

Warzone

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STORE

SPRING 2021

The Double-Edged Sword of Online Gaming

An Analysis of Masculinity
in Video Games and the
Gaming Community
Toolkit

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If she can see it, she can be it.™


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 **PROMUNDO**
Healthy Masculinity. Gender Equality.



Executive Summary

Representation in Video Games

We analyzed 27,564 characters in 684 fifteen-minute gameplay segments from sessions with the top 20 Twitch streamers.

Gender Representations

- ▶ Among all characters, male characters outnumber female characters four-to-one (79.9% compared with 20.1%).
- ▶ Among leading characters, girls/women make up 27.6%.
- ▶ Female characters are far more likely to be visually or verbally sexually objectified than male characters (3.5% compared with 0.1%).
- ▶ Female characters are ten times more likely to be shown in revealing clothing than male characters (24.6% compared with 2.3%).
- ▶ Female characters are nearly five times as likely

to be shown with some level of nudity than male characters (12.4% compared with 2.5%); therefore, while female characters are showing up in video games, they are likely to be sexualized.

Race/Ethnicity Representations

- ▶ White characters outnumber characters of color three-to-one (75.3% compared with 24.7%). This representation is less diverse than the US population, which consists of 38% people of color, but a notable improvement from the 20.0% of characters of color represented in the last decade.
- ▶ Nearly nine-in-ten (89.3%) leading characters are white.
- ▶ White characters tend to be significantly more likely to perpetrate violence than characters of color (51.7% compared with 33.6%).
- ▶ When characters do enact violence, characters of color are twice as likely to be motivated by the protection of a stranger or society as opposed to personal gain or anger than white video game characters (14.4% compared with 7.3%).

- ▶ Characters of color often show up in stereotypical roles (e.g., Black sidekicks, Latinx gang members, Middle Eastern terrorists). About one-in-four characters of color appear as stereotypes (29.5% of Black characters; 28.9% of Middle Eastern characters; and 20.7% Latinx characters).

LGBTQIA+ Representations

- ▶ LGBTQIA+ characters are virtually absent from video game representations; only 0.03% characters were identified as LGBTQIA+, far below the 4.5% of the US population who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Disability Representations

- ▶ Only 0.1% of characters are shown with a physical disability; far below the 19% of the US population with a physical, cognitive, or communication disability.
- ▶ Of leading characters, only 0.5% are depicted with a disability.

Age Representations

- ▶ Only 3.2% of characters are ages 50+, a bigger erasure of older adults than in family films (7.6%) and family television (9.5%), and far below the 34% of the US population who are 50+.
- ▶ Of lead characters, even fewer (0.8%) were ages 50+.

Body Size Representations

- ▶ Only 1.5% of characters have a large body type, far fewer than the 39% in the US population.
- ▶ Of the characters with a large body size, nine-in-ten are male, reinforcing the rarity of female characters with large body types in different types of media.
- ▶ 5.4% of leading characters have a large body type.

The 7 Pillars of Promundo's Man Box Scale

- ▶ Masculine norms are strongly upheld, with four-in-five (81.9%) male characters displaying at *least* one pillar of masculinity.
- ▶ Seven-in-ten male characters (70.5%) are shown engaging in stereotypically masculine activities (i.e., taking risks, engaging in violence, getting angry, etc.).
- ▶ Nearly one-in-four (23.7%) male characters express anger.
- ▶ Violence is a major component of masculinity, with 63.6% of male characters enacting violence, and 84.8% of the time that violence is directed against other people.
- ▶ The leading motive for violence from male characters was personal gain (84.3%), compared to the small proportion of male characters perpetrating violence for the more noble motivation of protecting a stranger or society (7.4%).
- ▶ Almost half of male video game characters (48.9%) carry a gun during gameplay.
- ▶ Males perpetrate more violence (63.6% compared with 54.2%), carry a weapon (61.1% compared with 46.9%), and kill 10+ humans (12.5% compared with 4.2%) at a higher rate than female characters.
- ▶ White male characters are significantly more likely to engage in risky behaviors (70.6% compared with 43.3%), to exhibit toughness (64.9% compared with 39.4%), and to engage in traditionally masculine activities (71.4% compared with 49.7%) than male characters of color.

- ▶ White male characters perpetrate violence at a significantly higher rate than male characters of color (55.4% compared with 30.9%).
- ▶ White male characters are twice as likely to carry a weapon as male characters of color (55.9% compared with 27.3%); in particular, a gun (45.6% compared with 24.9%).
- ▶ One-in-three white male characters (35.9%) kill at least one human compared to only 8.5% for male characters of color.

Streamer Comments

- ▶ We analyzed streamer comments from 684 fifteen-minute gameplay segments from sessions with the top 20 Twitch streamers.

Gender

- ▶ All of the top streamers are men.
- ▶ Sexist language was used in 37.7% of segments, with “bitch” being the most common gender slur used by streamers (28.9% of gameplay segments).
- ▶ Streamers used sexually degrading language in one-in-four (24.4%) gameplay segments, with 7.9% of segments using a variant of the phrase “suck my dick,” intended to enact dominance over another player.

Race/Ethnicity

- ▶ Of the top streamers on Twitch, only one streamer is a man of color.
- ▶ Streamers used racist language in 5.6% of gameplay segments, with 2.2% of segments featuring gamers speaking in stereotypically foreign accents for comedic effect.
- ▶ 0.7% of segments had the n-word spoken one or more times.

LGBTQIA+

- ▶ Of the top streamers on Twitch, only one publicly identifies as a gay man.
- ▶ Streamers used homophobic or transphobic language in 10.1% of segments.

Disability

- ▶ None of the top streamers has a visible physical, communication, or cognitive disability.
- ▶ Streamers used ableist language in nearly half (48.8%) of gameplay segments.
- ▶ Streamers used some variation of the ableist language “crazy” in one-in-five gameplay segments (18.3%).

Age

- ▶ None of the most popular streamers are adults ages 50+.
- ▶ Streamers used ageist language in 3.6% of gameplay segments.

Body Size

- ▶ One of the eight popular streamers analyzed has a large body type. In half (50.0%) of his gameplay segments, other players or viewers directed sizeist insults at him.
- ▶ Streamers used sizeist language in 6.9% of gameplay segments, with 3.8% of stream segments using the word “fat” as an insult to a streamer or another player.

The 7 Pillars of Promundo's Man Box Scale

- ▶ Popular streamers reinforced the “Man Box” in 96.5% of gameplay segments analyzed.
- ▶ Streamers used aggressive or controlling language in 42.3% of segments.
- ▶ Streamers acted tough in 39.0% of segments.
- ▶ Streamers promoted violence in one-in-three segments (33.9%).
- ▶ In one-in-ten (9.4%) segments, streamers used homophobia to prove their “manhood.”

What Do Viewer's Say?

We analyzed 225,190 chat comments from gameplay segments.

- ▶ Two-in-five gameplay segments (59.9%) include comments that promote the “Man Box.”
- ▶ 97.7% of gameplay segments include violent language in the chat.
- ▶ 62.6% of segments include sexist language in the chat.
- ▶ 91.7% of segments include crude and/or sexual language in the chat.
- ▶ 37.7% of segments include racist language in the chat.
- ▶ 84.4% of segments include ableist language in the chat.
- ▶ In segments where streamers use sexist, racist, homophobic, sizeist, ableist, or ageist language, we see a significant increase in this language use from viewers in the chat.

Survey Findings

We surveyed 1,050 boys and men ages 10–26 who play video games on a regular basis in an online survey.

Gaming for Human Connection

- ▶ One-in-three boys (ages 10–15) say that they feel closer to their friends when they play video games (31%) and that playing makes them feel less lonely (35%).
- ▶ One-in-four boys (26%) think that video games teach them how to be good friends.
- ▶ A vast majority of older gamers (ages 16–26) report that video games help them connect with guy friends in supportive ways that make them feel comfortable enough to let their guard down and get close with other men. Most respondents say they share their problems, worries, and concerns with other men in gaming spaces.
- ▶ Two-thirds of older gamers (16–26) say they feel more like their “true self” in gaming spaces than in “real life,” and that they feel like they fit in more in virtual gaming communities.
- ▶ Three-in-four gamers say that people who do not play video games do not understand how meaningful these experiences can be.

Bullying and Harassment in Online Gaming

- ▶ A majority of young gamers (ages 10–15) have witnessed cursing (54%) and name calling/making fun of people (51%). One-in-three younger respondents (37%) have seen other players ganging up on one player.
- ▶ Young gamers (ages 10–15) also experience bullying and harassment in online gaming spaces. Two-in-five (39%) have been the target of bad language/cursing and name calling and 25% have had other players gang up on them.

- ▶ About half of older respondents (ages 16–26) say they routinely witness homophobia and racism in online gaming spaces.
- ▶ At least 40% of respondents in both age groups say they regularly witness sexism, ableism, ageism, and sizeism in online gaming spaces.
- ▶ One-in-four gamers ages 20–26 say they experience racism (27%), homophobia (26%), and ableism (25%) on a regular basis. One-in-five say they experience sizeism (23%), ageism (20%), and sexism (19%) on a regular basis.

This groundbreaking study examines representations and enactments of masculinity in the most popular online streaming community. We also survey boys and young men to assess their experiences in online gaming spaces. This is the first systematic content analysis of Representation in Video Games since 2009, and the first study to systematically analyze content in a gamer streaming platform.

We begin this report with an overview of the methodology, previous research on this topic, and analysis. The analysis section is divided into four sections: Representation in Video Games, streamer comments, chat comments, and our survey findings. We conclude this report with actionable recommendations for parents and content creators.

Previous Studies

This section summarizes previous research around specific themes that provide the context for this research. We begin with a look at research on masculinity and the “Man Box.” We then focus on who plays video games (gamer profile), common experiences in the gaming community, what gamers are exposed to (Representation in Video Games), and the negative and positive impacts of video game play.

The 7 Pillars of Promundo’s Man Box Scale

This study requires a shared understanding of the term “masculinity.” This term refers to a range of behaviors and traits that are primarily associated with being a man in a given culture; it refers to prevalent ways that boys and men are socialized and expected to behave. Typical masculine socialized traits often include emotional restrictiveness, self-reliance, aggression, risk-taking, casual attitudes about sex, and an avoidance of behaviors labeled as feminine and often those labeled as homosexual.⁷ Promundo’s research on masculinities finds that cultural beliefs about how “real men” should behave often have detrimental effects on boys and men, in addition to the negative impact on women.⁸ In the “Man Box” study, Promundo identified seven pillars of masculinity that have negative effects for boys and men, building off of the notion of the “Man Box” first coined by Paul Kivel⁹.

1. **Self-Sufficiency:** A man is expected to be entirely self-reliant. He should figure things out on his own without help from others.
2. **Acting Tough:** A man should always defend his reputation and be willing to use physical aggression to do so. A man should also act strong, even if he is afraid or feeling vulnerable.
3. **Physical Attractiveness:** A man should be physically attractive, but effortlessly so. A man who spends too much time worrying about his looks is not masculine.
4. **Rigid Masculine Gender Roles:** A man should engage in stereotypically masculine activities and embrace stereotypically masculine roles. For example, a man should be willing to take risks, be a leader, and be the financial provider for his family. He should be less focused on “feminine” skills such as cooking, cleaning, or caregiving.

5. Heterosexuality and Homophobia: Being gay or queer is not manly, and a man should avoid being gay or perceived as being gay.
6. Hypersexuality: A man should value sexual conquests over intimacy, and never say “no” to sex. He is expected to be naturally sex-driven and the sexual initiator.
7. Aggression and Control: A man should be willing to use violence to get respect and should have the final say about decisions in his relationships.

The 7 Pillars of Promundo’s Man Box Scale study finds that men in the US, UK, and Mexico feel pressure from others to fit into these masculine expectations. Most survey participants in the US (59%) and Mexico (59%) report being taught by their parents to hide feelings of nervousness or fear. Additionally, three-in-ten men report pressure from romantic partners and male peers to stay in the rigid confines of the “Man Box.” Regardless of whether boys and men accept these stereotypically masculine roles for themselves, the vast majority, as seen in the surveys, are well aware of these expectations.

In many ways, some, perhaps many, men are beginning to reject certain aspects of traditional masculinity. While men reported awareness of masculine expectations, such as heteronormativity and the pressure to always say “yes” to sex, fewer men personally agreed with those ideas. Men in all three countries also rejected the notion that men are superior to women, or that men should not have a role in caregiving of children. Despite this progress, men are particularly likely to affirm societal pressures to live up to these norms of masculinity associated with toughness, independence, and limited emotional expressiveness.

Most men and boys are keenly aware that they are often judged and evaluated by male peers for adhering to these traditional ideas about manhood. We also know that notions of masculinity are modeled to boys in their family, in media and in their social networks, particularly among male peer groups. Most boys and men are keenly aware of being judged and

evaluated by the male peer group to live up to the “Man Box.” Given how prevalent gaming and video games are for young men, it is key to study male friendship, which is especially important to the study at hand. We examine displays of friendship in video game play, male interactions in online gaming spaces, and self-reported experiences of connection and friendship in these spaces, probing both how such spaces can be sites for reinforcing negative and stereotypical male norms, but also to see how they can be spaces of friendship, connection and positive emotional expression.

Interventions

Actions for Parents

- ▶ Recognize the importance of gaming spaces for connection, community, and friendship in the lives of boys and young men.
- ▶ Discuss bullying and harassment in online gaming spaces with your children to help them identify and intervene in this behavior. Ask them what they think about such occurrences, if it has happened to them, and what they think they can do to be part of the solution.
- ▶ Be an active participant in your younger children's gameplay. Watch them play. Play with them. Point out prejudiced language and biases in representation that are shaping their hearts and minds.
- ▶ Speak with your son(s) about toxic masculinity and the pressure to fit in the "Man Box." Speak with them about how these pressures surface in online gaming spaces and develop tools to navigate this environment with them. Ask them about moments when they have resisted such pressures, and tell them about your own, helping them see themselves as empowered to push back against harmful aspects of some gaming spaces.

Actions for Video Game Developers and Distributors

Another critical consideration is the gender and race representation within videogames within the context of who is creating these games. We should ensure that these stories are being told by game developers who themselves embody this kind of diversity.

The International Game Developer's Association's 2019 Developer Satisfaction Survey[1] states that in 2019, just 24% of game developers identified as female, and 3% non-binary. In addition, just 2% of game developers worldwide identified as Black.

If our goal is to better represent the countless stories about underrepresented identities, we need to create a better pipeline into the games industry for women, non-binary folks, and queer folks — especially people of color. After all, if they can see it, they can be it.

Most importantly though, as an industry, we need to support those underrepresented developers all the way through their careers so that they may rise to becoming the decision makers, reaching the level of creative directors, game leads, and studio heads. We need to empower - and crucially, financially support - those creators who are ready and eager to tell their stories.

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- ▶ Increase the number of playable female characters in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable characters of color in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable LGBTQIA+ characters in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable characters with observable disabilities in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable characters ages 50+ in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable characters with large body types in video games.
- ▶ Increase the number of playable characters who possess a wide range of emotions.
- ▶ Avoid gender, race/ethnic, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body size stereotypes when creating character options for personality, appearance, etc.
- ▶ Avoid the objectification of characters, including having them wear revealing clothing.
- ▶ Avoid gratuitous violence.

Actions for Streamers

- ▶ Be aware that any prejudiced language on your part inspires prejudice language from boys and men who are watching you play.
- ▶ Set the example for players. Intervene when you see or hear prejudiced language from other players and in the chat. Your voice carries considerable weight in shaping the culture of gameplay. Use it to create a positive culture of gameplay.
- ▶ Set an example in the industry. Become a spokesperson for healthy masculinity in gaming. Speak out about the pressures and harms of the “Man Box” and encourage other popular streamers to do the same.