

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

ABSTRACT

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 their respective genres. Using qualitative content analysis, this research examined the representation of hegemonic masculinity in main male characters in top selling video games from their respective genres in a sample of 4 top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres in the United states. This analysis reveals that main male characters reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity via their appearance, the role they play, their behaviour and interactions with other 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.

INTRODUCTION

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the dominant expression over all types of masculinities and femininities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is but one aspect of the topic of masculinity, studied by various scholars to describe traits such as power, aggressiveness, muscular physique, being white, material success, independency and heterosexuality. Which all refers to some sort of ideal man, idealized by men and women alike (Trinh, 2013; Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 125). One way this term is argued, is on whether hegemonic masculinity is reproduced in mainstream media. 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. Therefore, this current study aims to look at the representation of hegemonic masculinity, by exploring the following research questions;

GQ: How do main male characters in top selling video games from the best-selling video game genres reflect traits of hegemonic masculinity?

RQ 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?

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

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METHOD

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.

Sampling

A purposeful sampling method was used to draw from a sample of 20 top selling video games and 11 best-selling video game genres listed in the ESA report of 2015. A total of 4 top selling video games were selected from the top 20 selling videogames of the 2015 ESA report based on four of the best-selling video game genres from the 2015 ESA report. These four video game genres (Action, Adventure, Role-playing, Shooter) were the best-selling genres, excluding the sport games genre, as it did not have a main male character. These four genres 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.

Produce

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). 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.

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.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

The first main aim of this research question was to see how main male characters in top selling video games from their respective 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 via their appearance, the role they play in the video game, their behaviour and interactions with other 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 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.

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. 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. The willingness to be seen as being tough to be an ideal man. 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.

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 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. 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.

Limitations

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.

Recommendations

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.

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.

REFERENCE

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