I'm a warrior, I'm a monster – Who am I anyway? Shifting/Shaping Identity through Video Game Play

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Abstract

This article examines the implications of video game play on identity constructions. Our study focused on the gendered nature of identity and young males' construction of their gendered identity. Our study involved interviewing 3 young adult males aged 21, 24, and 30. The interviews allowed for the participants to reflect on their particular (previously unexamined) ideologies and values, as they began to question the incongruence of these values with particular game-based behaviours. For example, practices of competition, aggression, and violence were issues that either conflicted with or paralleled participants' practices in other aspects of their lives.

Introduction

Identities are complex, multi-dimensional ways of being in different contexts and to the extent that we believe our identities are socially constructed, we have a choice in how we represent who we understand ourselves to be. Therefore, attempting to understand how or what each context and choice says about our identity construction seems critical in how we perceive and behave in the world. Not surprisingly, video games seem to be contributing to shaping players' identities in the digital world. This paper will explore notions of identity with three young adult male participants who have been video game players since childhood, attempting to understand the complexities of identity and the influence of video game play on identity.

Notions of Identity

Traditional understandings of identity as an essential characteristic that identifies someone and constitutes his/her personality for life have been challenged by social identity theory and postmodern notions that identity is fluid and ongoingly constructed and reconstructed. As Filiciak (2003) comments, "the notion of identity is one of the most important questions in any study dealing with the human creature; in Western culture, "self" is the measure of reality" (p.

93). He goes on to suggest that "problems of our 'self' become more pronounced now that conventionally understood human identity has undergone erosion", that is, identity based on the "constancy of physical and mental traits that allow us to differentiate our self from others" (p. 93). William James who is considered a leader of modern psychology, suggested that humans determine their identity as social creatures only in reference to others, and present different "versions" of themselves in specific situations. Foucault suggests that there is no inside "self", no essence that makes a person who he/she is, but that "self" is only one of the possible ways of thinking, a discursive construct. Therefore, a "self" is only a temporary construction, a "liquid identity" (Filiciak, 2003, p. 92).

As a social construction, our "original" self is impossible to distinguish from the self that is created through societal expectations. From a postmodern perspective, identity is never quite defined, its final form is never reached, it can be manipulated - by media, by peers, by desires – it is always under construction. The postmodern self is fragmented; each identity we create is a temporary construction.

Reading texts and gender identity

According to Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) popular cultural texts powerfully aid in shaping identities and continually reinforce gendered identity . There are many ways that popular cultural texts influence gendered identities. Alvermann, Moon and Hagood (1999) explain how Barbie, Walt Disney movies, and fairytales are all laden with value messages about what it means to be male or female. Appearances, language, and actions of characters in magazines, movies, television, comics, toys, and the World Wide Web all suggest ways in which males and females should take up and practice identities that are appropriate to their particular gender. If, as Knobel and Lankshear (2003) suggest, 'attention economics' illuminates how society is functioning today, then popular cultural texts are being read, viewed, and heard at such a fast pace that there is little to no time to reflect on the value messages linked to these texts. In other words, students have limited time and opportunity to attend to or therefore to reflect upon values implicit in positions and situations they wish to explore. Drawing on studies from researchers of media and adolescent development, Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) report that "a common finding is that teens, while not as easily deceived by the mass media as some critics would assert, still find their personal needs for dealing with popular culture texts largely ignored and unaccommodated in formal educational circles" (p. 138). On this view, adolescents need more guidance in deconstructing the value-laden messages in texts, and this will very likely include grappling with the contradictions in their gender identities.

How readers engage with a text differs depending upon their background knowledge and experiences they bring to it (Rosenblatt, 2003). They can read texts, such as graphic novels, horror movies, or video games and disrupt the social norms that are presented; however, others will read these same texts and miss the undercutting of stereotypes and inequalities, instead adopting surface-level messages about gender, race, social, and economic beliefs (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory acknowledges this reciprocal relationship of meaning making that occurs between the text and reader.

If each person's schema develops from their individual experiences, we wonder how all readers can be said to react to any text (including video game text and play) in the same way?

How can we assume, for example, that even though some video games seem to portray violence, all players/readers will respond to the text in a similar way? In this study, we have attempted to approach our research on video game players with respect to both text and reader. As Rosenblatt (1978) notes: "different readers will… "concretize" the text differently. Each will seek to create a consistent structure and at the same time accommodate the shifting perspectives presented by the text" (p. 70). However, as we recognize the individuality of response to texts, it is also evident that dominant hegemonic masculinity is prevalent in many of the texts we are exploring. We wonder whether these powerful, sometimes subtle, and recurring messages influence video game players' understanding of their multiple and shifting genderedpo "selves".

Masculinity

This paper uses a theoretical framework that draws on a sociocultural understanding of gender and masculinity. Connell (1995) defines gender as a "social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do; it is not social practice reduced to the body. Indeed … gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social" (p. 71). Gender as a social construct impacts learning throughout life, dictating what is and can be learned and what is out of bounds. Gender, and thus masculinity, is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction, and masculinity must be understood as an aspect of large-scale social structures and processes (Connell, 1995, p. 39). Holland, Ramazanoglu, and Sharpe (1993) suggest that men are born into male bodies, but not necessarily into a successful version of culturally appropriate masculinity, therefore "becoming a man is a complex process of learning and doing within shifting sets of social constraints" (p. 2). From a poststructural perspective, there are multiple ways of being a male and creating/negotiating male subjectivities. These multiple and diverse positions open up the possibility of constituting subjectivity as multiple and contradictory (Davies & Banks, 1992) – every individual male accesses, performs, and transforms multiple versions of masculinity in various contexts and at various times. There are multiple ways that masculinity is performed; however hegemonic versions of masculinity are most highly valued, that is, performances of masculinity that embody "the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Social institutions "participate in constructing, circulating and naturalizing gender norms" (Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, & Lankshear, 2002, p. 59). As suggested by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), boys' and girls' learning is different even before they start school: boys' learning has introduced them to performances of activity and "maverick individualism," (p. 205) while girls' learning has introduced them to performances of submission, passivity, and courtesy. Family activities and values transfer into schooling practices where notions of masculinity (often linked to images of such things as strength, cleverness, winning, power, and status) are further developed and reinforced, creating powerful sites for gendered messages to be reinforced by teachers and young people themselves (Browne, 1995, Author, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity not only naturalizes masculine behaviours, but also male discipline areas, such as science, mathematics, mechanics, and technology – those areas, which seen to require rational, unemotional engagement.

Video games are powerful learning tools that have the potential to create spaces of disruption (de Castell & Bryson, 1999), yet most often games continue to be marketed towards a male audience aged 18-34 years, and according to Clint Hocking (2006), a video game designer, director and script writer, video game industry people have been misusing the potential of video games for 30 years now. Taylor (2006) and Downes (2005) both acknowledge that video games are influenced by surrounding culture; just like art and music, video game content is reflective of the messages and ideologies of particular cultures (Jenkins, 2000). Meanwhile video game play, the purposes of play, the social interaction during play, the persons who play and what they enjoy about playing is also reflective of the socio-cultural influences of the players.

Turkle (1995) suggests that video games are instruments with which people are "trying to understand themselves and improve their lives by using the materials they have at hand," but that video games can allow people to "easily move through multiple identities, and we can embrace – or be trapped by – cyberspace as a way of life" (p. 231). The choice to 'try on' different perspectives is celebrated by Taylor (2006) who explains that women gamers often embrace the opportunity to navigate masculine identities, recognizing the differences in gender expectations; however, what is problematic is when video games do not offer alternative gendered perspectives for males to play and value.

Henry Jenkins (1999) acknowledges the similarities between typical boy play spaces of the past and those now available in video games, while McCollough (2004), a writing instructor and video game player, writes nostalgically about envying college football players and his father's passion for football as reasons why he still plays Madden football today: "Once again, sports are as strong a medium for my relationships with other men as any other category of experience" (p. 180), but of course he does not play football on a field, he plays it on a screen. Hegemonic masculinity is a culturally constructed perspective prevalent in video games, but is also prevalent in multiple aspects of society, such as sports, economy, school, religion, music, and media. Since identity development in relation to video game play is so potentially complex and interconnected, we wanted to explore how gender construction in relation to video game play can be examined.

Methodology

Postmodernity informs the way we are discussing identity in this paper. A feminist post-structuralist perspective is appropriate for this type of research: it understands identity as fluid and continually changing (Taylor, 2006; Filiciak, 2003; Hughes, 2000; Sparkes, 2002), and studies how the relationship between gender, power, and discourses affects how people engage in both virtual and real worlds. A significant concern with video game play and content is the dominance of hegemonic masculine ideologies (Sanford & Madill, in press). Feminist post-structuralism focuses "on the subject as process [which] gives rise to the potential of creating new gender discourses and, by implication, new subjectivities" (Hughes, 2000, p. 3). Discourses encompass the "practices, formations, and subject positions" (Henwood as cited in Hughes, 2000, p. 2) and take on a culture's dominant beliefs, values, and ideologies. The metaphors, analogies, and descriptive words that our participants draw upon, reveal the repetitive and limited hegemonic masculine experiences they encounter playing video games and the

examination of their discourse helps us to better understand the relationships between identity and video game play.

Participants

The three participants (John aged 20, Vince, aged 23, and Spencer, aged 30) in this study began playing video games in elementary school and identified themselves as avid video game players in their teenage years. Although they explain that they play much less now because of school and work commitments, they still continued to play video games as a form of entertainment and social activity. They all worked in business related jobs: John managed a painting company with approximately 10 employees; Vince was a sales representative in a technology store; Spencer was a financial advisor in a national bank. Spencer was a graduate from a post-secondary business degree program, while John and Vince were currently enrolled in the same post-secondary business program. Each of them had participated competitively in sports at one time in their lives and they all continued to watch professional sports. John and Vince still lived at home with parents and Spencer was a husband and father. John and Spencer lived in the same city in which they were born and Vince moved from the United States to this same West Coast city; his parents had immigrated to Canada from the Middle East before he was born. After repeated observations of their video game play, case studies were developed with the participants which included interviews with each participant, and a focus group interview.

Methods

Observations – Video Recordings.

The participants were video taped playing their favorite game for an hour each, without the researcher in the room. Two of the participants were videotaped playing video games together three different times for an hour each time. The games that were played included *NBA Live 05*(online basketball game), *Counter Strike* (online first person shooter game), *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Playstation 2 game), *Triple Play 2001* (Playstation 2 baseball game), *NHL 2004* (Playstation 2 hockey game). The video tapes were transcribed.

Interviews - Rep Grid Approach.

Identity is elusive and cannot be readily accessed. Aspects of our own identity are hidden from us and from others, even those with whom we have a strong relationship. In order to "uncover" a deeper sense of each participant's understanding of their own identity/ies, we adopted a repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1955) in order to explore, together with the participants, the impact of video game play on their understandings of who they are.

The one-on-one conversational-style interviews lasted approximately 2 hours each, each participant asked to identify: 1) five favourite video games; 2) five names of people the participant has played video games with; and 3) five settings where the participant has spent considerable amounts of time playing. Each participant was given 15 squares of paper in order to make the responses. By providing a visual in the form of the squares of paper, we hoped to keep their conversation focused and provide opportunities for the participants to explore relationships between the different squares as they were juxtaposed with each other. The intention of this interview approach was to create a space where they could speak about what they knew

regarding the relationships between themselves and the games they play, the people they play video games with, and the places that reflect their play, in order to enable them to delve more deeply into aspects of their play that might shape their understanding of "self" and shifting "selves.".

The first part of the interview regarding their favorite games was by far the aspect of video games that each participant could speak about most. Their descriptions were detailed and passionate. They were asked to describe each of the identified video games individually (the type of game, the main characters, brief plot summary, and what they liked about the game); they were then asked to explain what the game reflected, directly or indirectly, about their personality. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on this more elaborated aspect of the data collection.

To examine whether the participants could gain any further insight into the relationship between video games and their identity, we asked them to read over their transcripts in the presence of the interviewer and comment on any areas of interest, surprise, or concern.

Findings

The participants admitted to never having actually considered or spoken about video games as connected to their personalities before. These interviews allowed for a space where these males verbalized some correlations between video game play and identity that they had not considered before. Of particular interest was how the participants' reasons for playing, the interests in the game content, and their beliefs in the ideology of the game rules, seemed to connect with other aspects of their lives, either at work, school, or their sports involvement.

Reasons for Playing

Although it was not explicitly asked, at different points in each interview the participants explained why they played video games. They identified opportunity, competition, relaxation, addiction, and enjoyment of the video game content as their primary reasons for playing. John explained, "I enjoy playing them; it's kind of fun to do stuff you wouldn't normally do on a regular day, it's kind of fun to see what that would be like," while Vince and Spencer iterated the same sentiment in their interviews. John further explained how the reality of video game graphics is reliable: an activity like parachuting out of an airplane is something he has actually done in real life and the parachuting aspect in *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* reminded him of having actually experienced it. The opportunity to steal a car, spend enormous amounts of money to outfit a car, shoot enemies in a war, or hit home runs repeatedly for an hour are action-oriented experiences these players talked about being able to try in a video game. As Filiciak (2003) comments, "for postmodern people, background and residence are less and less important, as they are liquid… we are more willing to identify ourselves with our hobbies or pleasures. Work is not the essence of life anymore, it is not a value in itself." Thus we construct our identities not through occupational connections, but through other, more pleasurable, activities and have more control over the shaping of our multiple identities.

Different than the action experiences, Vince described the achievement feelings he experiences as a reason why he plays video games:

With video games you can see your progress, you move through it really quickly. It's not very difficult, and I guess, I kind of struggle in school sometimes, because I'm not really seeing results. It just seems like I'm in school and I'm just gooo..ing [he slowed down the word 'going']… ultimately to get my degree right?

As Gee (2003) has pointed out, the learning in well designed video games is individually paced, with constant reinforcement, whereas school is not designed to provide this type of feedback. Vince acknowledged the lack of value placed on video game learning ["It's not very difficult"] and supported the perpetual myth that males are not succeeding in school learning with his comment, "I kind of struggle in school sometimes, because I'm not really seeing results." As learning theories based on experiential or inquiry-based learning continue to be disregarded, students like Vince are plagued with labels such as having short attention spans, or needing entertainment all the time, instead of being identified as keen learners who require more stimulation and challenge than the traditional school environment is providing for them.

Taylor (2006) and de Castell and Bryson (1999) have written about the potential of video game space to become an opportunity to disrupt limitations players may feel affect them in their lives, such as gender, race, religion, socio-economics or age. These particular participants, however, seemed to choose to play video games because the experiences enabled them to practice more hegemonic masculine ways of being. Instead of disrupting the limitations that stereotypical masculine ways of being impose their potential as humans, these males appreciated the opportunity to reenact hegemonic masculine practices. The limitations in their real lives that they recognized stemmed from not being able to be more adventurous, more athletically talented, and more aggressive than their school life or career life was supporting. As with most video game players, our participants were seeking pleasurable activities, including escapism, forgetting everyday worries, and deriving satisfaction from engaging with activities they would never do in the real world (Filiciak, 2003, p. 99). This possibility of renegotiation their "selves" minimized the control that social institutions wield over them and offers them a chance to express themselves beyond their physical or material limitations.

Interest in Game Content

The participants explained that the games have actually educated them or added to their existing knowledge base about topics such as cars, guns, and sports. The participants' enthusiasm was evident when speaking about their interest in the topic. For example John and Vince spoke about their interests in cars, in real life and in games:

[John reflecting on *Need for Speed*] I've got some ideas floating around, tinting the windows, little things like that and what this reflects about me. I enjoy racing, I am kind of competitive, I like winning races and things like that and I enjoy going fast when I am in my car, and that's one thing you can definitely do in the game, and it was really neat to learn some options about how to soup up a car.

[Vince reflecting on *Need for Speed Underground 2*] I love cars. I buy car magazines. Where it is just rich famous people and they have their cars done up with huge rims and stuff like that. I've done stuff to my car and stuff like that. Part of that too reflects on my love for that.

I love car games and stuff like that so. That's the only game I left out. That's my personality, and it shows in the type of games I like too.

Like sports or novels or movies, people are often drawn to past times that they can relate to or that complement areas of their own interests. Video games seem no different in this respect.

Their discussion, however, generally seems to involve stereotypically hegemonic masculine subjects that promote power, aggression, and competition. This image of masculinity that is relentlessly flogged by mass media pressures development of identity and supports this hypermasculine identity through objects and material goods. Filiciak (2003) suggests that the image offered is one of the most important aspects of the project: we desire the product and engage in competitive action in order to become the product that is seductively offered. Baudrillard (1997) suggests that image and identity are interchangeable notions, and calls identity the "label of existence."

All three participants commented on the more obvious correlation between their love of a particular sport (basketball, hockey, and baseball) and their enjoyment from playing the video game version of the sport.

> [Spencer reflecting on MLB Baseball] Obviously I like baseball. I like watching, I liked playing it when I was younger, so it's a natural sort of… I like playing, watching it on tv, I like playing the video games of it ….it's in that part of my personality, something I truly enjoy in life in video games and on tv……it's familiar.. baseball has always been part of my life I guess…I hardly have to learn anything new to play it.

Spencer views himself as a baseball player and so baseball video games continue to fulfill that part of his identity. His interest in competition and social interaction in a sport context is again reflective of hegemonic masculine practices that are not questioned or challenged in any of these activities. The construction of the participants' gendered selves is reinforced by their involvement in particular themed video games. These games blur the differentiation between artificial and real, creating what Jung has termed the "complete reality of mental life". Murray (2003) writes about the active creation of belief, and Filiciak (2003) suggests that "we desire the experience of immersion, so we use our intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience" (p. 99).

Reflection about their interaction with video games occurred when the video game content was of particular interest to the participants, and was different from activities they engaged in outside of the game world. John described his interest in the *Grand Theft Auto Games: Vice City* and *San Andreas*, and when he reflected on what the game suggests about him, he realized that guns had become one of his interests. As he was talking about this interest and knowledge base he began to question how much guns are a reflection of himself:

> I got most of my gun knowledge from games, not from real life and it's kind of neat to see the different guns and how good are certain guns, like the AKA 47 is much more powerful and the M5 is sort of a machine gun… that kind of reflects.. I kind of like guns and stuff like that. I don't see much of a link though…

Yet he continues to discuss this connection.

Umm… I don't know… I never use those guns and I've never even shot a rifle before. I have a BB gun and I use that and I've done a lot of paintball, so I have used a weapon. I don't know, maybe it is sort of the syndrome of they recruit young guys for the war and they get all excited about it and don't really realize it until they actually had to experience getting shot or their friend getting shot, that type of thing. Sort of, I guess, because it's made to be very heroic and very cool in the games and movies you see so that's maybe where it's coming from; but it is kind of a very masculine thing to be interested in guns and just from playing these games, I couldn't help but to learn and have knowledge about the guns because I had to know what guns to pick to do well in the video games and things like that so I end up getting some sort of wealth of knowledge, I don't know as much as Aaron, he's a friend of mine who is in the Army…

We wonder, then, about the power of video games to perpetuate and enhance hegemonic masculine interests and to reinforce "selves" that will not challenge these potentially restrictive notions of identity and will limit their perspective of the world.

Another example of a contradiction that occurred as a result of this interview was the way in which Spencer described his interest in the adventuring and the destruction possibilities in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.* At the end of the interview, when he realized how closely the games he played reflected aspects of his personality, he reconsidered which games he might continue to play:

I can think of one game – the *Grand Theft Auto* -   it's really not a game I feel very good about playing. There's a lot of bad …there's swearing, there's vulgar scenes, it's very gender wrong. Ya knew it, but now that I'm actually forced to think about that it makes it that much worse.

Similarly, Vince also questioned his in-game interest of killing characters which he states does not correlate to any interest outside of the game, but he never discussed a need to disassociate himself with the game or playing:

V: It is something gratifying in that it's not real, like I'm just trying to think of the feeling it gives you. How to explain the feeling, it's like a feeling of power, but it's… it's sadistic, but you really enjoy it, like killing someone at least in a video game, just blasting them in a head or just blasting them is really crazy. I don't know what it is. When you think about it, and now that I'm talking about it, what's wrong with me? You really enjoy it, like it is crazy. Maybe it's cause you can't do it, it's such a forbidden thing, but like they make it so real and powerful, like in a game you can have the ability to smoke people continuously, I don't know, I enjoy that. The gorier the better, the bloodier the better. I don't know. I don't know. It really gives you this power.

As Filiciak (2003) comments, "postmodern identity can be considered schizophrenic" (p.98), however it should not be looked on as pathology or mental illness. Our "self" is liquid, now more fluid than ever, however this does not generally mean an incoherence of the individual person and can be seen in a positive light as we understand the complexity of identity in a postmodern world.

The hegemonic dominant masculine ideologies of competition and winning were emphasized throughout all three participants' dialogues. The business school they are enrolled in and graduated from promotes competition and winning as one of its major philosophies, so hearing the importance of competition in games is not surprising. Spencer explains why he plays MLB Baseball game:

> It's a familiar game…it's fun …I guess...Honestly it's winning. That's what I like the most about that game. If I'm playing against the computer I'm playing to win, that's the part that makes me feel the best. If I'm playing against someone else it's kind of camaraderie…

The contradiction between playing with friends and competing with the game suggests that beating a friend is not always socially acceptable or desirable. John described the importance of communication with others in video game play and Vince also described how playing video games with some of his friends is reflective of how social he is. However, they both contradict their comments about the value of communication and social connections when they focus on the competition:

> [John reflecting on *Counter Strike*] I like the idea of a team sport, so it can be like that. If you are playing with people, you can talk to them. "Ok, you go first," that kind of thing. It's kind of neat that way, it's how I like to play in paintball, and that's how I like to play softball or hockey, I like to communicate a lot and I like to be a better team by, you know, communicating and stuff like that with other people, which is, you know, fun. I also, it is an aggressive kind of game, you trash talk a lot, you kill people, and you try and win. And that is something I do a lot… without the killing! But I do trash talking and I like to win. Even with [his painting company], I, although I am a little behind and kind of frustrated, I trash talk a lot, like "ah ya Dude, ya right… well…dadadada" that kind of thing. That's where it is reflective [of me].

> [Vince reflecting on *Halo*] When you are playing against each other, you are killing each other. Like the head shot, you smoke the guy and you know it is just so much fun. People get mad and they are throwing controllers, you get really into it. I don't know, the competitiveness and just when you are playing with other people it adds such an aspect to video games…when you get 4 or 5 players, you rotate, and you're swearing at each other, talking smack, it's a blast.

This opportunity to win was definitely critical to the way participants approached playing video games and the identity they were constructing. John and Vince are proud of their ability to communicate well with others and be in a team, yet then they enthusiastically describe their communication ability to degrade others: trash talking – aggressive talk often said in a humourous tone, but meant to maintain power and authority by the speaker.

As the participants were describing what their favorite video games reflected about them they emphasized the importance of wanting or possessing heroic qualities. John spoke about the main avatar, Master Chief, in *Halo 2*:

The way it is reflective of me is there is a hero character in it. He's kind of faceless so it makes it kind of cool. You don't see his face ever; you hear his voice a lot. I guess the idea is that I like to stand out from a crowd, I like to be a leader, and it's kind of a way, the game you are sort of a hero and everyone looks to you.

John also adds to this heroic image by considering the characteristics of Max Payne: "I wish I could be like, more of like, not a devious character, but somebody who is like kind of quiet and says a little less and people, you know, girls really fall for that type of person." John's comments suggest that the hegemonic masculine qualities promoted in games are values that are acceptable to want to live up to; values and assumptions that are encouraged in many other media messages, like television, movies, advertisements, and music. The desire to be a typical epic hero, "a leader, fighter, lover, healer…an extraordinary hero" (Flieger, 2004, p. 124) is reflective of Western society's hegemonic masculine traits (Connell, 1995). Spencer also relates to the heroism of the army characters in *SoCom*:

I really like the adventure. All throughout my teenage years I thought it would be cool to try out the training: "I could do that." It is like the image you see on the TV about how great being a part of the army is. You actually get to play out the cool part…in the most super hero part of the army…yeah, just literally pretending you are the character out in the field doing that stuff.

He then compared the use of strategy within the game to the strategizing he does in his job, as well as the physically fit aspect of the army characters to the "image as to how I would like to be." Vince also expanded on the ideology of power when he described how the *Grand Theft Auto* games reflect his philosophy on success:

So I guess that whole grind if you want to become, not powerful, but you can become powerful, you can become rich, and you're growing and you can see your character get like more and more, just moving up, whatever it is. In the world of *Vice City*, moving up, I guess it reflects on me wanting to do that, you know what I mean? You want to just move up, while doing the things you want to do. If I had my way, I'd get up and just get paid, and just move up. If I had the job I want, when I graduate, say I work for Microsoft, and I move up. Done. I want that so I'm going to do that. You have missions, but you do that, you do what you want pretty much. But you go through the missions and you move up. So I guess it kind of relates.

Conclusion

Focused conversations with articulate game players, using research methods such as a repertory grid, enable opportunities to explore notions of identity and reflect on notions of "self" in a postmodern world. Through this research we have been able, on a small scale, to more fully understand the construct of identity, demonstrating how it is neither simple nor singular, but is shaped by multiple complex influences. Mass media, social mores and postmodern notions of the world are some of these powerful influences. Through the conversations with our participants, we recognize the dominance of hegemonic masculine values and the promotion of these values through unexamined video game play. We have also recognized the potential of approaches such as repertory grid methodology to further understand and examine the shaping and overlapping of identity(ies) in both real and virtual spaces.

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