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*The role of video games in the identity construction of the young men - a sociopedagogical study*

**Summary:**

The average young Pole spends 17 hours a week playing video games. This makes video games one of the most significant socialization agendas for youth and young adults. Despite this, over the past two decades, video games have been associated with demoralization, aggression, and violence perpetrated by young men, attributed to the socialization of aggressive masculinity patterns in both academic and journalistic discourse. Most publications on video games, including those in Polish pedagogy, focus on the negative effects of playing video games, resulting in a one-sided, incomplete view of this complex phenomenon. This might be due to the fact that studies often presented the shaping of individual identities according to the intentions of game creators or the content of the games themselves, without considering the individual, internal meanings which are read and assigned to video games by the players themselves. Therefore, considering the complex nature of interactivity, ergodicity, and immersion in the world of video games in shaping personal experiences, this dissertation aims to explore and describe the role of video games in the process of creating and assigning meanings to their own masculinity by young men.

This dissertation is divided into two parts - theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part analyzes the place of video games in pop culture, presents critical and apologetic positions towards both, and shows the place of both video games and pop culture in pedagogy. Then, a brief history of video games is presented, showing how they have become entangled in discourses of masculinity. Classical and current theories related to game studies and identity-forming processes such as ergodicity, immersion, and procedural rhetoric of games are also discussed. The last theoretical chapter is devoted to issues of masculinity, gender identity, and gender socialization.

The research had an exploratory nature and was conducted using a qualitative strategy. The method chosen was the problem-centered interview by Andreas Witzel. The group of surveyed men was purposefully selected and consisted of 12 individuals. The meanings assigned to masculinities were analyzed on two levels of gender socialization related to the styles of play preferred by players - competition and role-playing. The first, called by me vertical gender socialization, is associated with the competitive mode preferred by players. The second, called horizontal socialization in the dissertation, relates to the change in players' preferences from competition to role-playing and experiencing stories.

The results of the research indicate that players both read the meanings of masculinity from the characters in the games and assign masculinity meanings to their own avatars in the game. I provided specific meanings of masculinity indicated by my interviewees. The players I spoke with both read and assign meanings to masculinities, both in accordance with- and in opposition to the meanings contained in video games and the affordances they noticed - perceived, hidden, and unintended

possibilities, included in video games by the game creators. The analysis of the research results also indicated specific practices related to video games used by men to interpret the meanings of masculinity in a preferred, negotiated, and oppositional manner to the contained patterns of masculinity. The relations of these patterns of masculinity to each other and their relationships were also interpreted, which I presented in graphical representations.

The obtained data allowed for indicating pedagogical propositions for teachers and parents of young men. Aware of the limitations of my research, I presented pedagogical postulates and implications. I pointed to educational proposals - the development of digital competences for both parents and educators, which would enable them to become architects of the gaming capital of young men. This would allow for the expansion of young men's resources in contesting the hegemonic pattern of masculinity present not only in video games but also in the everyday lives of young men. The interest of educators and parents in video games, which constitute an important part of the socialization of young men, also presents a great opportunity to strengthen relationships between both parties. However, this change requires adaptation from both educators and parents (secondary media socialization), as well as educational institutions (amnesty of popular culture, recognition of the place of new technologies in pedagogy, and greater interest in non-formal education).

I also presented the dangers faced by young men playing video games: stereotype threat, increasing polarization of masculinity patterns, limiting oneself to informational bubbles (echo chambers), and building one's identity based on neoliberal individualism. The conducted research may serve as a stimulus for further scientific explorations and may also contribute to developing further practical suggestions.