

The normalisation of ‘video gaming parents’ in the era of eSports

Dan Padua

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia
d.padua@qut.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This paper uses discourse analysis of online articles to investigate the contemporary cultural identities of video gaming parents constructed by news media organisations. The findings of this research highlight the significant ways in which the discourses of parenting and family are colliding with those of eSports and video games. The contemporary construction of the video gaming parent is a cultural product of an era where video games are an increasingly pervasive element in everyday life and popular culture.

Keywords

eSports, family, parenting, discourse, media

INTRODUCTION

Video games have been and continue to be the focus of media moral panics across the global. For example, one needs to look no further than comments made by U.S. President Donald Trump proclaiming that violent video games create violent youth (Gach 2018). Despite this, video game culture has become increasingly mainstream as evidenced by the ways that titles such as *Fortnite* become household names in the media and popular culture. Such examples speak to the ways in which video games and the associated fan practices are increasingly embraced within everyday life, especially within the family unit.

Video games are typically perceived as the domain of youth, with research often focusing on the parental monitoring and moderation of children’s video game play. The *Digital Australia* study conducted by the Interactive Games and Entertainment Association found that most Australian parents with children under 18 living at home played video games together as a way for the family to spend time together, for educational purposes or to monitor and regulate their children’s video game play (Brand, Todhunter, and Jervis 2017). Given the high instance of video gaming parents, it pays to investigate the cultural identity of young gamers as they transition into parenthood or parents who have picked up video gaming as a family ‘tool’. The high number of video gaming parents should be understood in an era where the eSports industry is enjoying rapid expansion across the globe and as such plays an important role in the mainstreaming of video game culture given the industry’s struggle for recognition as a ‘serious’ and legitimate sport (Wagner 2007; Taylor 2012; Witkowski 2012).

Although the idea of video gaming parents is not necessarily new, aspects of this cultural identity appear to be increasingly normalized throughout the media. As such, this paper

Proceedings of DiGRAA 2019: What’s Next?

© 2015 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

discusses how contemporary understandings of video gaming parents are constructed in the media. Drawing from a discourse analysis of online news articles drawn from several media outlets, such as *Gizmodo*, *Kotaku*, and *Lifehacker* (Allure Media), News.com.au (NewsCorp) and *ABC Online* (ABC), this paper highlights shifts in mediated constructions of adult identities that manifest in video gaming culture. The findings point to significant changes in the way video games and parenting are discussed in popular culture and wider society. Video games are increasingly seen as tools of intergenerational communication and familial bonding in a similar fashion to the way popular music plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining family relationships.

The findings suggest that video games and its cultural practices are no longer solely the domain of youth. Rather, video game audiences can be increasingly understood as multigenerational and the interactions within videogame culture as intergenerational. I use the findings from this analysis to question what is next for a mainstreamed video game culture related to the increase of video gaming parents, especially in an era where eSports are constructed as holding an equivalent popular culture status to more established, traditional sports such as football.

BIO

Dan Padua is a lecturer in the School of Communication and a member for the Digital Media Research Centre at QUT. His research focuses on how fandom and generational dynamics play out in media and entertainment industries. Specifically, his PhD investigated cases of shared popular music fandom within families. Dan's current project is analysing the developing global eSports industry, its multigenerational audiences and the intergenerational exchanges that take place within eSports and videogame fandom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brand, J. E., Todhunter, S. and Jervis, J. (2018) *Digital Australia Report 2018*. Available at: <https://www.igea.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Digital-Australia-2018-DA18-Final-1.pdf>.
- Gach, E. (2018) *Trump Says Video Game Violence Is 'Shaping Young People's Thoughts'* | *Kotaku Australia*, *Kotaku*. Available at: <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2018/02/trump-says-video-game-violence-is-shaping-young-peoples-thoughts/>.
- Seo, Y. and Sang-Uk, J. (2016) 'Beyond solitary play in computer games: The social practices of eSports', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(3), pp. 635–655. doi: 10.1177/1469540514553711.
- Taylor, T. L. (2012) *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. MIT Press.
- Wagner, M. (2007) 'Competing in metagame gamespace: eSport as the first professional- sized computer metagames.', in von Borries, F., Walz, S. P., and Böttger, M. (eds) *Space time play: Synergies between computer games, architecture and urbanism: The next level*. New York: Springer, pp. 182–185.
- Witkowski, E. (2012) 'On the Digital Playing Field: How We "Do Sport" With Networked Computer Games', *Games and Culture*, 7(5), pp. 349–374. doi: 10.1177/1555412012454222.