Nerd/Geek Masculinity: Technocracy, Rationality, and Gender in Nerd Culture's Countermasculine Hegemony

Abstract
Nerd and geek culture have become subjects of increasing public concern in recent years, with growing visibility and power for technical professions and increasing relevance of video games, science fiction, and fantasy in popular culture. As a subculture, nerd/geek culture tends to be described in terms of the experiences of men and boys who are unpopular because of their niche interests or lack of social skills. This dissertation proposes the concept of nerd/geek masculinity to understand discourses of hegemonic masculinity in nerd/geek culture. Examining three case studies, the novel Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card, the neoreactionary political ideology, and the #GamerGate controversy, the dissertation suggests that nerd/geek masculinity responds to a perceived emasculation of men who identify as nerds or geeks by constructing the interests, skills, and behaviors of nerd/geek culture as inherently male traits. In this way, nerd/geek masculinity turns the very traits nerds and geeks are often mocked for into evidence of manhood – as the cost of excluding women and queer people from nerd and geek culture.

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Subject
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Nerd and geek culture have become subjects of increasing public concern in recent years, with growing visibility and power for technical professions and increasing relevance of video games, science fiction, and fantasy in popular culture. As a subculture, nerd/geek culture tends to be described in terms of the experiences of men and boys who are unpopular because of their niche interests or lack of social skills. This dissertation proposes the concept of nerd/geek masculinity to understand discourses of hegemonic masculinity in nerd/geek culture. Lockhart, Eleanor Amaranth (2015). Nerd/Geek Masculinity: Technocracy, Rationality, and Gender in Nerd Culture's Countermasculine Hegemony. Doctoral dissertation, Texas A & M University. In gender studies, hegemonic masculinity is part of R. W. Connell's gender order theory, which recognizes multiple masculinities that vary across time, culture and the individual. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimizes powerful men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man. Conceptually, hegemonic masculinity proposes to explain how and why men maintain dominant social Geek masculinity describes a formation of gendered subjectivity in which boys and men claim technological knowledge and aptitude as an alternative basis for masculine identity. (Murray, 1993). Escalations in gendered abuse and harassment originating within, but also extending beyond, geek-dominated spaces and subcultures. Geek efforts to preserve a sense of control over their preferred technological domains have included online threats and insults against women and other perceived “outsiders”, including racially and sexually diverse groups (Higgin, 2015), sexual harassment in technology industries and fan cultures (Salter and Blodgett, 2012), and, as this paper will argue, the formation of alliances with other reactionary male identity.