

**The representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling
video games from best-selling videogame genres**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree (Social
Science Specialization) at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.

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April 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research study would not have been made possible without the unwavering support from Mr. Colin O'Keeffe, Dr. Bernadette Quinn and Dr. Niall Hanlon. Words cannot describe how much they have helped and encouraged to get through this paper. Special thanks go out to my family, friends and doctor for helping throughout my recovery during my time in the hospital.

ABSTRACT

Using qualitative content analysis, this research examined the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling video game genres in a sample of 4 top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres in the United states. Research into the male representation in video games and hegemonic masculinity in video games are understudied topics in video games. Masculinity or masculinities is an essential topic to research in the social sciences, yet, masculinity does not gain as much attention as femininity. This research attempted to bridge the gaps in previous research regarding the representation of hegemonic masculinity traits in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling video game genres. This analysis reveals that main male characters reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity through their appearance, the role they play in the video game, their behaviour and interactions with other characters. Additional analysis revealed that each trait of hegemonic masculinity varied across different video games and video game genres in main male characters. Despite the fact that, the representation of hegemonic masculinity being portrayed in video games, it is still an understudied topic. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity in video games with respect to other aspects of the media is nothing new.

Keywords; Hegemonic masculinity, Main Male Character, Video game, Video game genre, Qualitative content analysis

INTRODUCTION

Research into the male representation is an understudied topic in video games. Masculinity or masculinities is an essential topic to research in the social sciences, yet, masculinity does not gain as much attention as femininity (Craig, 1992, p. 9; Trinh, 2013). It was only since Connell brought on the notion of hegemonic masculinity that research into masculinity started to gain more attention (Trinh, 2013; Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 124).

Connell (2005) explains that there are different types of expressions of masculinity and femininity. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the dominant expression over all other types of masculinities and femininities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is but one aspect of the topic of masculinity, that is studied by various scholars to describe different traits such as power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, being white, material success, independency and heterosexuality. Which all refers to some sort of ideal man that is idealized by men and women alike (Trinh, 2013; Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 125). One way this term is argued, is on whether or not hegemonic masculinity is reproduced in mainstream media. Previous research on the media industry's many facets such as the internet, television, movies, magazines, advertisements and video games have actively emphasized the physical aspects of hegemonic masculinity as being the ideal representation of masculinity (Trinh, 2013).

Video games are one area of the media industry that can be argued upon whether physical aspects of hegemonic masculinity are portrayed in video games. Video games have long been considered as a male-dominated media in terms of market audience, player base, and character representation in games (Zorrilla, 2010). The video game industry is one of the most popular

forms of entertainment media. In 2015 alone, the global video game industry has shot past Hollywood to be the fourth largest entertainment market in the world, behind gambling, reading and TV. In 2015 alone, the global video game market was estimated to be around \$91.5 billion and is estimated to grow to reach \$107 billion in 2017 (Writer, 2015).

The focus of this research distances itself from previous research on video games linked to violence and video games' representation of femininity. It focuses on the perpetuation of human beings' unrealistic body ideals, particularly among popular main male video game characters. This research adds to the growing research on the influence video games have on the male body's image. This research is an important area to study as the gender representation in video games is more focused on femininity. Another notable reason is that the influence video games have on the male body's image is overlooked compared to other popular forms of media. There is not enough research on masculinity in video games as well as femininity and the influence they both can have on the male body's image (Trinh, 2013; Sylvia, King, & Morse, 2014). More research into the male representation in video games is required, for boys or men who play videogames that may want to imitate these unrealistic male video game characters & the ideals of masculinity that they represent (Craig, 1992, p. 3). This is made evident in male characters in video games as they tend to reproduce hegemonic masculinity traits in video games (Dill & Thill, 2007; Fares, 2015). Therefore, this current study aims to look at the representation of hegemonic masculinity, focusing on the main male character in top selling video games from the best-selling videogame genres. The following literature reviews looks at the general topic of masculinity and focuses on hegemonic masculinity in video games in an attempt to answer the research questions of this current study.

Literature review

This section looks at previous research relevant to the topic of masculinity, specifically hegemonic masculinity in video games to answer the research questions of this current study. As it provides a broad overview of how masculinity is perceived in media. Then by discusses hegemonic masculinity in video games, in detail, from relevant studies that are most similar to this current study. As a review of this literature reveals, few studies provide a useful context on hegemonic masculinity in video games.

Mass media and Men

The media is a major contribution to people's everyday life, whether it is over the internet, television, in movies, radio, magazines, advertisements and video games. These different forms of media contribute to people's gender identity and gender roles to some extent (Ottoosson & Cheng, 2012). Looking at how these different forms of media influence masculinity, research across these areas point out that the standard of physical appearance for men presented in the media has become more focused on muscular figured men as the ideal representation of masculinity (Craig, 1992, p. 10 - 22; Powrie, Davies, & Babington, 2004, p. 177 - 180; Martins, Williams, Ratan, & Harrison, 2011).

Many studies have found that male figures in the media are depicted as being more muscular than the average individual (Soulliere & Blair, 2004; Harrison & Bond, 2007; Dallesasse, 2011). Dallesasse's (2011) qualitative content analysis on the male body in television, particularly, reality TV have revealed that primary male cast members were more likely to be depicted as being more muscular and exhibited lower levels of body fat than the average American male. This is mirrored in Soulliere & Blair's (2004), content analysis of 118

episodes of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), which found that images and commentaries of televised male professional wrestlers emphasise the male body as being physically more muscular and more desirable than the average male individual. It is worth noting that both researchers did not include reports of other ethnic males into their research, despite having given a general account of the mass media and masculinity. This current study focuses solely on the aspect of video games.

Gender representation in video games

Video games have long been considered as a male-dominated area of the media in terms of market audience, player base, and character representation (Baerg, 2007; Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain, 2008; Zorrilla, 2010). Research findings on gender representation in video games; generally, support previous findings on gender representation in video games, whereby, male characters are more represented than female characters (Mou & Peng, 2009; Zorrilla, 2010; Near, 2012; Kondrat, 2015). This is clearly demonstrated in Mou & Peng's (2009) research on video games. Their research indicates that, male characters are more represented than female characters. According to their findings, out of 26 human characters on the covers of 19 of the most popular video games in the United States, 85% of human characters were male and 15% were female. In other words, 22 of the human characters that appeared on the covers were males. While only four female characters appeared on the covers.

In addition, Near's (2012) recent research paper on video games, supports previous findings that male characters in video games are more represented than female characters. Furthermore, the paper suggested some sort of reason to explain why female characters in video games are underrepresented. Using content analysis, a sample of 399 box art cases of video

games, randomly selected games with ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) ratings of Teen or Mature released in the United States during 2005 to 2010. Near's (2012) findings suggest that there is a correlation between a decline in video game sales when female characters were not sexualized and not the main character of the game. He suggested that there was an increase in video games sale when female characters in video games were sexualized and not the main character of the game. According to Near's (2012) research, video game providers have an economic motive to expose their audience to various stereotypical depictions of female characters. Of course it should be noted that this study only looks at the games marketed in the United States. Prior research confirms that female characters are less represented in video games. Nonetheless, previous research mainly focuses on the female characters when analysing the gender representation (Mou & Peng, 2009; Zorrilla, 2010; Near, 2012; Kondrat, 2015). Contrary to previous research, this current study attempts to describe and evaluate the representations of male characters in video games.

Gender roles in video games

Research findings in general, looking at gender roles between male and females tend to suggest that male characters are portrayed more significant roles in video games while female characters are portrayed in a more sexual manner (Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain, 2008; Downs & Smith, 2009; Zorrilla, 2010).

Several research studies published in the same year, all seem to suggest that male characters are portrayed in more significant roles while female characters are portrayed in a more sexualised manner. Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, (2007) research findings also reflected the same results. Using content analysis to analyse 225 video games, their research determined that,

male characters were four times more likely to be portrayed in a more significant role. Female characters in video games were more likely to be portrayed in a sexual manner. Another research study by Miller & Summers' (2007) also found similar results. According to Miller & Summers' (2007) research findings, male characters in video games were more likely to be heroes and main characters. Male characters in video games were also able to use more weapons, have more abilities, and were more muscular and powerful than female characters in video games. Female characters were more often supplemental characters in video games. Female characters were portrayed in a sexualised manner and also wore more revealing clothing (Miller & Summers, 2007).

Prior to these research studies carried out in 2007, a research study by Mou & Peng (2009) which examined 19 games' official trailer also found similar results on the different gender roles in video games. According to Mou & Peng's (2009) research findings, most of the leading characters in each of the 19 game trailers were all male characters. There were no leading female characters in each of the 19 game trailers. Although, it is worth mentioning that a small-scale content analysis was used to determine these results.

On the other hand, a more recent study by Wohn (2011) suggests otherwise. From analysing 200 casual games, Wohn (2011) found that there was no significant difference in gender roles. Wohn's (2011) research findings points out that, both male and female characters in casual games are depicted in a sexual manner. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, this research only focuses on one area of gaming. Although, previous research may argue whether gender roles between male and female characters in video games are different. This current

study, however, only looks at male video game characters' gender roles, as a result of limited research focusing on the role of male characters in video games.

Race representation in video games

In a research article by Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain (2008), two interesting findings were made about the representation of non-white characters in video games. First, there are fewer representations of non-white characters in video games. Second, the application of racial stereotypes on non-white characters in videogames, limits their roles in the game. Several other research findings also agree with Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain's (2008) research findings. These findings are similar to Whon's (2011) research paper. Whon's (2011) research findings also found that, there are fewer representations of non-white characters in video games. From looking at 54 of the most downloaded popular games on websites of five multinational casual game distributors, 92% of all human characters in the games selected were white (Whon, 2011).

Along the same lines, Mou & Peng's (2009) research paper suggests that non-white characters in video games are often portrayed as racial stereotypes thus limiting their roles. Mou & Peng's (2009) research findings, was accumulated from looking at 19 of the most popular video games in the United States that had official game trailers. 70 human characters were identified in total of all 19 game trailers. 74% of the leading characters were white males, while only 4% were black males from a basketball game. No other character from a different race was portrayed as the leading character.

This is mirrored in Dietrich's (2013) research paper about the representation of non-white characters in video games. According to his research findings, the majority of both online and offline games, do not allow for creation of avatars with a non-white racial appearance. Dietrich (2013) also argues that this has created a sense of norm in games for avatars to have an all-white appearance. These previous studies all suggests that video games in general have a strong tendency to have fewer representations of non-white characters in video games and portray non-white characters as racial stereotypes thus limiting their roles. Nonetheless, it is important to note that is it hard to determine the exact race of the characters in game. Nevertheless, more research is needed to shed some light on the representation and stereotypical portrayal of non-white characters in video games. This current study attempts to shed some light on the representation and stereotypical portrayal of non-white characters in video games, by looking at different genres of video games to add to the limited research on race representation in video games.

Theoretical Framework; Hegemonic masculinity

This current study utilizes Connell's concept of Hegemonic masculinity, which is centred on Connell's theory of Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity refers to a pattern of dominant practices and behaviours that allow for male dominance over females. These practices and behaviours are comprised of patriarchal legitimacy, female subordination and also include any association that wards off any feminine and homosexual traits. (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2005, p. 77; Hanlon, 2012, p. 9). It is important to point out that despite Connell's (2005) contributions; she does not go into further detail, explaining what these practices and behaviours are beyond these explanations in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily express direct violence. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity is often reinforced through cultural ideals that extend into personal lives and social realms such as education, religion, sports, music and the media. These forces all ensure that hegemonic masculinity is policed, the male body is emphasized as being superior to the female body and any association with femininity and homosexuality are not seen as being masculine (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2005, p. 77; Giddens & Sutton, 2009, p. 611; Hanlon, 2012, p. 9). Connell (2005) points out that hegemonic masculinity is emphasized as the ideal form of masculinity. Nevertheless, it is not attainable by all men. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity exists through examples (cultural ideals for example are often channelled through the media) to exemplify ideal traits. These exemplified ideal traits include power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, being white, material success, independency and heterosexuality (Connell, 2005; Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 125). In particular, video game characters replicate these traits associated with hegemonic masculinity in order to emphasize hegemonic masculinity as the ideal form of masculinity. This current study utilizes Connell's (2005) concept of Hegemonic masculinity and Wade & Ferree 's (2015, p. 125) concept of Hegemonic masculinity in order to assess traits of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres.

Video games and hegemonic masculinity

Previous research has looked at video games and hegemonic masculinity. In particular, looking at whether aspects of hegemonic masculinity exist in video games and specifically, in video game characters. Many previous findings have found that hegemonic masculinity exist in video games and specifically, in video game characters (Baerg, 2007; Dill & Thill, 2007; Parsons, 2007; Fares, 2015).

Dill & Thill's (2007) research paper that examined images of video game characters from 150 top-selling American gaming magazines, confirms that hegemonic masculinity exists in video games especially through the video game characters. According to Dill & Thill's (2007) research, a specific form of hegemonic masculinity exists in video games. Out of 360 male characters that were examined, 82.6% of the male characters tended to be portrayed as being aggressive and 33% of the male characters were portrayed as hyper masculine in terms of role play in video games. These traits are associated with hegemonic masculinity with Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, a limitation to this study was that, Dill & Thill's (2007) research did not include the aspect of race and video game genres when looking at male characters in video games.

Nevertheless, another research study by Fares (2015) also found similar results, that hegemonic masculinity exists in video games, using a content analysis to examine the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity in top selling video games and their characters. Fares's (2015) research findings suggest that Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity exist in video games. Whereby, male characters in video games operate as ideal models of hegemonic masculinity (i.e. these traits that includes power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, being white, material success, independency and heterosexuality) and masculinity is favoured over femininity in video games as male characters continue to dominate the videogame industry (Fares, 2015). However, Fares's (2015) research only provides little information about the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres. Despite the fact that, previous research has looked at video

games and hegemonic masculinity, there is still not enough research that provides an analysis of the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres. This current study, however, looks at the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres.

Conclusion of literature review

In conclusion, prior research has contributed to the understudied topic of masculinity, specifically hegemonic masculinity in video games. Nonetheless, there is not enough research into the study of masculinity that particularly looks at the representation of hegemonic masculinity in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres, focusing on main male characters. Even with the exception of Fares' (2015) research paper, in particular, that provides a useful context into the analysis of the representation of hegemonic masculinity in video games. Fares' (2015) research paper provides little information about the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres. Previous research does not look at the representation of hegemonic masculinity, especially focusing on the main male character in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres. This current study attempts to bridge the gaps in previous research regarding the representation of hegemonic masculinity in video games. By exploring the following research questions;

General research question; How do main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity?

Sub-research question 1; Which traits of hegemonic masculinity were portrayed most frequently by main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres?

Sub-research question 2; Do different genres of video games depict more traits of hegemonic masculinity than others regarding the main male character?

METHOD

This study is a descriptive research, as it aims to describe and understand the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, focusing on the main male character in top selling video games from respective genres. This section explains the steps taken to choose the specific research design and data collection for this current study. Probable ethical issues and procedures regarding this research were also discussed in this section.

Design

A qualitative content analysis was used as the most suitable and naturalistic approach to investigate and to answer the research questions of this research study. Thus, by using the qualitative research design, this study was able to obtain a deeper insight into analysing the representation of hegemonic masculinity in video games from different genres (Neuman, 2013, p. 167). By utilizing, qualitative research design, this study was able to obtain a detailed, informative and interpreted understanding of the traits of hegemonic masculinity in video games (Flick, 2014, p. 12). Qualitative content analysis was used rather than quantitative content analysis in this research as it allowed for each traits of hegemonic masculinity to be coded and

interpreted. Please read the materials & measure section to get a full understanding of the coding matrix sheet used to analyse traits of hegemonic masculinity in video game and genres.

Participants

There were no participants that were directly involved with this study. The data was collected analysing walkthrough videos hosted on YouTube.

Sampling

A purposeful sampling method was used to draw from a sample frame of 20 video games and 11 video game genres listed in the ESA report of 2015: The top 20 selling video games and 11 best-selling video game genres by units sold (Entertainment Software Association [ESA], 2016).

There were many reasons for using this sample. A purposeful sampling of the top selling video games from their respective genres offers a general overview of the representation of hegemonic masculinity. Whereas, analysing every video game available to acquire a general overview of the representation of hegemonic masculinity is time consuming. Therefore, a purposeful sample of the top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres was the most appropriate way to get a general overview. In that, these top selling video games from their respective genres tend to represent the vast majority of other video games as they are the most sought after due to their large fan base and profitability. Another reason for selecting this sample, was that purposeful sampling was used as it met the specific criteria that tied in with analysing the representation of hegemonic masculinity in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genre. The game sample and video game genres used in this research revolved around profitability. This was similar to previous research (Dill & Thill, 2007; Fares,

2015). Dill and Thill (2007) and Fares (2015) game samples were also based on profitability. The game sample and video game genres used in this research came from the list of top 20 selling video games and best-selling video game genres according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) report of 2016. The ESA is a U.S. association that reports yearly grossing of the top twenty selling video games and their respective genres by units sold in each particular year in the United States from video game consoles, handheld devices, personal computers and the Internet (Entertainment Software Association [ESA], 2016).

Sampling procedure

The top selling video games listed in this research were purposely selected. The top 20 selling video games from the ESA reports of 2015 were categorized according to their respective genres from each games' handbook. A total of 4 top selling video games was selected from the top 20 selling videogame of the 2015 ESA report based on four of the best-selling video game genres from the 2015 ESA report into this research. These four video game were the top selling game of their respective genre and were selected to represent each four best-selling video game genres. Focusing on each top selling game of each genre, each game offers a general representation of its respective genre as they grossed the most sales and therefore best suited to represent their genres. In cases where a video game from the list of ESA report of top 20 selling video games occupied more than one genre in the four the best-selling video game genres, only the top selling videogame of that particular video game genre was chosen first to represent that specific best-selling video game genre. Duplicate cases of the same top selling video game representing more than one of the four best-selling video game genres was excluded from the sample as it does not offer a general representation of the four best-selling video game genres.

These four best-selling video game genres were the following;

Action - This is a broad term as it has different styles of gameplay; however, these games have an emphasis on physical challenges in the game. Action games often have the player controlling one single character, and navigating through the game's environment while overcoming different obstacles in the game, while battling enemies (e.g. Fallout 4). Video games labelled action games can also overlap with adventure games (Wolf, 2000; Room, 2011)

Adventure – These games are set in a world that usually comprises of multiple, connected rooms or screens. Adventure games usually allow some degree of freedom for the player (e.g. Grand theft auto V). In these games, the player is required to complete several steps in the game. That involves collecting or unlocking certain elements (these include weapons, keys, special items, or modes of transportation) in order to progress through the game.

Shooter – these games revolve around the player shooting at and often destroying a series of opponents or objects in order to progress through the game (Wolf, 2000). These games usually take place in urban settings that allow for two or more players to team up and play together (e.g. Call of duty: Black ops III).

Role-Playing – In these games, the player is able to take on the role of one or more imaginary characters in the game (The Game Room, 2011). The character's description is represented by different statistics such as strength, skills and various abilities. These are usually

represented numerically and are limited in some degree as the player is required to build up the character's stats (e.g. The witcher 3: Wild hunt). These games may even offer the player the ability to completely change various aspect of the character (Wolf, 2000). This may include changing the characters' species, race, gender, or even occupation. These games, offer the player an opportunity to immerse themselves into a character's situation (Grace, 2005).

These four best-selling video game genres were also purposely selected. 4 out of 11 of the best-selling video game genres of the 2015 ESA report were selected. These four video game genres (Action, Adventure, Role-playing, Shooter) were the best-selling video game genres excluding the sport games genre as it did not have a main male character. These four genres were more story focused, included the most character development and complex story themes. In addition, these four video game genres were selected as profitability reflects what games and video game genres are most sought after by gamers. These games would be more recognized by most gamers. Whereas, sampling games from a video game genre that most gamers do not recognize, does not represent what is heavily consumed by most gamers. In cases where a video game genre did not have a main male character, the game was excluded as they did not meet the criteria of analysis. It should be noted that, these four top selling videos games represent the four best-selling video game genres based on units sold not released date. This study only included games with ESRB rating of Mature as it does not limit the depiction of traits of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in video games. ESRB ratings are provided by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). The ESRB is a non-profit, self-regulatory organization that assigns a rating system to determine what video games and apps are age-appropriate for consumers to make an informed choice about which video game and apps to

choose from (The Entertainment Software Rating Board [ESRB], (n.d.). Another reason is that the most frequent gamers, on average, are between the ages of 35 and 44, for both men and women according to ESA report in U.S (Entertainment Software Association [ESA], 2016).

The gaming console used in playing the four games sampled in this research that represented the four best-selling video game genres purposely selected. The gaming consoles excluded from this study were the following consoles: Nintendo Wii, Nintendo DS, PlayStation Vita and other handheld consoles. This was determined based on issues with comparability of technology, not all the games on the list were available on every console. Therefore, the video games sampled in this study are those that are played on the top selling consoles: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC. These gaming consoles offer a higher level of resolution and quality than the other game consoles, thereby allowing for better data analysis.

The main male character from each video game in this research that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres were purposely selected. The main male character in each video game that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres were identified based on their significance to the storyline of their game. This was determined on the following; whether the character is playable or serves a major role in the game, the characters' biography and characters' pictures. In the situation where there is more than one main character in the game (for example Grand theft auto V), the main character was selected based on the amount of screen time appeared in the game. A total of 4 main male character were identified from each top selling video game and their respective genres were selected. (see Appendix A for list of each main male character selected).

Materials & Measures

The materials used for this research included the computer software programme Microsoft excel version 2016, a laptop and a coding matrix sheet. Each video game was watched on a laptop and coded using a coding matrix sheet (See Appendix B for outline of coding matrix sheet). Afterwards, Microsoft excel was used to analyse, input and compare data collected from the coding matrix sheet. In order to conduct this research a structured coding matrix method was created to described, code and measure traits of hegemonic masculinity in the four top selling video games that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres in a way that could be coded and interpreted using qualitative content analysis from previous research.

Coding criteria; Coding matrix sheet

The research method of analysing video games using content analysis is similar to the coding matrix of Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan's (2009) paper. In that, the video game character's traits were described, coded and interpreted. In this current study, the main male characters' appearance, role play in video game, behaviours and interactions with other characters in video games were assessed on which traits of hegemonic masculinity they portrayed. These traits were based on previous literature (Connell, 2005; Connell, 2005, p. 77; Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 125), as well as the researchers' visual observation. However, due to the nature of this research being focused on the video game world some traits of hegemonic masculinity that were collected from Connell (2005) and Wade & Ferree (2015, p. 125) such as the rejection of feminism or homosexuality could not be coded in a manner that accurately portrayed these traits.

Nonetheless, most psychical traits of hegemonic masculinity such as power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, Race/ethnicity, material success, independency and heterosexuality were able to be coded and interpreted using qualitative content analysis. Therefore, these were the most obvious physical traits that were coded and used to measure hegemonic masculinity traits. The main male character of each top four selling video game that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres were assessed separately on seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity (power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, Race/ethnicity, material success, independency and heterosexuality). The presence or absence of a trait was coded as 10 or 0. In cases whereby a trait was not able to be determined whether a trait was present or absent a value of 5 was used to code this outcome. Therefore, to ensure that the results of this study was not skewed (See Appendix B outline of coding matrix sheet). The main male characters' appearance, behaviour and interactions with other characters in each top four selling video game that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres was categorized in a manner that measured the following seven traits of hegemonic masculinity;

Power, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Lack of Superhuman ability = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Superhuman ability = 10. The use of power in video games can refer to the character's ability to have control over his environments, emotions, over other people and accomplish tasks (Fares, 2015). This trait was used to measure whether video games emphasise that an ideal man is in control over his surroundings, emotions and others

Aggressiveness, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from

their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Lack of Ability to kill = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Ability to kill = 10. It should be noted that, the characters' ability kill included any living organism such as insects (e.g. Fallout 4). The ability to kill in video games can be interpreted as the characters' willingness to be less empathetic or violent and to make an all-out effort to accomplish his goal (Dill & Thill, 2007). This trait was used to measure whether video games emphasise that an ideal man is capable of being less empathetic or violent and willing to do whatever it takes.

Muscular physique, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Lack of Muscular physique = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Muscular physique = 10. This trait was used to measure which video game portrays muscular physique as an exemplary trait of being an ideal man.

Race/ethnicity, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Non-White = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) White = 10. This categorization was based on a rough assessment of the characters' hair, skin colour and other facial features considering these games have fictional characters. This trait was used to measure whether video games underrepresented non-white characters in order to emphasizes white video game character as the ideal type of man.

Material success, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Lack of ability to acquire currency = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Ability to acquire currency = 10. Of course it should be noted that, the

definition of material success varies throughout different games. These three indicators were used to convey a general interpretation of material success in each video game. This trait was used to measure whether video games creates the notion that the opportunity to acquire currency in order to further the character's status can be interpreted as a quality of an ideal man (Fares, 2015). Acquiring currency included any form of currency, that allows the character to buy or sell any object.

Independency, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Absence of Free-Roam = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Free-Roam = 10. Free-roam is the game's ability to allow characters to move freely in the without having to follow the game's storyline (e.g. Grand theft auto 5). This trait was used to measure whether video games portrays being independence as an admirable trait of being an ideal man.

Heterosexuality, the presence of this trait was assessed in each main male character from their respective game into three possible indicators: (1) Lack of Female love interest = 0, (2) Unclear = 5 or (3) Female love interest = 10. This trait was based on a rough assessment of the characters' relation with other female or male characters (such as characters' girlfriend, wife, boyfriend, or husband) in the game. This trait was used to measure whether video games underrepresented non-heterosexual characters.

The maximum and minimum number that can be given to represent one of the seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity in each top four selling video game from their

respective genres, ranges between 10 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) (See Appendix E for outline of maximum and minimum amount of each seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity). In regards to the maximum and minimum amount of number given to represent all seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity in all top four selling video game that represented all four best-selling video game genres. The maximum and minimum amount of number given to represent all seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity ranges between 70 (maximum) and 0 (minimum) (See Appendix E for outline of maximum and minimum amount of all seven different traits of hegemonic masculinity)

Measure

The cinematic introduction and the first mission or task in the game in each of the four top selling video games that represented each of the four best-selling video game genres was analysed for a total of one hour in a quiet environment. The first 10 minutes of each game was coded from the start of the game, this included the game's cinematic introduction. Which is shown before each game play, and lasted roughly between 5-10 mins. This provides general information about the main character of game, possible conflict in game, the inner workings of the game and the games world. At the end of each cinematic introduction, the gamer takes control of a character and begins to play. In addition, the first mission or task in each game was also coded. This lasted roughly around 20-50 mins.

The cinematic introduction and the first mission or task in each video game was coded in order to see at first glance what the character was portrayed as to get an accurate and general basis of understanding of the representation of hegemonic masculinity, focusing on the main male character in top selling video games from their respective genres. Another reason is that,

changes to the main male character's appearance or ability may not create a consistent result of a general basis of understanding the representation of hegemonic masculinity. In cases where there were changes to the main male character's appearance or ability during the time spent analysing the video games (i.e. Fallout 4). This study only analysed the main male characters before any changes to the main male character's appearance or ability.

One argument that can be made is the gamers choices could affect the outcome of each game. Even though some choices were made possible, the gamers involvements with the game was not enough to greatly change each game's storyline and depiction of their main character. These few gamer's choices eventually led to the same conclusions determined by each game's storyline. However, taking into consideration the few games that allow for gamer to determine the ending of the game, these type of games were also included in study. In the scenario where the main male character was not in use at certain points of the game within the total one hour of analysing a game (i.e. Grand theft auto 5). That includes the cinematic introduction and the first mission or task in the game. The main character was coded, when they become available to be used to complete their first mission or task. Another argument that can be made in this study is the gamers control over the main male character could change the appearance or ability of the main character. However, any changes made to the character's appearance or ability by the gamer was not coded for in order to get a consistent result of the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in video games.

Procedure

The data was collected from internet consumer videos of game sessions from the website YouTube, known as walkthroughs in the gaming community. These are videos that are created often by other gamers with the intent to teach other gamers how to win or improve their gaming performance (Maich, 2015). The content of these walkthroughs is virtually the same as any other individual playing the game themselves, as the actual purpose of a walkthrough video is used as a learning tool. In regards to this study, the narrative of each game was only analysed and not the gamer's choices in the game or differences in game play by certain types of gamers. The narrative of the game was analysed as it was the same for each gamer, regardless of how well the gamer is cable of playing. The use of these walkthrough videos, meant that there was no need for participants. This allowed the researcher to only focus on coding the game instead of trying to manage coding the game as well as coding the participants' gameplay. Each walkthrough video of each game was watched on a laptop and coded using a coding matrix. Upon completion, the data was then entered into Microsoft excel 2016 and interpreted using qualitative content analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study is an unobtrusive research as it does not collect data directly from people. There were little ethical issues as this method of research was not involved with any direct manipulation of people. Nevertheless, names of the YouTubers that posted a walkthrough video of games used in this research were not mentioned.

Unit of analysis

Content analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings within the data (Berg, 2011, p. 338). Content analysis is a systematic and replicable technique. That is used for condensing the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media (such as video, televisions, photographs, movies, song lyrics, advertisements) into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Thomas, Brubaker, & Thomas, 2007, p. 158; Grbich, 2012, p. 112; Neuman, 2013, p. 49). There were many benefits to using content analysis in this research. Content analysis was cost effective, the material necessary for analysing video games were easily assessable. Content analysis is unobtrusive, as it does not deal with people directly when collecting data (Neuman, 2013, p. 49). Content analysis allows for a repeatable and precise results in analysing various content of video games (Berg, 2011, p. 364). It further allows the researcher to see themes, biases, or characteristics in the contents of video games that are difficult to see with casual observation (Neuman, 2013, p. 373).

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to look at the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters from top selling video games and their respective genres. A total of top 4 selling videogame were analysed in this study based on the following; 4 best-selling video game genre, profitability, ESRB rating (Mature), and types of console (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC). From these 4 games, there was a total of 4 main male characters (N=4) recorded in the data set.

Additional analysis on of the overall representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters from the best-selling video game genres was also included in this research. Which was used to determine the top 4 selling video games. The top 4 best-selling video game genres that was used to determine the top 4 selling videogames in this research was analysed. These top 4 best-selling genres were based on the following; Story focused genres, whether games in these genres have characters that are playable or serves a major role in the game, the characters' biography and the characters' pictures. From these 4 video game genres, there was total of 4 main male characters (N=4) recorded in the data set.

For the purpose of answering the research questions, a qualitative content analysis (in reference to coding matrix) was used to interpret the data and a descriptive statistic was used to outline the data. The findings of this research was divided into three parts. The first part of these results, gives an interpretation of hegemonic masculinity traits in main male character according to the coding matrix of this study. The second part of these results illustrates the representation of masculinity in the top 4 selling video games. The third part of these results shows the overall representation of masculinity in each top 4 best-selling video game genres.

Interpretation of hegemonic masculinity traits - Qualitative content analysis (In reference to Coding Matrix)

Main male characters' appearance, behaviours and interactions with other characters in video games were assessed on which traits of hegemonic masculinity they portrayed;

Power - The main male character's ability to use power in this sample was coded and interpreted as the character's ability to have control over his environments, emotions, over other people and to accomplish tasks. Only one main male character reflected this trait of hegemonic masculinity, as shown in table 1 and was able to use a superhuman ability. The use of power amongst main male characters in this research was only emphasised by one main male character. In this sample, one main male character (Geralt of Rivia) was portrayed as an ideal man that is capable of being in control over his surroundings, emotions and others.

Aggressiveness - The main male character's ability to kill was coded and interpreted as the characters' willingness to be less empathetic or violent and to make an all-out effort to accomplish his goals. All main male characters from each video game in this sample reflected this trait of hegemonic masculinity as seen in table 1. In this sample, all main male characters in each video game were portrayed as an ideal man capable of being less empathetic or violent and willing to do whatever it takes.

Muscular physique - The main male characters' appearances were coded and interpreted. This trait of hegemonic masculinity was common with main male characters, according to this

sample. In this study, most main male characters displayed muscular physique. This was portrayed an exemplary trait of being an ideal man amongst the main male characters

Race/ethnicity - The main male characters' race/ethnicity were coded and interpreted. This trait of hegemonic masculinity was consistent amongst all main male character in this sample as shown in table 1. In this study, all main male characters in each game portrayed being white as an ideal type of man

Material success - The main male character's' ability to acquire currency was coded and interpreted as material success. This trait of hegemonic masculinity was common in most main male characters in this study (see table 1). The need to acquire currency was emphasised by most main male characters as an emphasised trait of being an ideal man.

Independency - The main male character's' ability to move freely in the storyline was coded and interpreted as independent. This was another common trait of hegemonic masculinity being portrayed by main male character as an admirable trait of being an ideal man. As shown in table 1 in this research.

Heterosexuality - The main male character's sexual orientation was also coded and interpreted. Most main male characters in this research were portrayed as being heterosexual. This trait of hegemonic masculinity was emphasised amongst most main male characters as an exemplary trait of being an ideal man.

Descriptive statistic

The second part of these results can be seen in the following table that shows a breakdown of the traits of hegemonic masculinity in top selling video games.

Table 1: Breakdown of traits of hegemonic masculinity in top selling video games

Traits of hegemonic masculinity	Fallout 4 (Nate)	Grand theft auto V (Michael De Santa)	The witcher 3: Wild hunt (Geralt of Rivia)	Call of duty: Black ops III (The Player)	Total	%
Power	0	0	10	0	10	25%
Aggressiveness	10	10	10	10	40	100%
Muscular physique	10	0	10	10	30	75%
Race/Ethnicity	10	10	10	10	40	100%
Material Success	10	10	10	0	30	75%
Heterosexual	10	10	10	5	35	88%
Indecency	10	10	10	0	30	75%

As it can be seen in table 1, Power was the least represented trait of hegemonic masculinity in the video games sample, with 25% of main male characters portraying this trait of hegemonic masculinity. Aggressiveness was one of the most consistent traits of hegemonic masculinity represented in the sample, with all main male characters in the sample depicting traits of aggressiveness. Three games of out four from the sample saw the main male characters portray Muscular physique. Which was one of the most common traits of hegemonic masculinity represented in the sample, with 75% of main male characters in the sample portrayed as muscular. Race/ethnicity was another consistent trait of hegemonic masculinity represented in the sample, with all main male characters depicted as white males across all four video games. Three games of out four from this sample, portrayed the main male characters as being materially successful with 75% representing this trait of hegemonic masculinity. Three out of the four games in the sample, depicted the main male character as being heterosexual. However, it was not clear whether main male characters were portrayed as heterosexual in the fourth game with 88% of main male characters portraying this trait of hegemonic masculinity. Three games of out four from the sample saw the main male characters portrayed as independent. This was another common trait of hegemonic masculinity represented in the sample, with 75% of main male characters depicting this trait of hegemonic masculinity across all four video games.

Table 2: Breakdown of traits of hegemonic masculinity in each best-selling video games genres

Traits of hegemonic masculinity	Action	Adventure	Role-Playing	Shooter
Power	0	0	10	0
Aggressiveness	10	10	10	10
Muscular physique	10	0	10	10
Race/Ethnicity	10	10	10	10
Material Success	10	10	10	0
Heterosexual	10	10	10	5
Total	60	50	70	35
%	86%	71%	100%	50%

The second part of this results can be seen in the following table above that shows an overall breakdown of the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters from the best-selling video game genres. All video game genres depicted a high level of traits of hegemonic masculinity in their main male characters with the expectation of Shooter video game genres. Role-Play video game genres, scored the highest with 100% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity were found present in main male character in this simple. Action video

game genres, scored high with 86% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity were found present in main male character in this simple. Adventure video game genres, also scored with 71% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity were found present in main male character in this simple. Shooter video game genres, scored the lowest with 50% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity were found present in main male character in this simple.

DISCUSSION

This section analyses the results of this study. It also addresses the limitation of this research and suggests ways in which future research could benefit from these research findings. This current study attempted to bridge the gaps in previous research regarding the representation of hegemonic masculinity in video games. The representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling videogame genres were examined using qualitative content analysis. There were three main aims in which this study looks to explore this, 1) the General research question, 2) the first Sub-research question and 3) the second Sub-research question. Which consisted of the following;

General research question

The main aim of this research question was to see how main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity. The results of this research indicated that main male characters in top selling video games from their respective genres reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity through their appearance, the role they play in the video game, their behaviour and interactions with other characters. Psychological traits of hegemonic masculinity such as power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, Race/ethnicity, material success, independency and heterosexuality were evident in the

main male characters. These findings translate to Dill & Thill's (2007) findings, which argues how specific forms of hegemonic masculinity are portrayed in video games. In that, male characters portray specific forms of hegemonic masculinity such as aggressiveness, in terms of their role play in the video games. This also relates to Fares's (2015) findings. She argues that male characters reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity through their appearance, role play in the game and behaviours, these were indicators that reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity in video games.

Connell (2005) also points out that hegemonic masculinity is expressed through the male body as a way of emphasizing it as being superior to the female body and any association with femininity and homosexuality. This could also be due to the status of being the main male character, as he may be expected to portray an ideal man for other individuals to mirror. Even in general male characters are expected to be significant characters in the game. Research findings in general, all conclude that male characters are expected to be portrayed in more significant roles in video games (Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain, 2008; Downs & Smith, 2009; Zorrilla, 2010). According to Miller & Summers' (2007) research findings, male characters in video games are seen as significant characters, as they're more likely to be heroes and main characters. Main male characters in video games were also able to use more weapons, have more abilities, and were more muscular and more powerful than female characters. Even in a broader sense, across different forms of media such as over the internet, television, in movies, radio, magazines, and advertisements, there are certain expectations for men to be physically fit (Craig, 1992, p. 10 - 22; Powrie, Davies, & Babington, 2004, p. 177 - 180; Martins, Williams, Ratan, & Harrison, 2011).

Sub-research question 1

The second aim of this research question was to see which traits of hegemonic masculinity were portrayed most frequently by main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres. As shown in the results of this research, hegemonic masculinity traits such as aggressiveness and being white were the most frequent traits of hegemonic masculinity, found in all main male character in this research sample. Aggressiveness was a frequent trait of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters, which was also found in Dill & Thill's (2007) research findings. They argue that male characters in general tend to be portrayed as being aggressive. However, their results do not include any detail into whether male characters tend to be portrayed as being white. Although, this research does not relate masculinity to violence, it's evident that aggressiveness is a strong trait associated with being an ideal man. Connell (2005) and Fares' (2015) research findings also replicate this. According to both findings of Connell (2005) and Fares (2015), aggressiveness is a strong trait associated with hegemonic masculinity. The willingness to be seen as being tough to be an ideal man. Which may also feed into the reasons for aggressiveness' strong association with being seen as an ideal man. It's important to note that violence and aggressiveness are two different traits.

Along the same lines, Mou & Peng's (2009) research paper correlates with these results, regarding the underrepresentation of non-white characters. They argued that white video game characters in video are overwhelmingly represented compared to non-white characters in video games especially in terms of being seen as the main character in the video game. The result of this study also translate with Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain (2008) findings, which also found that there are fewer representations of non-white characters in video games. In a

general sense it is clear that there is an underrepresentation of non-white character in video games (Whon, 2011; Dietri, 2013). The result from this research has clearly reiterated that non-white characters in video games are underrepresented and that there needs to more diversity in video game characters especially regarding main male characters, as shown in the results of this research. Although, this study also determines the need for more representation of non-white character in video games. There is also more research needed to understand the logic behind this reason. One major factor maybe the need to ensure the ideal form of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, only portrays the ideal man as being white. Fares's (2015) research and Connell's (2005) research both stress that the ideal form of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, is policed, in that any other forms of masculinity is discouraged. In other words, any other of forms of masculinity that goes against the ideal models of hegemonic masculinity (i.e. these traits that includes power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, being white, material success, independency and heterosexuality) is seen as inferior.

Sub-research question 2

The third aim of this research question was to see whether different genres of video games depict more traits of hegemonic masculinity than others, regarding the main male character. According to the result of this research, there were video game genres that depicted more traits of hegemonic masculinity than others in regards to the main male character. Role-play videogame genre depict the most traits of hegemonic masculinity regarding the main male character. All seven traits of hegemonic masculinity were found present in the main male character. The Action video game genre was one most common to display traits of hegemonic masculinity regarding the main male character with 86% of all seven traits of hegemonic

masculinity found present in main male character in this sample. The Adventure video game genre, was third to depict the most traits of hegemonic masculinity regarding the main male character with 71% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity present in the main male character. The Shooter video game genre, depicted the lowest traits of hegemonic masculinity regarding the main male character with 50% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity evident in the main male character from the sample.

A similar study by Fares (2015) looks at four genres and analyses videogames based on genres that include the most character development. However, Fares' (2015) research does not analyse the different representation of hegemonic masculinity between those four video game genres. In contrast, this research goes further by analysing the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters from four video game genres. Despite, this research analysing the differences in the representation of hegemonic masculinity regarding main male characters between different video game genres. More research is need to analyse the reasons why main male characters portray different levels of traits within hegemonic masculinity than other video game genres. For example, to explain why the Shooter video game genre depicted a lower number of traits within hegemonic masculinity than the Adventure video game genre with 71% of all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity present in the main male character. One possible reason for this could be that different video game genres focus on different traits of hegemonic masculinity regarding main characters than other video game genres would. As shown in the result section, the Shooter video game genre emphasised the main male character as physically more fit than the Adventure video game genre. The Shooter video game genre may require the main male character to be physical fit in order to face off series of opponents to

progress through the game. Whereas, the Adventure video game genre may not require not the main male character to be physically fit but more reliant on their intelligence and quick thinking to get through difficult situations in order to progress through the game.

Limitations

There were many limitations found in this research that could be addressed. One major limitation found when carrying out this research was the limited sources to work with regarding the representation of hegemonic in main male characters from different video game genres. Secondly, the coding matrix used to analyse and interpret traits of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters was vague in analysing each trait of hegemonic masculinity. Thirdly, not many research provides a coding matrix which was specific in analysing the traits of hegemonic masculinity in each main male character from their respective video game and genre. Another limitation to this research was that only main male character were analysed. Other issues were that this research, only looks at specific years, the results of this research could vary each. This research only looks at the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling video game genres in the United States. This research only looks at a representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters from top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres from the year 2015. Finally, the use of qualitative content to analyse each main male character meant that research findings were subjected to the researcher's interpretation.

Recommendations

In regards to future research, this research would be very useful in analysing why main male characters are represented as hegemonic masculinity in video games. From this research, future research could look further into analysing the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres in each year. Future research could compare and contrast each year to see whether the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from best-selling video game genres is consistent during each year. Future research could look at the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games outside of the United States other than just focusing on the United States. Future research could look at other research databases other than the college library for more sources on hegemonic masculinity in video games.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the representation of hegemonic masculinity being portrayed in video games with respect to other aspects of the media is nothing new. Thus the representation of hegemonic masculinity is hardly a surprise. Traits of hegemonic masculinity from main male characters in video games from different video game genres was found evident in this research. Connell's hegemonic masculinity was reproduced in top selling video games from best-selling video game genres regarding main male characters. This can be seen throughout the main male character's appearance, the role they play in the video game, their behaviour and interactions with other characters. However, more research is needed to analyse the representation of hegemonic masculinity in video game genres, in order to understand the different traits of hegemonic masculinity displayed by main male characters.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Sample of Entertainment Software Association (ESA) report of 2015

Sample of Entertainment Software Association (ESA) report of 2015			
Top selling video game Genres	Top selling video games	ESRB Rating	Main male video game character
Action	Fallout 4	Mature	Nate
Adventure	Grand theft auto V	Mature	Michael De Santa
Role-Playing	The witcher 3:	Mature	Geralt of Rivia

	Wild hunt		
Shooter	Call of duty: Black ops III	Mature	The Player

Appendix B: Coding matrix sheet

Coding matrix sheet			
Traits of hegemonic Masculinity	Indicators	Present	Values
Power	1) Lack of Superhuman ability	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) Superhuman ability	Yes	10
Aggressiveness	1) Lack of Ability to kill	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) Ability to kill	Yes	10
Muscular physique	1) Lack of Muscular physique	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5

	3) Muscular physique	Yes	10
Race/ethnicity	1) Non-White	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) White	Yes	10
Material success	1) Lack of ability to acquire currency	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) Ability to acquire currency	Yes	10
Independency	1) Absent Free-Roam	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) Free-Roam	Yes	10
Heterosexual	1) Lack of Female love interest	No	0
	2) Unclear	Unclear	5
	3) Female love interest	Yes	10