has also uploaded a recording of his Twitch stream to YouTube, the additional engagement he received there is nowhere near enough to make up the difference between them.

One part of the explanation is that Asmongold is by far the largest content creator in the study, with many times more live viewers than any of the other streamers. However, Sloot is the *second* largest streamer in the study, and his engagement is dwarfed even by the smallest content creator of the study: Taliesin & Evtel. A more satisfying explanation, then, is perhaps that Sloot, whose stream mainly focuses on gameplay mechanics, has created a community that does not really care about gender expression one way or the other, but is content to exist within whatever setting they are presented with. This explanation also seems to fit Naguura, whose channel mainly focuses on gameplay as well. Indeed, her total viewer engagement overlaps closely with Sloot's.

The two other notable results are Nobbel87 as well as Taliesin & Evtel. Despite having received far fewer comments than Asmongold, both channels match him in total word count. In the case of Nobbel87, this is likely a combination of the fact that his community discourse is exclusively taken from YouTube, paired with the fact that his channel focuses on the storytelling in WoW, which generates more lengthy discussions amongst his fans.

This explanation only applies in part to Taliesin & Evtel, however. While they do cover the game's story content, their channel also takes very strong anti-hegemonic stances on gender. Their viewers have engaged a lot with their support of renegotiated gender roles, which will be covered more in detail in subsection 6.2, and it would appear evident that their viewer engagement is so high because their viewers also care about this renegotiation process.

This would imply a noticeable pattern of counter-hegemonic discourse amongst Taliesin & Evtel's viewers, which is indeed confirmed by Table 2, using the four ideological categories that were first introduced in subsection 5.2. Additionally, the table lists frequencies of hegemony and counter-hegemony amongst the other content creators' viewer comments.

Table 2: Hegemonic variance in corpus comments⁵

	Asmongold	Naguura	Nobbel87	Sloot	Taliesin & Evtel	TOTAL
Hegemony-Enforcing	1,061 (5,3%)	18 (2,2%)	31 (0,9%)	7 (0,9%)	37 (0,5%)	1,154 (3,6%)
Hegemony-Enabling	1,307 (6,5%)	41 (5%)	48 (1,4%)	11 (1,4%)	190 (2,8%)	1,597 (5%)
Hegemony-Breaking	148 (0,7%)	7 (0,9%)	39 (1,1%)	4 (0,5%)	315 (4,6%)	513 (1,6%)
Hegemony-Challenging	123 (0,6%)	0 (0%)	7 (0,2%)	0 (0%)	300 (4,4%)	430 (1,3%)
Unrelated Comments	17,325 (86,9%)	748 (91,9%)	3,392 (96,4%)	754 (97,2%)	5,993 (87,7%)	28,212 (88,5%)

Notably, far from all comments concern themselves with hegemonic or counter-hegemonic gender discourse. This is because viewers discuss other aspects of the trailers as well, such as game mechanics, aesthetics, speculation about what the trailers will mean for the game's story, etc., but these comments have still been included when calculating the total ratios of each respective hegemonic or counter-hegemonic category in order to demonstrate how prevalent this gender discourse is in each respective streamer community.

From this, one can infer that, although pro-hegemonic comments outweigh counter-hegemonic ones amongst both Nobbel87's and Sloot's viewers, the overall ratio of gender discourse in their respective communities is negligible when compared to that of Asmongold, Naguura, or Taliesin & Evtel. The latter three, therefore, will constitute a more significant part of the qualitative analysis in this study, but it is nevertheless an interesting finding that some online video game communities do not seem to enforce a hegemonic stance on gender, as this has not been borne out in previous research.

In regards to the comments that do concern gender, one ought to note that the two highest ratios of gender discourse can be found amongst Asmongold's as well as Taliesin & Evtel's viewers; the former having the largest discrepancy between hegemony and counter-

⁵ (Asmongold, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; Asmongold TV, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; Naguura, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Nobbel87, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Sloot, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Taliesin & Evtel, 2020e; 2020f; 2020g; TaliesinAndEvtel, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d)

hegemony with over ten times as many pro-hegemonic comments. Naguura's ratio is lower, but comparable to Asmongold's in that her viewer comments favour hegemonic gender views, while Taliesin & Evtel is the only content creator in this study where counter-hegemonic comments outnumber hegemonic ones.

It is, finally, worth noting that some of the most extreme and hateful hegemony-enforcing comments made by viewers actually do not appear in this study, on account of YouTube deleting comments that go against their terms of service, as well as Taliesin & Evtel heavily moderating their Twitch channel by banning viewers who express overtly misogynistic values, which automatically removes their comments as well. As such, the numbers in Table 2 would have been higher for hegemony-enforcing comments if this had not been the case. Nevertheless, patriarchal discourse is demonstrably the dominant hegemony even without these comments, and the one outlier in Taliesin & Evtel would still represent a counter-hegemonic challenger. As such, this does not affect the results of the study in any significant way, but ought to be kept in mind for the sake of transparency.

6.2 Hegemony and counter-narratives in practice

With the quantitative presentation of data in the previous subsection, the presence of a patriarchal hegemony seems clear. However, there is also pushback, and the next question ought to be how this clash of discourses manifests in practice. This subsection explores the qualitative level of gender discourse amongst gamers, by dividing the findings of the study into five different topics.

6.2.1 Transphobia

Although it is not brought up in any of the four trailers, the new WoW expansion does include a transgendered character (Wowpedia, n.d.). This fact caused some confusion for Asmongold, who mistook the female character Devos from the first trailer for being transgendered, on account of her being depicted with masculine facial features.

Asmongold: [...] is it like a her or a dude? [...] I don't remember what the whole lore was behind the character. But like obviously they're using this character to uh- this is like supposed to be a- umm a trans character in some way I think, Blizzard trying to- trying to do that.

(Asmongold TV, 2020a)

Of note in Asmongold’s remark are the expressions “they’re *using* this character” and “[The game developer] Blizzard [is] *trying to* [...] do that”, which both seem to imply some sort of agenda on behalf of the game developers, as if the presence of a transgendered character in a fictional setting – unlike the presence of a male or female character – is thought of as so inherently unrealistic that it is no longer treated as a narrative or design choice, but rather as evidence of an underlying political agenda.

More noteworthy, however, are the comments from Asmongold’s audience. Who use a number of words and emoticons to construct an identity that is then projected onto the assumed proponents of the agenda implied by Asmongold:

Table 3: Asmongold viewers’ transgender referential strategies⁶

	<i>HotPokket</i> *	<i>MonkaW/S</i> *	<i>DansGame</i> *	<i>Subversive</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Meme</i>
Frequency	31	15	5	4	3	2
Per 10,000 words	32,3	15,6	5,2	4,1	3.1	2,1

(* = Twitch Emote)

Most commonly, the *HotPokket* emoticon⁷ was used. It depicts the face of a blue-haired woman with bared teeth, and was used to represent an otherised version of trans advocates. The intent of this becomes clearer in context to the emotes *MonkaW/MonkaS* and *DansGame*, commonly used to express a sense of tension and revulsion respectively (Dictionary.com, 2020; Slanglang, 2020), as well as descriptors like *subversive*, implying that the mere existence of a trans character represents a threat to gaming culture in the form of an infringing ideology. This otherisation process appears to overlap with the findings of Salter and Blodgett (2012), who discuss the treatment of women that attempt to resist sexism. The fact that the otherised identity of such women is infused with notions of revulsion could perhaps help explain why the women in Salter and Blodgett’s (2012) study faced such hostile reprisals; the discursive process demonstrated in this subsection appears to lay the foundation for such behaviour before an actual person in opposition to bigotry is even introduced.

Many comments were also directly bigoted towards transgendered people, such as the viewer ‘givemeyourshoes’ who compared transgenderism to a “mental illness” (Asmongold 2020a), and notably, even comments that did not express any strong opinions on the issue still

⁶ (Asmongold, 2020a; Asmongold TV, 2020a)

⁷ For visual representations of the emoticons discussed in this study, see Appendix A.

gave cover to the prevailing hegemonic sentiment, such as ‘Swaggamanca’ who attempted to correct Asmongold by stating that the transgendered character he mistook Devos for was another “minor meme on the side” (Asmongold, 2020a). The use of the word *meme* here is significant, as in an Internet context it implies an object of amusement, not to be taken seriously (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a) – again belittling the idea that transgendered people have a legitimate place in gaming.

6.2.2 Renegotiated gender roles

In the second WoW trailer, the female character Draka is depicted as a powerful warrior – a role typically reserved for men in a hypermasculine environment. The trailer describes Draka as “an unyielding warrior” and a “protector” (World of Warcraft, 2020b) – characterisations that all five content creators seem to accept, but which their viewers do not.

The viewer ‘optionalkick’ from Sloom’s stream objects by saying “nerf draka [she is] too op”, wherein *nerf* is gamer slang, referencing game developers’ method of adjusting unbalanced game mechanics by making them less powerful (Urban Dictionary, n.d.), and *op* is an abbreviation of *overpowered*. The implication, then, is that Draka’s strength and capability as a woman is rejected. ‘N.N.’⁸, one of Nobbel87’s viewers, puts this same form of scrutiny forward as an open challenge when they say “Draka is giving me some serious Mary Sue vibes” (Nobbel87, 2020b).

The term *Mary Sue* typically refers to a fictional female character that is exceptionally competent or powerful, with the implication that this is unrealistic and detracts from the excitement of the story (Tudury, 2020). This referential strategy is also repeated with other female characters throughout the corpora in this study (Asmongold, 2020b; Asmongold TV, 2020b; TaliesinAndEvel, 2020b), although not at a rate that warrants a further breakdown in a table. What is notable, however, is that the term is only used to dismiss female characters, and never male ones, even though the male-equivalent term *Gary Stu* exists (Tudury, 2020), and despite the fact that the male characters of the trailers are depicted as equally powerful, if not more so. It appears, then, as if women are categorically perceived as less capable than men, much like was noted in the literature review of this study when discussing the findings of Kasumovic and Kuznekoff (2015).

Due to the strong patriarchal hegemony in Asmongold’s community, his viewer responses are more aggressive. ‘Smeave’ describes Draka’s story as “more feminist bullshit

⁸ This username was anonymised as the commenter had used their real life name.

from blizzard” (Asmongold, 2020b), and follows his remark up with the same *HotPokket* emote that was used to create an otherised identity for trans advocates. A listing of the most common referential strategies amongst Asmongold’s viewers is illustrated in table 4.

Table 4: Asmongold viewers’ descriptors of renegotiated female gender roles⁹

	<i>HotPokket</i> *	<i>SJW</i>	<i>Token</i>	“ <i>Strong whamen</i> ”
Frequency	148	23	7	6
Per 10,000 Words	67,5	10,5	3,2	2,7

(* = Twitch Emote)

While one may note that the terms *strong whamen* [sic] and *token* are being used to delegitimise the inclusion of a capable female character, what truly stands out is that the *HotPokket* Twitch emote is once again used, similarly to how it targeted transgender advocates in subsection 6.2.1, by otherising and ridiculing advocates of gender expressions that break from patriarchal norms. The emote also takes on a further dimension in this part of the corpus, as it appears frequently together with the term *SJW*, which is an abbreviation of *Social Justice Warrior* – a term used to ridicule people who advocate for progressive or tolerant values (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b.). It would appear, then, that this constructed identity of ‘the other’ is not just a caricatured blue-haired woman, but the woman also represents an ideology that is specifically called out as social justice.

A clear example of how this narrative is used can be found with the YouTube viewer ‘Dr Boom’:

Draka is so boring and unimportant. I feel like they just chose to focus on her because they wanted another butch strong whamen character. [...] We already focus on [the male character] Uther [in the previous trailer] so the HotPokket blizz employees probably threw a fit at the thought of another testosterone filled badass having the focus. He’s not only a mAn after all, hes a huwite mAn, the thing they hate the most. While Draka is a strong whamen of color [...]

(Asmongold TV, 2020c)

In this quote, one can infer not only the identity of ‘the other’, but also the identity of the in-group. ‘Dr Boom’ clearly sympathises with what he describes as a white man, and appears to

⁹ (Asmongold, 2020b; Asmongold TV, 2020c)

feel threatened when other identities infringe on what he seems to perceive as ‘male territory’. Interesting to note is that ‘Dr Boom’ also brings race into the discussion – despite the fact that Draka is not a human, but an orc – as if seeking to enforce a broader hegemony that goes beyond gender. This is discussed further in subsection 6.2.5.

6.2.3 Renegotiated power dynamics

Although the character Draka’s gender role challenged hegemonic viewers, she was depicted throughout the trailer as obeying the orders of her male superiors, which still maintained the traditional patriarchal power dynamic between men and women. This power dynamic is however challenged in the third WoW trailer, which depicts the male character Ara’lon as being subordinate to a benevolent female ruler: The Winter Queen.

The renegotiated power dynamic is met with even greater scrutiny, both by hegemony-enforcing viewers as well as several of the content creators. Nobbel87, who doesn’t quite seem to accept the Winter Queen as a figure of authority, undermines this depiction by referring to her as “Little Flower” (Nobbel87, 2020c). Asmongold is much more aggressive, stating that Ara’lon “looks like a bitch” (Asmongold TV, 2020d), while Naguura focuses instead on mocking Ara’lon’s devotion by comparing him and the Winter Queen to the female Twitch streamer *Pokimane* and her audience (Naguura, 2020c). In the summer of 2020, Pokimane was targeted with cyberbullying, harassment, and accusations of attracting desperate, sexually frustrated young men to her audience (D’anastasio, 2020). The implication of Naguura’s remark, therefore, can only be to belittle the power dynamic depicted in the trailer by implying that a male character will only defer to a female character out of sexual attraction. As such, Naguura – herself a female streamer – also adds to the harassment and hostile sentiments towards another female streamer on the platform, which is especially noteworthy as she does this after having faced ridicule and harassment of her own in her two previous streams, for asking her viewers questions about the game’s storyline to better understand the trailers (Naguura, 2020a; 2020b).

As seen in Table 5, Naguura’s depiction is also the one that most prominently features amongst hegemonic viewers in all five content creators’ communities:

Table 5: Hegemonic descriptors of renegotiated power dynamics¹⁰

	<i>Simp</i>	<i>Kreygasm*</i>	<i>My Queen</i>	<i>Pussy</i>	<i>Furry</i>	<i>DansGame*</i>	<i>T3 Sub</i>	<i>Poki-mane</i>	<i>Bitch</i>
Frequency	1094	195	159	153	152	83	31	26	25
Per 10,000 Words	172,4	30,7	25,1	24,1	24	13,1	4,9	4,1	3,9

(* = Twitch Emote)

Predominantly, the different referential strategies target the male character, Ara'lon. *Simp* is a form of Internet slang, notably unrelated to the short-form for *simpleton*. Rather, in a gamer context, *simp* is more or less synonymous with *sycophant*, except the term also contains a gendered dimension in that it specifically refers to men who behave acquiescently towards women in the hopes of incurring attention of a sexual nature (Kelly, 2020). The term *T3 sub* is used to a lesser extent, but with similar implications, as it refers to the tiered subscription system on Twitch that viewers can buy into to support their favourite content creators. Tier 3 is the highest level of monetary support, and the implication is that this subscription level is only selected by desperate men who are willing to spend money in order to get attention from female streamers; so-called *simps*.

Furthermore, Ara'lon's appearance is disparaged, particularly with the term *furry*, which refers to his anthropomorphic blend of animal and humanoid features. This term is frequently paired with the *DansGame* emote in order to emphasise disgust. Asmongold's sentiment of describing Ara'lon as a *bitch* is also repeated, but not to the same extent, and unlike the terms *simp* and *furry*, not in every viewer community. Rather, the other major referential strategies turn their attention to the Winter Queen, in part by mockingly repeating the term *my queen* with sarcasm, but more so through sexualisation and objectification: the *Kreygasm* emote is specifically used when talking about her, with sexually suggestive implications. The Winter Queen is also referred to as *pussy*, implying that her worth is defined by her genitals. Just like Naguura, multiple viewers also compare the Winter Queen to Pokimane, with the same implications as discussed previously.

¹⁰ (Asmongold, 2020d; Asmongold TV, 2020d; Naguura, 2020c; Nobbel87 2020c; Slood, 2020c; TaliesinAndEvitel, 2020c)

The viewer comments range from highly aggressive, to excuses for said behaviour. As has repeatedly been the case in this study, the clearest examples come from Asmongold's viewer base, where 'Soldmysoup' references Ara'lon by typing in all caps that "SIMP DESERVES DEATH" and 'anon_acc123' provides cover for this type of behaviour by responding to those viewers who criticise the hegemonic terminology, stating: "whop [sic] cares if people say simp? jesus christ let em say whatever they want" (Asmongold, 2020d). This remark, while not actively engaging in hegemony-enforcing behaviour, still enables it by reframing harassment as a matter of freedom of speech, implying that anyone who objects to harassing behaviour is infringing on the rights of those who are responsible for the harassment. Interestingly, this same behaviour is repeated on Taliesin's stream when he enforces bans on strongly misogynistic comments, which suggests that this is a recurring reframing strategy (TaliesinAndEvel, 2020c).

As for Asmongold, he ultimately notices the behaviour of his chat during his live-stream, and despite having initially called Ara'lon a *bitch*, the trailer seems to have changed his mind as he discusses it afterwards and attempts to push back against the delegitimising referential strategy of calling Ara'lon a *simp*:

Asmongold: Everyone in chat saying "simp", it's not simp at all. There's nothing simp about it.
I- I don't think so at all. [...] d- shut up. Shut up!
(Asmongold, 2020d)

Arguably, telling one's community to "shut up" does not do much to mitigate the hypermasculine culture within it, but nevertheless this is a clear attempt at challenging the more extreme enforcement strategies of patriarchy, and as a consequence, Asmongold's chat turns against him. 'mihailo1306' responds by saying "ASMON SUPPORTING A SIMP" and 'andremre1' expresses a similar sentiment with the comment "Asmonfurry confirmed" (Asmongold, 2020d). What's interesting about these comments is that they use the same delegitimising referential strategies as were being used to target Ara'lon, but now apply them to the person who stands up for the character, expressing a sentiment similar to *guilt by association* – i.e. if you defend what the hegemony disparages as a simp and a furry, then you too must be a simp and a furry. This is arguably a fairly effective strategy for suppressing differing viewpoints, and Asmongold does indeed give up soon after he becomes the new target of his viewers, choosing instead to overlook the name-calling as he moves on to a new topic.

6.2.4 Problematic elements in counter-hegemonic discourse

This study has found attempts at counter-hegemonic narratives to regularly be problematic in their own way. Taliesin – who expressively takes a counter-hegemonic stance – exemplifies this when he defends the claim that cis-women in the United Kingdom overwhelmingly acknowledge trans-women as also being women, in an argument with a viewer during one of his live-streams:

Taliesin: “Citation needed” oh my fucking god. Just because you’re a fucking idiot cunt I’m gonna [...] find it for you. Because this is important: you are [...] lying, and repeating lies [...] and you’re wrong, and I’m not gonna let you do that, you fucking cunt. [...] There [is the citation]. You’re a cunt. Fuck off! [...] We’ll have no transphobia in this fucking channel. You fucking cunt. Get out.

(TaliesinAndEvitel, 2020c)

Although the swearing and forceful language may be justified, despite maintaining the same rhetorical tone as hegemonic discourse, the truly problematic word here is *cunt*. Taliesin quite clearly is not using the word with an actual intent to disparage women, but the word is still a female-gendered insult that ought to be perceived as misogynistic. Additionally, as previously demonstrated by Salter and Blodgett (2012), the behaviour of influential actors such as Taliesin affects the behaviour of their larger community, and so the use of the word – even in this context – still normalizes it to segments of his viewer base that may not differentiate the possible intentions behind the word. Taliesin’s behaviour could perhaps also be viewed as a corroborating example to Nardi’s (2010) finding that, while segments of the WoW community does acknowledge women, men are still allowed to set the discursive tone.

Similarly, many viewers who try to fight back against patriarchal language end up using bigoted terminology of their own, such as ‘ShamlotBestRhapsEver’ who, when being called a simp by the viewer ‘Evanor’ because of arguing against the use of that same term, retorts with “oh snap, the virgin-sperg manchild got me!” (Asmongold TV, 2020d). The use of the word *virgin* here seems to enforce the patriarchal idea that a man’s worth is defined through his sexual exploits, and additionally, the term *sperg* is an ableist slur, referencing Asperger syndrome (Wiktionary, n.d.).

It may be the case that gamer discourse is so infused with bigoted language that even counter-hegemonic advocates have internalised it, which would explain why much of the pushback against misogyny also appears to take on such an aggressive tone. Additionally

however, Taliesin's use of the word *cunt* could also be understood in context to his social background as a citizen of the United Kingdom, as the word is less taboo in a British culture context than an American one.

6.2.5 Hegemony's expanding goals when unchallenged

The fourth WoW trailer only features a male character who, based on the corpus comments, does not appear to challenge hegemonic sentiments in any way. Therefore, one would expect this part of the corpus to lack any gender discourse, which is indeed the case, but this study found – quite unexpectedly – that when the patriarchal hegemony was not being challenged, the hegemonic discourse started instead to enforce itself on other topics.

Many of the viewer comments for the fourth trailer turn instead to politics, comparing the events of the trailer with real-world ideologies. This is especially noticeable in Asmongold's and Taliesin's chats, which, since their respective channels represents the strongest hegemonic and counter-hegemonic audience respectively in relation to gender, may suggest that these views on gender are linked to hegemonic views on other societal topics such as race and wealth.

Unfortunately, due to the limited scope of this paper, this cannot be explored in detail here, but it is worth noting that the anti-patriarchal sentiment amongst Taliesin's viewers seems to correlate with an anti-capitalist sentiment (TaliesinAndEvel, 2020d), and the patriarchal sentiments amongst Asmongold's viewers in turn appears to correlate strongly with conservative and even 'Trumpist' ideals (Asmongold, 2020e; Asmongold TV, 2020e). For instance, 'Lord Tyranus' discusses the male character Garrosh, and his affiliation to the in-game faction called 'The Horde' by saying: "Sad that we punish Garrosh for making the horde great again. [...] It's the SJW narrative in wow." (Asmongold TV, 2020e). Here, the expression "making the horde great again", which clearly references Donald Trump's election slogan, "Make America Great Again", is used in the same breath as the term *SJW*, which this study has demonstrated to be a disparaging referential strategy towards advocates of gender representation and inclusivity.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to explore how gender identities are constructed within gaming culture, as well as how different forms of gender expressions are talked about by gamers. One of the biggest strengths of this study lies in confirming the presence of misogyny in gamer discourse by including support from quantitative data rather than relying on qualitative analysis alone, whereas previous studies have largely opted for the latter (Kasumovic & Kuznekoff, 2015; Nardi, 2010; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Thornborrow, 1997). Its central findings include specific examples of how the otherisation processes in misogynistic gamer discourse manifest in practice, especially by politicising the inclusion of women and transgendered people, and blaming such inclusions on the agenda of caricatured *Social Justice Warriors*. This study also describes a behaviour in which counter-hegemonic criticisms of problematic language are reframed as attacks on free speech. Additionally, this study finds that women, including content creators, can face strong pushback simply by existing in the same space as male-essentialist gamers. This could potentially relate to the findings of Kasumovic & Kuznekoff (2015) about women being categorised as a ‘second class’ gamer, especially as the ridicule found in this study manifests in context to knowledge of the game’s story.

Furthermore, this study – especially through the inclusion of the counter-hegemonic content creator Taliesin & Evtel – manages to corroborate Potts’ (2014) finding that content creators can influence their viewers by enforcing either a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discursive environment. This is also expanded on, by demonstrating how counter-hegemonic narratives can still remain influenced by their close proximity to a dominant hegemony, e.g. by reproducing an aggressive, hypermasculine discourse tone, and by criticising misogyny while still embracing certain aspects of it, or other forms of bigotry such as ableism.

Finally, this study has found signs of a broader hegemonic structure, which implies that misogyny in gamer culture is intertwined with certain other presuppositions, such as conservative values and pro-Trump sentiments. The use of the term *Social Justice Warrior* is also reminiscent of the ‘Anti-SJW’ community on YouTube, and this may be one of the more fruitful paths one could take in regards to future research. It appears as if misogyny in gaming is linked to ‘Anti-SJW’ communities on YouTube, but these ties would need to be mapped out. It may even be the case that links to far right communities can be demonstrated. This study recommends researching said topic further by studying discourse produced by online

content creators who cover both video games and politics. A number of content creators from the ‘anti-SJW’ community on YouTube would likely be suitable for this purpose.

Additionally, it may be worthwhile to expand further on the hypothesising of Sveningson (2012), that hegemonic discourse is further determined by game genre. This study has demonstrated a strong misogynistic presence in the MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) genre, and a future study may, for instance, wish to contrast these findings by comparing them to the language in FPS (First Person Shooter) or RTS (Real-Time Strategy) games, in order to conclude whether Sveningson’s assessment is accurate or not.

In conclusion, the sociolinguistic field of study related to gamer discourse remains rich with new, unexplored venues. This study has focused on sexism, but future studies may also focus on racism, or even the use of swearing, which can heavily influence the rhetorical tone in a discourse community. This study has also attempted a new method for gathering data, and shown that online content creators for video games do indeed provide a rich source of discourse material. This, too, is something that future studies ought to bear in mind in their data selection processes.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Twitch emoticons used by viewers

Emote: "DansGame"



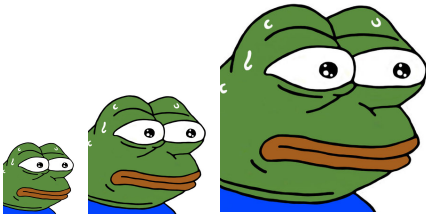
Emote: "HotPokket"



Emote: "Kreygasm"



Emote: "MonkaS"



Emote: "MonkaW"

