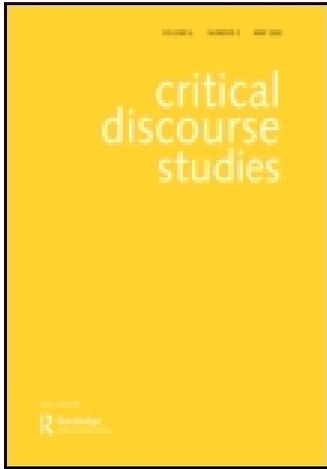


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'LOVE YOU GUYS (NO HOMO)'

Amanda Potts^a

^a FASS Building, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YD

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‘LOVE YOU GUYS (NO HOMO)’

How gamers and fans play with sexuality, gender, and Minecraft on YouTube

Amanda Potts

This paper explores queer discourses produced by a group of very popular professional video game players on social media, with particular focus on the impact that this has on the language and interactions of the fan community. Three data sets have been incorporated into this study, allowing for analysis of the central data, as well as consideration of the production and investigation of the reception of the discourse contained within. These include 63 YouTube videos, a corpus of 217,916 comments on these videos, and an interview with a gamer. While the majority of the discursive data in the YouTube videos features interactions between heterosexual males, the introduction of homosocial meaning and homosexual innuendo into videos gives the (largely adolescent, male) audience a unique opportunity to encounter, interpret, and experiment with queer discourse. It is found that the production of nonheteronormative discourses by prominent gamers online has contributed to the formation of a self-policing fan community that advocates acceptance and rejects bigotry.

KEYWORDS sexuality; gender; identity; masculinity; gaming; YouTube; Minecraft; fandom; virtual communities; corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

In the digital age, users of social media have the opportunity to craft the image of their identity presented to the larger public; ‘when we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass’ (Turkle, 1995, p. 177). Scholarship on identity construction in online games and other simulated places is on the rise, as these are sites where identities are negotiated and (re-)constructed (or mixed and matched), and therefore where existing sociocultural expectations might be transmuted as a gamer’s ‘physical appearance and physical environment can remain completely hidden “back-stage” so that only the desired “front-stage” avatar identity is visible’ (Cleland, 2009, p. 221). However, ‘it is still unclear whether this technology would ever have been able to foster a non-racist, non-sexist and non-classist cultural model’ (Baker & Potts, 2013, p. 187).

Multiplayer online video games are a form of social networking which exposes unprecedented numbers of gamers to scenarios, discourses, and identities far outside of their usual environments. Considering masculinities and femininities as communities of practice, these are also sites where ‘young people would learn what it is to be masculine or feminine ... through legitimate peripheral participation in these communities of

practice, while simultaneously taking part, as full participants, in their own child and adolescent masculinities and femininities' (Paechter, 2003, p. 70). In many ways, the internet is 'changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities' (Turkle, 2004, p. 19).

Unfortunately, 'While digital environments have the potential to overcome the heteronormative ignorance and social stigma perpetuated by those in power and by the pressure to conform to social norms, the problematic portrayals of sexual and gendered norms are continually rearticulated here' (Pulos, 2013, p. 79). Homophobic discourses have long been a method of policing masculinities (Plummer, 1999) by adding distance between anything perceived to be 'gay' or feminine. The massively multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* is infamously rife with heteronormative and homophobic discourses (Pulos, 2013). However, *World of Warcraft* also allows some gamers who might be questioning aspects of their identity a creative space in which to explore life as another sort of person – this might even transform their 'offline' identity, as is the case with some trans-gamers (Dale, 2014). Academic and anecdotal evidence is emerging in which individuals find immersive gaming environments inimitable as places in which to experiment with dimensions of their own identity (e.g. gender and sexuality) (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). Experimentation in gender performativity is sometimes even built into games themselves: Miller (2012) studied *Guitar Hero* and found that the game both cites and encourages cross-gender and 'camp' performances, supporting Butler's assertion that 'Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of the hegemonic, misogynistic culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilised through their parodic recontextualization' (1990, p. 138).

In this paper, I analyse the discourse of a group of professional video game players (or 'gamers'), detailing the ways in which they use 'video games and other forms of interactive digital media ... to draw attention to the unstable, performative nature of identity, through role-playing and character-customization features' (Miller, 2012, p. 142), particularly in *Minecraft* gameplay videos posted on YouTube. Uniquely, though the majority of the discursive data are drawn from interactions between heterosexual males, introduction of homosocial (Sedgwick, 1992) and homosexual innuendo into the 'canon' (or source text) has granted a unique opportunity for very large adolescent fan audiences to encounter, interpret, and experiment with queer discourse (Tosenberger, 2008) in the comments sections of these videos, making the storylines and players 'answerable to their own sexual and social desires' (Penley, 1997, pp. 2–3). To this end, research questions explored herein include: *Which discursive themes are most frequent in the construal of homosocial/homosexual meaning across multiple series of gameplay videos on YouTube? Which combinations of gamers are most and least productive of sexual innuendo, and what are some explanations for these differences? To what extent do fans challenge or emulate these motifs in their own discourse?*

As with Miller's work, 'my aim here is not to valorize these games and their players by identifying them as inherently subversive or resistant' (2012, p. 143), but rather to demonstrate how camp-inflected performances by some of YouTube's most subscribed gamers can stimulate progressive conversations about sexuality and gender performativity in very large communities of (largely adolescent, male) fans. First, however, I shall introduce the machinations through which these identities are performed.

1.1. *Minecraft*

Released in 2009, *Minecraft* is an independent game that has become an international phenomenon; nearly 54 million people have purchased the game, which is available to play on the PC as well as various gaming consoles (Farokhmanesh, 2014). It is a sandbox game, meaning that gamers can roam freely through a world that is automatically (and nearly endlessly) generated, modifying this world as they move through it by breaking and crafting components, or blocks. Sandbox games are unique in that gamers may design their own gameplay and choose their own objectives (Lundgren & Björk, 2012). The lack of linear gameplay progression, possible avoidance of fights with enemies, and the focus on construction and nurturing allows for a diverse array of gameplay styles.

A great deal of freedom is also afforded in the form of a given user's avatar. Unlike many games where characters are automatically fitted into the default avatar or given a choice from a limited range of tropes, characters can be designed just as easily as the rest of the world. This is noteworthy, because '[a]s a portal, alter ego or a form of prosthesis, the avatar not only operates as an online construction of self but also plays a part in the social fabric of the online game space' (Hjorth, 2011, p. 71). The character in *Minecraft* is intended to be generic and genderless ('The Player', 2014), though the 'skin' (or overlay on the character) can be changed. However, all *Minecraft* characters are the same height and weight, and are flat-chested. One example of a skin worn recently by YOGSCAST Sjin (whose gameplay discourse forms the locus of this study) appears in Figure 1.

Due to the set shape of *Minecraft* characters, gendering is optional, and largely a matter of clothing and hairstyle choice. The anatomically/visually 'hypermasculine' male and 'hypersexualised' female players prevalent in and stereotypical to many other games are not possible in this one. Gender is performed largely through the actions and

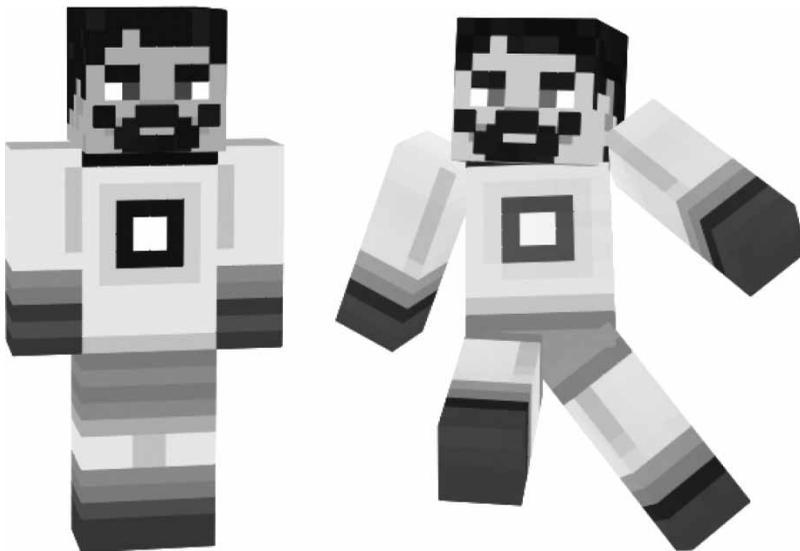


FIGURE 1

Downloadable facsimile of YOGSCAST Sjin's 'spaceman' skin. Reproduced with permission from Marcelo Saviski at novaskin.me

discourse of the gamer, though most members of the Yogscast tend to create human characters bearing some resemblance to their own 'real-life' appearance (with some exceptions, e.g. a walrus or a mouthless green entity in a business suit), and refer to characters using gendered pronouns corresponding to gamer identity.

1.2. YouTube

In the Statistics page published by YouTube (2014), it is stated that each month, the site registers more than one billion unique user visits and over six billion hours of video are watched; every minute, 100 hours of video are uploaded. The website also has incredible reach: '80% of YouTube traffic comes from outside the US' and '[a]ccording to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more US adults ages 18–34 than any cable network' (YouTube, 2014). Web-based entertainment is growing in popularity, narrowing the gap between producers and consumers, allowing for both mass production and mass participation (Burgess & Green, 2009).

People from across the world can register a YouTube account and begin to upload videos instantaneously. Likewise, users can 'subscribe' to an account (receiving updates on channel activity) and interact with specific videos, for instance, by commenting. A channel's network of subscribers, or a regular core group of users commenting on videos with certain shared features, can form an online community, which Rotman and Preece define as 'a group (or various subgroups) of people, brought together by a shared interest, using a virtual platform, to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members, while cultivating communal culture and adhering to specific norms' (2010, p. 320).

1.2.1. YouTube monetisation and the Yogscast network The YouTube partner program, created in 2007, allows content creators to monetise their videos by enabling advertisements. At the time of writing, 'more than a million creators from over 30 countries around the world [are] earning money from their YouTube videos' and 'thousands of channels are making six figures a year' (YouTube, 2014).

All of the YouTube videos analysed within this study were produced by one network (the Yogscast¹) and feature one common individual from this network (Sjin²). According to their website, 'The Yogscast are a network of talented and entertaining YouTube producers committed to bringing the best in gaming entertainment to the world. The main Yogscast YouTube channel is the largest in the UK, being the first ever UK channel to hit one billion video views' (Yogscast, n.d.). Seventeen individual Yogscast channels currently exist on YouTube in addition to the main channel. Most of the Yogscast play in regular pairs, with popular games and partnerships developing into long-running series of videos comprising dozens of hours of gameplay.

As professional content creators, the Yogscast generate gameplay videos that both: 1) showcase video games and 2) entertain an audience. Their most popular series (on the basis of views) are Minecraft videos, likely due to the game's popularity in addition to the creativity and novelty inherent in a sandbox – no subscriber's randomly generated world will be like the one depicted. Though Minecraft is not specifically a 'roleplaying game', Lundgren and Björk (2012, p. 119) point out that roleplaying 'can be done in any game, e.g. pretending to be more attached to a game's outcome than one actually is, just for the enjoyment of others and oneself'. Likewise, even if storytelling is not actively supported

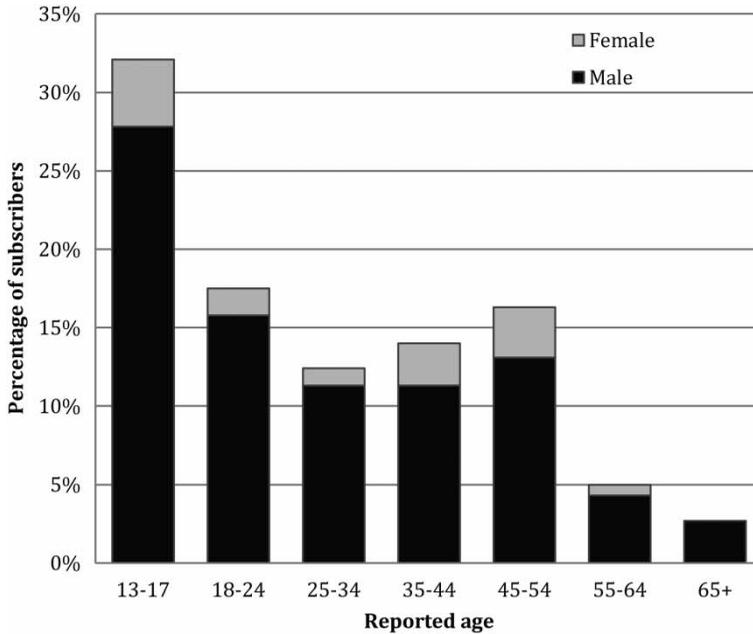


FIGURE 2
Proportions of Sjin's subscribers by reported age and gender

in a game, 'any player may engage in it as a commentator of the ongoing activity' (Lundgren & Björk, 2012, p. 119). While much of the entertainment value of Yogscast videos is derived from their specific style of in-game roleplaying/storytelling, this is also the method by which identity is constructed and/or portrayed.

1.2.2. Yogscast Sjin With around 1.8 million subscribers, YOGSCAST Sjin is one of the largest individual gaming YouTube channels in the UK and the second most subscribed Yogscast channel. This channel is maintained and produced by self-described 'Personality/Entertainer' Paul 'Sjin' Sykes. At the time of writing, Sjin (as he prefers to be called) is 30 years old and resides in Bristol, England; he identifies himself as heterosexual and is in a relationship with a woman.

To enhance understanding of his viewership, Sjin additionally provided overview Analytics of subscribers to his channel following the interview. The demographic of Sjin's regular audience is decidedly young and male; approximately 50% of subscribers report their age between 13 and 24 (around one-third of subscribers are between 13 and 17), and 85% of subscribers report their gender as male³ (Figure 2).

Sjin is fully aware of the adolescent age of his average subscriber. This may contribute in no small way to his fans' impressionability and veneration:

Author: How do you think your fans see you?

Sjin: ... There's a degree of celebrity to what I've become, and that can distort people's opinion of you. A lot of people kind of lose touch with the idea of you being a normal person and in some ways revere you, look up to you ...

2. Description of the Data

This study is triangulated, meaning that analysis is performed upon several datasets, and discussion is based upon findings common or distinct between these. I have chosen to make use of a triangulated study integrating the voices from various areas of a virtual community because ‘culture is what we are and what we do, and understanding the varying ways *all* participations are productive is one of our best tools in making sense of what emerges’ (Taylor, 2006, p. 154). Three sources of data have been used: 63 YouTube videos, a corpus of 217,916 comments on these videos, and a 40-minute interview with a gamer featured in these videos.

2.1. YouTube Videos

At the time of collection, Sjin’s channel featured 11 Minecraft Let’s Play or player-versus-player playlists, containing a total of 370 videos. The particular 63 YouTube videos forming the basis of analysis were selected to include both variety and quantity in the sample. They are drawn from eight distinct playlists featuring other players in gameplay; playlists predominantly starring Sjin in isolation were disregarded. These videos were published between 17 February 2012 and 31 October 2013.

For the most part, the videos represent the first 10 episodes of long-running series (*Minecraft with Sips*, *Tekkit*, *Diamonds in the Rough*, *SkyBlocks*, and *Dirt Factory*), as this format is much more prevalent and popular, leading to greater long-term fan engagement. However, one adventure map (*Aevium’s Manor*), one player-versus-player challenge (*Survival Games*), and one mini-series (*The Apprentice*) are also included for differing gameplay style as well as a matter of parity: *Aevium’s Manor* has one female and two male gamers, whereas *The Apprentice* and *Survival Games* are two rare series in which Sjin partners exclusively with female gamers. (The Yogscast is predominantly male, and male/male partnerships are much more the norm.)

Series included are listed in Table 1, ordered by date range. Long-running series with no intended outcome garner the most comments, with partnerships between Sjin and Sips, and Sjin and Duncan attracting the most comments per video. However, it is the videos where Sjin and Sips play together which consistently contain the highest number of sexual references and innuendos, a point which we will return to shortly. Instances of innuendo or queer discourse have been transcribed and categorised (see Section 4.1). As no aspects of conversation analysis or sociophonetic analysis are featured in this work, transcripts are broad and glossed.

2.2. YouTube Comments

Comments from each of the videos indicated from the series in Table 1 were collected using a PHP script scraper that interfaced with the YouTube API⁴. Output contains the text of the comment as well as further metadata including unique comment identifier, commenter name, and date of comment. However, usernames will be omitted from this study to enhance anonymity; the text of the comments in isolation will be utilised as the corpus of data representing viewer reaction to the video content.

At the time of collection (11 March 2014), a total of 217,916 comments were posted on the 63 videos under analysis, averaging 3459 comments per video. Comments have been compiled both in their entirety and by playlist, forming a main corpus of 2,872,447 words, comprising eight subcorpora.

TABLE 1

Detailed overview of YouTube videos sampled

Series name	Dates	No. of videos sampled	Partner (gender)	Total comments (average/video)	No. of sexual references/innuendos
Minecraft with Sips – season one	17/02/2012 – 07/03/2012	10 (first)	Sips (m)	21,204 (2120.4)	36
Survival games – team Sjin and MintyMinute	27/05/2012 – 29/05/2012	2 (all)	Minty (f)	5122 (2561.0)	0
Tekkit with Sips and Sjin	01/07/2012 – 16/07/2012	10 (first)	Sips (m) Rythian (m)	51,092 (5109.2)	21
Minecraft: diamonds in the rough with Sjin and Nilesy	23/07/2012 – 03/10/2012	10 (first)	Nilesy (m)	14,317 (1431.7)	8
SkyBlocks [feat. Sjin]	07/06/2013 – 09/07/2013	10 (first)	Duncan (m)	66,123 (6612.3)	4
The apprentice: Sjin's farm	25/06/2013 – 16/08/2013	7 (all)	Kim (f)	19,015 (2716.4)	4
Sipsco Dirt Factory	15/09/2013 – 03/10/2013	10 (first)	Sips (m)	38,162 (3816.2)	13
Minecraft Halloween – Aevium's Manor	22/10/2013 – 31/10/2013	4 (all)	Duncan (m) Kim (f)	2881 (720.3)	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>17/02/2012 – 31/10/2013</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>4 (m) 2 (f)</i>	<i>217,916 (3459.0)</i>	<i>96</i>

2.3. Interview – 4 February 2014

The final point of data in this triangulated study is an interview with the prevalent YouTube gamer Sjin, whose discourse in videos and perception by fandom is the focus of this analysis. The interview was conducted remotely on 4 February 2014 over Skype, lasted approximately 40 minutes, and followed a structured set of questions concerning Sjin's persona and participation in the Yogscast, his gaming habits (specifically to do with Minecraft), and his use of sexual innuendo in YouTube videos.

3. Tool and Method

Given the large sample size of the YouTube comment data, a tool and method allowing for quantitative analysis has necessarily been employed. SketchEngine⁵, developed by a team led by Adam Kilgarriff, is a powerful tool used mainly in lexicographical studies (Kilgarriff, Rychly, Smrz, & Tugwell, 2004). This corpus query system allows users to load their own data and automatically applies lemmatisation and part-of-speech tagging.

Searching for an item allows users to build word sketches, or 'one-page automatic, corpus-based summaries of a word's grammatical and collocational behaviour' (Kilgarriff et al., 2004, p. 105). If words regularly appear in close context, and this relationship of co-occurrence is statistically significant, they are said to be collocates. SketchEngine uses the association score logDice to calculate collocation on scalable corpus sizes; as a rough guide, a logDice score of 1 indicates that items collocate twice as often as might be expected, whereas a logDice score of 7 indicates 100 times frequent collocation. During use, I have retained the default settings (minimum similarity between cluster items: 0.15, minimum score for unary relations: 5.0) to obtain a mixture of closed class and open class results in the WordSketch.

SketchEngine also contains several reference corpora, or large, representative collections of text. To better conceptualise the YouTube comments corpus as a whole, I have compared it to the UKWaC, a corpus of over two billion words of words gathered from the web and therefore representing web-based genres, e.g. blogs and forum posts. The size of UKWaC and its generic composition make this the ideal reference corpus to derive key terms from a modern corpus of YouTube comments without being unduly influenced by features of internet language.

4. Analysis

4.1. YouTube Videos

Sjin's high frequency of gay and sexual innuendo in YouTube gaming videos is acknowledged by other members of the Yogscast in various videos, by fans in various social media outlets, and by the gamer himself:

Author: I want to ask about the way that you interact with other men in Minecraft videos, specifically with gay and sexual innuendo. Before I contacted you

- about this study, were you conscious of making these sorts of jokes more than might be expected or more than other people necessarily do?
- Sjin: Yeah, without a doubt. I mean, I've got friends who are gay who mentioned it. Some take slight offense because they know I'm not really gay ... I think some people perceive it as me making fun of homosexuality.
- Author: Okay, but you don't see it that way?
- Sjin: I could see why someone would see it that way. But the truth is, the reason I started doing it is because it made people feel uncomfortable, I thought that was funny ... I try not to overthink where the routes of humour are. It's potentially offensive, so if people are offended by it, it's definitely a very, very, very small percentage of people ...
- Author: Do you think that kind of humour has added to your popularity or detracted from it? Or not had any effect whatsoever?
- Sjin: Honestly, probably to some degree detracted, because people under the age of 15–16 are not very accepting of that sort of thing. Sexuality is a very confusing sort of thing for them. So it's not really something they kind of understand or appreciate ... Like when I was young, 'gay' was a word we threw around if something wasn't very good. Like, 'Oh, that's gay.'

The exact frequency and nature of these are matters of investigation. References to sex/sexuality/gender/relationships in each playlist were counted and categorised. Categories included the following (listed in order of frequency of occurrence, from most frequent to least frequent):

- (1) *Sexual innuendo*: Double entendre (usually focussed around the name of an in-game items) that could refer to a sexual/illicit activity
- (2) *Illicit/sexual activities*: Direct reference (without innuendo) to such acts
- (3) *Nudity/clothing*: Allusion to a character's (lack of) clothing
- (4) *Romance*: References to romantic relationships, without a sexual element
- (5) *Infidelity*: Allusion to unfaithfulness in a perceived romantic relationship
- (6) *Compliments*: Commendations of a non-sexual nature
- (7) *Homemaking*: References to a domestic relationship or activities
- (8) *Gender play*: Instances in which a male gamer assigns himself female characteristics or naming strategies, or instances in which a gamer's gender is inaccurately referred to by another gamer
- (9) *Fan fiction references*: Meta-discourse regarding fan reception to videos

These nine categories were not evenly distributed across the playlists. Videos in which Sjin partners with Sips draw more heavily on the themes of Sexual Innuendo and Illicit/Sexual Activities, whereas *Skyblocks* (with Duncan) is more skewed towards domesticated discussion, with categories such as Homemaking and Romance. Discussion of Nudity/Clothing features in the top categories of half of the playlists under analysis, notably all containing at least one male collaborator.

4.1.1. *Sexual innuendo and nudity/clothing* The most frequent method of incorporating adult themes or meanings is through the use of sexual innuendo. This is often

with creative wordplay involving in-game items such as: meat, wood, bone, stick, [mine] shaft, and sword. Ownership and consumption of items form a common theme, and in these cases, sexual innuendo is almost exclusively homosexual in nature. For instance, gamers discuss 'giving [one another] wood', and sitting on 'bones', e.g.:

Sjin: If you've got any spare food, I could eat your meat.

Throughout the corpora, the male gamers refer to their own penises – and the penises of others – as weapons, using a linguistic tactic that allow for both in-game item euphemism and virility metaphors that construct a sense of dominance or masculinity in contrast to the surrounding discourse.

Sips: Do you – do you want to look at my red tool when it's done? ... <equips a red sword in his character's hand>

Sjin: Oh, I can see your red – your red weapon right now.

Sips: Yeah?

Sjin: Why's it red?

Sips: It's in my inventory, that's why. It's because it's sheathed ... It's the hue on the inside of the sheathing, makes it red.

References to anal sex also occur in male/male discursive contexts, though this is framed as a scenario that would be surprising and unwelcome:

Sjin: ... the last thing we want is for something to just wander into our mine and just take us from behind in the shaft.

Sips: Oh yeah, yeah. I don't want to be taken from behind while we're digging out the shaft.

Sjin: No. No.

In some instances, the innuendo is averted or negated in the final turn of the exchange. This is often achieved by Sips refocussing on the task at hand, or Sjin delivering a nonsexual punchline highlighting the dual meaning of the double entendre (as in the example below), perhaps in response to Sips' disgust and failure to volley. This illustration also indicates the level of roleplaying and storytelling involved in Minecraft videos.

Sjin: I'm going to need to wash these clothes. I am dripping in sweat. That was an insane night, Sips. Some of the things you did with that wooden pickaxe ...

Sips: Ugh!

Sjin: I would have never thought that you could convert it into a banjo with a few spider strings and play some original bluegrass. That was fantastic.

Positive evaluation of a male character's nudity (or a 'skin' designed to look less clothed) by another male gamer is another popular reference to sexuality:

Sips: ... So that's – yeah, I'm rocking that today ... And you're rocking next to nothing, which is also nice.

Though characters appear in their selected skins, they are also given in-game items as clothing which serve as armour. These are added on top of their player skins. Sjin shows creativity

in referring to these as a full outfit, again positively appraising male posterior nudity. Rythian counters this with an intertextual reference to a hyper-masculine male player from another video game by way of constructing and reaffirming his own masculinity.

Rythian: I got boots and a hat.

Sjin: You'll look so cool with your ass exposed.

Rythian: I'm ... you know, if it worked for Rammstein in *Final Fantasy Tactics*, it works for me.

Intertextual references are also incorporated and contributed to in-game discussion of Sjin's performance of gender and sexuality. In the excerpt below, Duncan refers to Sjin as the 'king of the fairies' in an intertextual discussion about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this case, Duncan makes use of the slang term 'fairy' – meaning an effeminate (gay) male – to question Sjin's sexuality. Sjin does not deny the innuendo but does refocus upon the original intertextual target:

Sjin: Oberon would be proud of that bad boy ...

Duncan: Who's that?

Sjin: You know, the king of the fairies.

Duncan: I thought you were the king of the fairies.

Sjin: No <scoffs> OBERON from *Midsummer Night's Dream* ...

These references might have been inaccessible (or indecipherable) to some of Sjin's audience, given their use of double meanings, intertextual reference, and slang (e.g. 'tool' for penis, 'fairy' for effeminate man). However, instances from the next category – Romance – are more oblique.

4.1.2. *Romance and infidelity* Items categorised Romance contain reference to a romantic (but not necessarily sexual) relationship. With only one exception (Duncan inviting Sjin to 'cuddle up' in SkyBlocks), turns falling into the Romance category happen exclusively in playlists featuring Sjin and Sips. These take two forms. The first is physical displays of romance, where one gamer details some form of non-sexual intimacy, e.g. holding hands, dancing, looking into one another's eyes, etc. The more common form, however, is emotional romance (or 'bromance', a nonsexual romance between 'brothers'). In these cases, gamers express psychological, homosocial (Kiesling, 2005) care, affection, or love for one another, as in the illustrative example below.

Sjin: Do you want some steak?

Sips: No, I've got plenty of steak, thanks. Thanks for offering, though. You're so considerate. You're really the most considerate guy I've ever met.

Sjin: It's because I care, Sips. I really care about you.

This may also extend to in-game discourse on the topic of marriage (e.g. Sips discusses crafting an engagement ring for Sjin) and infidelity (e.g. bringing enemy mobs 'home' to share the communal bed 'without protection').

4.1.3. *Homemaking and gender play* In videos where Sjin performs with Sips, Rythian, or Duncan, patterns of references and creativity I have categorised as 'Homemaking' or 'Gender Play' occur, often in tandem. As Minecraft gameplay involves construction of a base, some element of domestic discussion is inevitable. However, Sips and Sjin allude to a romantic element in their domestic relationship, for instance, in discussing hanging a mirror above the bed, or placing the beds next to one another, forming a 'double' bed as opposed to separate singles, or bunks:

Sips: This, this is where we started off. This is our hovel. Uh, as you can see here, we slept in these beds, which are side-by-side for some reason.

Rythian: I see, and they're very close to each other, but that's perfectly normal ... I guess ... Just for body warmth.

In a related pattern, gamers sometimes refer to themselves or to one another using female pronouns or nomination strategies, indicating flexibility in portrayal of gender. Below, Sjin refers to Sips as a housewife (gender inversion), then self-corrects to househusband. However, Sips repeats (and therefore endorses) the inverted 'housewife' label:

Sjin: I come home to a cooked meal. You're the best housewife – househusband a guy could ask for, Sips. Truly.

Sips: In the land! I'm the best housewife in the land!

In one episode from the Tekkit playlist, Sjin claims to always carry his 'pocket GameGirl' (a play on the name of the GameBoy handheld gaming console). In another, gamers insinuate that Duncan wears really big beige ladies' underpants – whether this is a reference to cross-dressing or to gender play is unclear.

4.1.4. *Interaction with female gamers* Three of the playlists included in the corpora feature female gamers: Minty partners with Sjin in *Survival Games*; Kim partners with Sjin in *The Apprentice*, and with both Duncan and Sjin in *Aevium's Manor*. Videos belonging to these playlists contain markedly fewer sexual references and innuendos than videos with all-male casts.

This lack is particularly striking in the case of the *Survival Games* videos, where Sjin partners with Minty Minute (Anya Ferris). This playlist contains no sexual innuendo or references, though these might have been expected to arise given the pair's rapport – in several videos and fan FAQs, Sjin and Minty (or Paul and Anya) stated that they were dating.

Author: When I was looking at [your videos], I didn't find any sexual innuendo with Kim and Minty (so, the girls) ... Do you think that girls are kind of off-limits?

Sjin: Oh, uh, not so much ... [Anya] was just very, very nervous because she doesn't really do this very often at all ... When someone is new and nervous ... you don't rely on them to have bounce-off ... I tailor jokes towards whoever else I'm with ...

- Author: It could have gone the other way, where you felt that you had to kind of play it up because she was kind of playing it down, for instance, to ... keep the entertainment factor up ...
- Sjin: Again, doing it with Anya is difficult because she's not really a performer. With Kim there was a lot of innuendo, but for the most part because she was heavy on it, I kind of played the part of playing it down or highlighting where she was being a bit ... you know. I'm not sure why, honestly. Very little gets overthought, it's all just a reaction to the situation.

While Anya's inexperience could have indeed contributed to the pair's dynamic, interactions with Kim (a more seasoned gamer) do show skew that could be more readily linked to gender. In all-male episodes, Sjin is the most likely to discuss taboo topics. Male gamer Sips was also observed to actively initiate sexual innuendo, which was nearly always escalated by Sjin (showing 'bounce-off'). However, when female gamer Kim initiated, the attempt was ignored, as in the excerpt below:

- Kim: I just thought being on the farm would be nice and simple ... I didn't realise it had all this power generating and seed oiling and nut ... grabbing
<snorts>
- Sjin: Well, that's the thing, really. When you go onto a farm, it's kind of all simple to start with ...

Other such attempts by Kim are explicitly marked as deviant or inappropriate, as in the excerpt below. When Kim's insinuation is challenged by Sjin's retort, she averts the innuendo in the final turn of the exchange, marking the double meaning (as in Section 4.1.1).

- Sjin: You don't like melons. I've got ... a carrot. Do you like carrots?
- Kim: Mmm ... no.
- Sjin: I've got ... hm. What else have I got?
- Kim: I think you know what I want, Sjin.
- Sjin: I beg your pardon?
- Kim: You know my favourite rare fruit ... PUMPKINS!

Abundance of sexual innuendo in male/male interactions combined with lack of participation in taboo talk with female gamers likely contributes to prevalent fan confusion over Sjin's sexuality. This ambiguity is translated into fan fiction, a fact directly addressed by gamers in videos.

4.1.5. *References to fan fiction* Though not among the top categories named above, *Diamonds in the Rough* is the only playlist to contain references to fan fiction. This may be largely due to partner Nilesy's heightened awareness of his position as the object of fan attention, and his understanding of the translation process between video discourse and fan uptake. In the excerpt below, Sjin's escalation of discourse into taboo territory is immediately halted by Nilesy:

- Nilesy: Oh yeah? You want to play punchy-doodles? <punching> ...

- Sjin: C'mon, keep punching. Punch my bum.
 Nilesy: No! <laughing> Oh my god!
 Sjin: <laughing>
 Nilesy: Oh my god. I'm going to be reading about this on Tumblr for days now, Sjin, Jesus.

Fan art featuring Yogscast members is very popular on the microblogging site Tumblr, which specialises in image and text sharing. Fan-made images and stories are 'tagged' with gamer names, allowing them to be easily found by other fans and by the gamers themselves, most of whom maintain their own Tumblr accounts. These fall broadly under 'slash' – or a sort of fan fiction traditionally placing male characters in romantic or erotic situations (Penley, 1992). One archetypal example of slash is the pairing between Kirk/Spock (K/S) of *Star Trek*, though this differs significantly in that homoerotic bonds are said to be *latent*, with this sexual subtext being *constructed* by fans (Woledge, 2005). Fans of the YOGSCAST Sjin YouTube account are exposed to – and respond to – overt (homo-) erotic innuendo on Tumblr, often quite explicitly. Sjin regularly 'reblogs' (or reposts) this fan-generated artwork on his own Tumblr account.

- Author: On your Tumblr you ... reblog suggestive artwork and you've said that you're happy to do so as long as it's not NSFW⁶-
 Sjin: Sexual.
 Author: Yeah, not too suggestive. And I think that a lot of people might have been threatened ... or choose to ignore that part of their fandom. So can you say a bit more about why you choose to support people's efforts in that direction?
 Sjin: I think that you wouldn't really think anything wrong of somebody reblogging artwork if it was me and a woman kissing (if they were single). So I don't really like the idea that the other person being a man is strictly off-limits ... I can appreciate that people have gone to the effort to create something and then upload it because they're proud of it ... if something's really good and I'm really impressed, I'll reblog it ... Obviously there's a line if anything sexual is happening, but kissing is fine, and man-and-wife style joking around, perhaps me in a dress ... or playing a housewife or something like that ...

Though he identifies as straight, Sjin is quite accepting of his fans' appropriation of him as queer (DeAngelis, 2001, p. 181). This has led to a proliferation of various configurations of fan fiction, as explored in Section 4.2.3.

4.2. User Comments

The next section of analysis is a reception study based on a corpus of 217,916 comments (2,872,447 words) posted on the videos previously discussed. Analysis and discussion are focussed on meanings made in patterns responsive or congruent to those described in the videos, above. These comments are representative of community reaction

to the discourse of Sjin and his partners, giving us a glimpse into the effect of homosocial/homosexual gameplay narrative on Yogscast audiences.

To gain an understanding into commenter appraisal of Sjin, I generated a WordSketch of his name. The sections that follow are guided by interesting features arising from the WordSketch categories of colligation/collocation resultant.

4.2.1. Overall appraisal of Sjin The most basic inquest into commenter construal of Sjin is attribution. More simply: which adjectives most often appear as pre- or post-modifiers of his name? Top results appear in [Table 2](#).

Results can be sorted into semantic categories. Commenters frequently and positively appraise Sjin’s gameplay or personality (*awesome, hilarious, amazing, funny*) and his appearance or demeanour (*adorable, cute*). These are markers of widespread community approval and appreciation, indicative of the presence of a fandom. They also discuss his nationality (e.g. *British, American, English*), a feature related to his *voice*, addressed below.

Notably, the second highest score is a remark upon Sjin’s sexuality: *gay*. There are 956 instances of *gay* in the entire corpus. In a thinned sample of 100 instances, only four instances (4%) of *gay* are used in what might be deemed a generally pejorative sense (not as an attribute of ‘sex’ or a human agent). Most instances occur in the immediate context of the name of a gamer, rather than being aimed at a fellow commenter. This particular collocation arises due to a variety of comments both questioning and remarking upon Sjin’s sexuality. Though some comments ask the question obliquely (e.g. A), the more prominent form makes use of hedging devices or further explanation (e.g. B). In additional concordance lines (where *gay* collocates with *they, Sips, and he*), the relevance of the query is often called into question (see D below).

- A: Is Sjin gay?
 B: is sjin gaynot to be offensive i jus wanna kno its fine if he is
 C: No, Sjin is not gay.
 D: Does anyone care if they are gay anyway?

Some probable sources of this line of questioning can be traced in verb collocates of *Sjin* behaving as a subject. Many high-scoring collocates can be related to gameplay (e.g. *say, be, do, build*), though others are linked to identity construal (*have, sound, look, date*) ([Table 3](#)).

TABLE 2
 Top adjectival collocates of subject ‘Sjin’

adj subject of	Instances	Score
awesome	65	9.52
gay	29	9.15
british	13	8.75
adorable	8	8.63
american	12	8.55
english	11	8.37
hilarious	10	8.28
amazing	12	7.82
cute	6	7.76
funny	20	7.72

TABLE 3
Top verbal collocates of subject 'Sjin'

Subject of	Instance	Score
say	465	9.98
have	554	9.31
be	2384	9.21
do	423	8.48
sound	88	8.37
look	96	8.02
build	83	7.97
date	56	7.93

Sjin is construed as *having* a girlfriend (see E) or a nice voice (F). Note that in line F, the commenter includes a disclaimer about their own sexuality – a pattern explored further in the next section. In particular, Sjin's voice and the way that he *sounds* are among the most frequently cited indicators of his unclear sexuality. This is infrequently conveyed through the use of derogatory language (see line G). More commonly (see lines H and I), Sjin is said to 'sound gay', a statement which is both ambiguous (is it his voice or his discourse that is 'gay?') and stereotyping (what does it mean to 'sound gay', anyway?). Commenters (presumably fans) modify these observations by offering qualified praise (Bench, 2013, p. 137) – they 'like it' (line H), or 'still love him' (line I, noting the misspelled contrastive conjunction 'but' indicating that love might be unexpected given this information).

- E: I know you're trolling but you know Sjin's got a (very attractive) girlfriend right?
- F: Sjin has such a relaxing, adorable voice, I'm sorry, I'm not gay it just that its just so irresistible to listen to.
- G: Sjin sounds bent as fuck
- H: sjin sounds gay. but i like it
- I: sjin sounds gay, buh i still love him

Throughout the comments, users regularly cite the fact that Sips has a wife and child as evidence of his heterosexuality. Sjin, who is unmarried and not a father, is lacking the same community-endorsed markers of heterosexuality, despite having a girlfriend from the Yogscast for much of the period of data collection. Commenters state their support despite the ambiguity; in line J, the commenter declares, 'To each his own'. Very interestingly, a large number of comments also challenge the preconception that heterosexual marriage precludes a queer identity (see line K), which can be considered quite progressive in YouTube comments.

- J: Sips is not gay my friend, I'm pretty sure he's married and has a child. To a woman if that wasn't clear enough already! In terms of Sjin, no idea to be honest! To each his own I say, I just laugh as well as sometimes cringe at their sexual innuendos XD
- K: : i know sips and sjin aren't gay, but just because you are married to a women doesnt mean you are stright

In these contexts, users appear to be reacting to the content of the discourse (the nature and frequency of taboo subjects) as well as the delivery (e.g. gamers' voices), and express confusion regarding the identity of characters constructed in-game (personas) versus the 'actual' identity of gamers existing outside of Minecraft. Sjin has an awareness of negative reactions to the discursive (homosexual) content of his videos as well an understanding of the ambiguity around his relationships with gaming partners, most notably Sips, with whom he shares the highest frequency of sexual innuendos.

- Author: ... have you ever experienced flaming or trolling⁷ related to that?
- Sjin: To me putting on a slightly camp persona? ... Yeah, of course. I mean you see in YouTube comments all the time, like somebody will just put 'Oh this is gay' etc. And you can turn around and say, 'Well, yeah. Pretty much. It's quite gay.'
- Author: I see more comments like, 'Are they gay?' ...
- Sjin: Yeah that's true. There's a lot of confusion. People seem to think that me and Sips are a married couple or something ...

Some commenters explicitly label this sort of homosocial behaviour – calling it 'borderline homosexual friendship' (line L) or a 'bromance' (line M). All instances positively appraise camp-inflected performances when underlying heterosexuality might be inferred or possible (line N). More broadly speaking, however, this thread of comments questions the heteronormative assumption that very close male friendships are 'gay', an unexpected and welcome result.

- L: Borderline homosexual friendships are the best kind of friendships. You don't have to be gay to be best of friends. There's nothing wrong about being gay, of course.
- M: they aren't gay, they just have a really strong bromance xD
- N: can't tell if sjin and sips are gay lovers or just comfortable with their sexuality

Items under the 'Possessed' category in the WordSketch (e.g. *voice, name, accent, face*) indicate strong commenter interest in details of Sjin's 'offline' life. Commenters who are unaware of these details are distanced from the Yogscast fan community ('Yognaughts').

- O: You don't deserve to watch the yogscast if you haven't even seen Sjin's face! LOL You just failed soooooo hard!
- P: Idiot. Sjin's name is Paul and Sips's name is Chris, youre not a yognaught if you dont know that.

This level of probing interest in gamer identity shows that fans are continually endeavouring to build knowledge and intimacy with the objects of their fandom. However, attempts to reconcile points of personality or identity in perceived 'offline' and 'online' performances (such as matching online/offline appearance, personality traits, sexuality, and relationship status) indicate that many fans accept performances which undermine expected gender/sexuality roles, but might be much less tolerant of actual subversion of heteronormativity.

4.2.2. 'No homo' This hypothesis is further evidenced in the frequency of the phrase 'no homo' in the comments corpus. In a previous study on this phrase, Brown (2011, p. 301) stated that 'in saying something that the speaker might think will be understood as "homosexual", the added "no homo" disqualifies such a misunderstanding for the audience'.

In Minecraft Season 1, the earliest playlist to be analysed in this study, use of 'no homo' is largely limited to commentary on Sjin's accent or voice, shown earlier to be a prevalent topic of conversation. In illustration B below, the two 'guys' (males, Sips and Sjin) are grouped and labelled 'cute', a diminutive which could refer to demeanour or appearance, perhaps compelling the commenter to preface the statement with 'no homo', fearing that 'a heterosexual man cannot be intimate with or complimentary to another man without societal intervention – an intervention that would potentially posit both as homosexual' (Brown, 2011, p. 307).

- A: I love acent no homo
 B: Sjin's voice is sexy, no homo.
 C: your voice is awesome ... no homo
 D: No homo, but these guys are so cute.

Survival Games (where Sjin partners with Minty) is the only playlist where 'yes/no homo' statements appear below videos featuring a female. Three cases nested within a single conversation intriguingly show the gendered quality of 'no homo'. Commenter E compliments Minty's voice (as opposed to Sjin's) but uses the same 'no homo' formula, but receives several replies moderating the phrase's use. Though it transpires that commenter E is female (like Minty), the reaction of fellow community members (e.g. 'No homo was not necessary') indicates that: (1) commenters are assumed to be male until explicitly proclaimed female and (2) 'no homo' is reserved for male/male commentary

- E: minty has such a cute voice. :) (no homo)
 F: ... She's a girl, why would it be homo ... ?
 G: No homo was not necessary
 H: minty is a girl :|
 E: and so am I, hence saying 'no homo'

Indeed, all four instances of 'no homo' on the SkyBlocks playlist appear in tandem with expressing love for the gamers (males, Duncan and Sjin). This indicates that viewers feel a very strong affinity for the gamers, but that they feel reservations in using the term 'love' to describe this, should they be perceived as communicating romantic (homosexual) affection – as opposed to fan admiration – by either the gamers or the greater community. Even more generally, the pattern suggests that '[y]oung men do experience and value intimacy but refrain from labeling it as such due to the fear of homophobia' (Evers, 2010; cited in Thurnell-Read, 2012, p. 253). This contrasts (or is in reaction) to the gamers' own free usage of 'love' in-game.

- I: I love u guys (no homo) but u r such noobs at this.
 J: I luv u sjin (no homo)

The final male/male playlist appearing chronologically in my corpus (Dirt Factory, with males Sips and Sjin) shows the greatest variation of 'no homo' usage. Commenter K below begins a thread with a compliment familiar from both previous male/male playlists (Minecraft Season 1 and SkyBlocks), but this is followed by negation; commenter L responds, '(yes homo)'. This shows that there is still tension in what is allowable in the homosocial constraints of community interaction. Commenter M refers to the chemistry between the two as being 'no homo, but they may joke about homo', going a step beyond disqualification of personal misunderstanding to pre-emptively disqualify misunderstandings regarding the nature of the relationship between Sips and Sjin, stating that this is just joking. In the last excerpt, Commenter N shows additional creativity by using a variant of the 'love' format, modifying this by stating that there is 'A tiny bit of homo', perhaps repurposing this frequent phrase by way of invoking an ironic index of community membership.

- K: The funniest 2 people alive LOVE YOU GUYS<3 (no homo)
 L: (yes homo)
 M: Sips and Sjin are incredibly awesome as a pair. They have a perfect kind of chemistry (no homo, but they may joke about homo) going on. There's not really much room at all for a third person.
 N: At first, I thought you were kind of beating a dead horse with this series but ... I'm loving it so far I <3 you Sips/Sjin (A tiny bit of homo)

Within the comments corpus, there are signs that the phrase 'no homo' is falling out of favour within the larger community, with one commenter stating that 'saying no homo makes it homo'. This indicates that marking a compliment for (heteronormative) sexuality indeed calls attention to another possible intent.

4.2.3. *Shipping/one true pairing* The 'and/or' section of the WordSketch – indicating words found alongside *Sjin*, broken by conjunctions or in running lists – (expectedly) exposes the names of several other members of the Yogscast (e.g. *sip*, *Duncan*, *rythian*, *nilesy*, *Kim*). However, analysis of the resulting concordance lines does reveal an interesting pattern in commentary: shipping.

A form of fan fiction, shipping is a declaration of 'devotion to a particular non-canonical romantic relationship, or ship' (Schwabach, 2009, p. 391); a fan's favoured character combination is referred to as their one true pairing (OTP). A unique feature of ships is that they are often given unique names (e.g. portmanteaus) for ease of singular reference. Ship names were identified by examining concordance lines resulting from the collocation of proper nouns; these sometimes contained 'definitions' of the neologisms. For instance:

- A: Sjin+Kim=Sjim <3 I ship them :DDD

Ship names for at least two pairs (Sjin and Sips, Sjin and Minty) appeared to be quite standardised, and these were the most frequent in the corpus of comments. Frequency of ship names might indicate popularity of the ships themselves. While it must be acknowledged that the highest frequency ship (Sjips) aligns with the pair featured in the highest number of videos in the corpus, I also note that the second highest frequency ship (Sjinty) is the

least represented in-game, having the fewest number of videos (of the shortest length) and the second fewest number of comments per playlist.

- Sjin + Sips = Sjips (100)
- Sjin + Minty = Sjinty (32)
- Sjin + Kim = Sjim (20), Kjin (6), kimxsjin kjin or sim (1)
- Sjin + Duncan = Sjuncan (6), Sjincan (2)
- Sjin + Nilesy = Sjilesy (4), Nilsjin (1)
- Sjin + Rythian = Rythjin (2)

Here, it is worth stating that ship names do not only appear within videos with relevant pairings, but occur throughout the full corpus. Fans state their changing alignments and ships across playlists. The results cross gender boundaries and are rarely heteronormative. Ships are stated (e.g. B) and allegiances changed (C). When a given OTP seems to be going out of fashion, fans show their loyalty to the original ship, as in line D below.

- B: omg omg I ship Nilesy and Sjin ship omg OTP ...
 C: Sjips is old news. now its all about Sjim
 D: Wait, we can't ship Sjin and Nilesy! We're supposed ship Sjin and Sips!

Shipping statements also indicate crossover in fan perception between Sjin, the character/persona, and Sjin, the gamer. Playlists featuring Sjin and Kim tend to lead to a greater frequency of 'Sjim' ships, though commenters show awareness of real-world implications, when Sykes is dating Ferris (Minty).

- E: I ship these two [Sjin and Kim]. Even if Sjin dates Minty.
 F: Lol keep these ships on Tumblr, and for the record Sjin and Minty are dating, not Sjin and Kim.

'Real-life' shipping or slash is considered taboo by this and many other fandoms. This is one example of emerging codes being enforced in the online community. Another code observed is discussed below.

4.2.4. *Homophobia and community policing* A high frequency of sexuality markers collocating with Sjin and other gamers (e.g. *gay*, *homo*) led me to make use of the reference corpus to typify the comments corpus as a whole. Various markers of affect/appraisal/attribution arise, including *gay* (score: 3.4). This led me to generate concordances of these markers in isolation. Here, two opposing patterns emerge. The use of homophobic slurs as negative markers, established by previous research to be associated with both gaming discourse and online comments sections, is apparent in commenters' language. Conversely, community policing regarding use of this very language is also very much in evidence; indeed, it has a much higher frequency than the slur use, with each negative comment tending to attract one to 10 reprimands of various natures. One popular method of undermining the force of a slur is to correct grammatical or typographical errors, as highlighted in the 'grammar nazi' discussion in lines A and B below.

- A: Stop being a grammar nazi u fag
 B: *you Not liking me is not an acceptable excuse to call someone a fag

The use of 'gay' as an insult, which has been demonstrated to occur frequently in other gaming discourse (Pulos, 2013) is openly problematised in the YouTube comments on Yogscast videos, where it is called 'bigoted':

- C: YOU NOOBS GOLD IS THE WORST ARMOR!
 D: How gay are you actually saying noob ...
 E: How bigoted are you to use gay as an insult

Community-constructed and -enforced codes pressing towards equality indicate that audiences of these particular videos may have been attracted to the nonheteronormativity featured within, may be influenced by the queer discourses they come into contact with, or may simply be behaving within norms to establish their own space within the community. Heightened tolerance is becoming part of the Yogscast fan community code.

5. Discussion

The use of three distinct data sets (YouTube videos, comments on these, and an interview with a YouTube content producer) has offered a number of perspectives on the community formed around Sjin and the greater Yogscast fandom. Further, the utilisation of both qualitative and quantitative methods has allowed me to comb very large sets of data (62 YouTube videos and 217,916 comments) to establish what is 'usual' and to 'zoom in' on particularly salient features of interactive identity framing.

However, this mixture of methods is not without limitations. For one, analyses have not taken into account diachronic evolution of discourses. The relationships between the gamers interacting in the videos develop over time, and while some of these changes might be determined by 'off-camera' circumstances, the very action of habitually working with certain partners may contribute to the development of well-worn repartee styles such as those observed. Likewise, discourses from fan communities may demonstrate a change from less to more accepting as discourses from certain gamers (e.g. Sjin, or the Sjin/Sips pairing) are considered less shocking or 'rules of behaviour' from certain communities (e.g. Yogscast fandom) become more codified. Another limitation is that the comments corpus may be skewed towards highly engaged frequent commenters. Samples included above represent distinct voices, but there is no doubt that the discourse of the 'fandom' may be unduly shaped by who shouts loudest. There is an argument to say, though, that the corpus methods then represent the meanings most frequently presented to the average viewer. In any event, a 'fandom' is not a static community, and I feel that a snapshot of its discourse (in time and of membership) has served adequately to represent its behaviour at one place in time.

The personalities developed by the Yogscast on YouTube and other forms of social media have been extremely successful in attracting and sustaining fanbases large enough to maintain ongoing revenue. This is no doubt in part due to their unique brand of humour, including the non-heteronormative and queer discourses that find their platform in videos broadcast on their channels.

A high frequency of (homo-)sexual innuendo and references to romantic acts and feelings directed at male gaming partners was found to typify videos featuring popular YouTube producer YOGSCAST Sjin. Female partners are rarely featured, and when they contribute to gameplay,

sexual innuendo and other forms of taboo discourse is infrequent, largely initiated by one female gamer (Kim), and ignored by male partners. As a professional entertainer, Sjin does participate in persona construction 'in ways that suggest that the appeal to both gay and straight audiences is quite strategic' (DeAngelis, 2001, p. 181), as such innuendos can 'permit homoerotic readings without dampening the enthusiasm' (Bench, 2013, p. 143) of straight subscribers. Bench's observation on queer dance videos on YouTube may also hold true here: it's advantageous that the Yogscast 'perform in groups, distributing masculinity ... in such a way as to render masculinity a cumulative effect rather than the singular property' of a single gamer (2013, p. 143). However, Sjin himself believes that his own behaviour comes with a risk of alienating (adolescent, male) fans, rather than a guaranteed method of attracting them.

Regardless, his lack of concern with fan perception of him as gay or straight, masculine or feminine, has made an important contribution to the community: 'not only does homophobia cease to be a tool of masculine marginalization, but homophobic expressions become stigmatized' (Anderson, 2007, p. 606) in their most derogatory forms (e.g. 'fag') or gain ironic meaning, thereby building solidarity and allowing for creativity (e.g. 'no homo'). Incorporation of queer and nonheteronormative discourses in these videos – watched by hundreds of thousands, subscribed to by over a million – has a nearly unprecedented opportunity to undergo a trickle-down effect on viewers, who are involved in the participatory culture of the social media platform. Commenters have been observed to use the online community created by Yogscast fandom to explore their understanding of homosocial and homosexual relationships, 'working through social experiences and concerns' (Jenkins, 1992, p. 215) by voicing their own emotions and experimenting with establishing norms. In this community, bigotry is much less tolerated than in other areas of online gaming, though 'decreased homophobia does not necessarily result in a dissipation of sexual identities' (McCormack & Anderson, 2010, p. 855), as evidenced by the occurrence of 'no homo' in many comments.

Ultimately, it was found that the anonymity and flexibility afforded by many games also allows gamers to 'utilize their characters to blur gender roles and act to promote social justice, offering a transgressive way to participate in the digital world' (Pulos, 2013, p. 81), whether or not this might have been the main motivating factor. Consumption of YouTube videos in which influential gamers demonstrate disregard for hegemonic discourses and normed roles can positively influence the discourses of adolescent audiences. As 'real' and 'virtual' communities are increasingly integrated and behaviours 'online' and 'offline' show higher and higher levels of correlation (Taylor, 2006) heightened awareness, tolerance, and acceptance will perhaps prove formative as social media becomes even more central in the (re-)production of ideologies.

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Notes

1. www.yogscast.com.
2. www.youtube.com/user/YogscastSjin.

3. This does not account for users who falsify birthdates to circumvent YouTube's minimum user age of 13, or for those who log views from the accounts of their friends or family members.
4. Written by Andrew Hardie.
5. <http://SketchEngine.co.uk>.
6. NSFW: 'Not safe for work', a tag indicating that content is sexually provocative or pornographic.
7. Harassing language online, usually with the intent to belittle or 'bait' someone into providing an angry or violent response, thereby jeopardising his/her own position within the community.

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Amanda Potts is a Senior Research Associate at the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science at Lancaster University. Her research interests are in corpus linguistics, (critical) discourse analysis, gender studies, analysis of culture, (new) media discourse, representations of identity, and investigation of discriminatory discourses. FASS Building, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YD. E-mail: a.potts@lancaster.ac.uk