Bethany Thomas (she/her)
thomasb@edgehill.ac.uk

@_brthomas

Gender and Gaming: What can social psychology tell us about the construction of gamer identity for female gamers?

Edge Hill University

1. INTRODUCTION

- Across digital game research, "gamers" are discussed, defined, and measured using various approaches and two questions are often raised – **who is a gamer and what makes someone a gamer?**

- 'Gamers' are stereotyped as "*mostly young, mostly nerdy and most definitely male*" (Harwell, 2014), disregarding the wide demographic of players, particularly as females account for 46% of the domain.

- Gamers are often understood using social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978), which illustrates how individuals create and define their place in society based on membership in social groups.

- But the efficacy of SIT principles as processes in the construction of gamer identity is unknown and further research is needed to explore this directly with players who identify as gamers, particularly non-male identifying gamers.

- The framework of Multiple Social Identities (MSI; Rydell et al., 2009) has interesting application here (Figure 1) – illustrating how we each have multiple identities, and some may align where others are "competing".
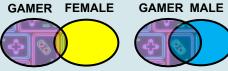
GAMER FEMALE   GAMER MALE

Figure 1: MSI framework considering the overlap between gender & gamer identity

- Kaye & Pennington (2018) suggested a superordinate approach (Turner et al., 1987) to gamer identity may have a positive psychological impact for female players, but further research is needed to explore this approach.

- Instead, subordinate approaches to gamer may provide more accessible and meaningful targets for identification (Rabinovich & Morton, 2011). But could this promote the notion of a dominant masculine and subordinate feminine – as previously considered regarding 'hardcore' gamers (Vanderhoef, 2013)?

- This on-going project is exploring whether non-male identifying players construct their identity as gamers in a diverse way to male-identifying players and whether "female" and "gamer" are competing where "male" and "gamer" may align.
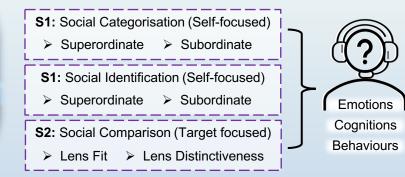
2. RESEARCH AIMS

(1) To explore how players construction of gamer identity intersects with gender identity,

(2) To qualitatively explore these social processes (experientially) from a Social Identity Theory perspective,

(3) To establish the theoretical basis from which gamer identity for female-identifying players may be understood.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

S1: Social Categorisation (Self-focused)
- ➤ Superordinate   ➤ Subordinate

S1: Social Identification (Self-focused)
- ➤ Superordinate   ➤ Subordinate

S2: Social Comparison (Target focused)
- ➤ Lens Fit   ➤ Lens Distinctiveness

?

Emotions
Cognitions
Behaviours

4. METHODOLOGY

- Across two studies, virtual semi-structured interviews are being used to investigate the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of gamer identity.

- **Study 1** is exploring the role of social identification and categorisation as processes involved in the construction of gamer identity, and whether this intersects with players gender identity. Additionally, superordinate and subordinate approaches (Turner et al.,1987) to gamer identity are being investigated, to further establish the theoretical approach in which gamers may be understood.

- **Data collection** (interviewing, transcribing, member checking) **is on-going**.

- In the second phase of the study (data analysis) data from the interviews will be analysed using a combination of both deductive and inductive thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2014), with both semantic and latent coding.

- The planned analytical strategy is a development of the Braun & Clarke (2006; 2013) approach. This process will be conducted separately, between groups initially and then during the final phase of analysis will be joined to finalise themes the researcher has developed using TA. As codes will be developed into encompassing themes, comparatively across each group of participants.

- These interviews, with a wide demographic sample of players with diverse gender identities, are providing in-depth insight into how gamers understand and construct their identity.

- **Study 2**, will explore the role of social comparison as a process involved with the construction of gamer identity and the intersection with gender identity – specifically considering the role of players "in/out-groups", alongside principles from the lens-based model for stereotyping (Petsko et al., 2021).

References QR link: