

The militarisation of the living room? Military recruitment, video games and the British armed forces.

My research question: Videogamers have, for a number of years, been a target demographic for militaries around the world. There has often been an academic assumption that playing militaristic videogames leads to a militarised worldview. I aimed to interrogate this assumption by running focus groups with military videogamers to understand their opinions on military recruitment and militarisation

Context: the problem at hand

Key facts The British Military is failing to hit its recruitment targets – this has led to the targeting of young people, particularly videogamers, by the British Military

8,200

shortfall in the number of military personnel (full-time trained regulars) as at January 2018 – 5.7% below the requirement

102

number of trades where the Ministry of Defence has insufficient numbers of skilled personnel to maintain defence tasks without placing additional demands on regulars

94%

proportion of trades where the Ministry of Defence does not expect to resolve shortfalls in personnel in the next five years



Method: feminist-informed focus group research

I have so far conducted 5 focus groups (one more forthcoming). Each group was made up of 4-6 individuals.

My focus groups were designed in order to tap into vernacular conversation and understand the everyday (Weber). This was achieved through an appreciation of the social context of focus groups (Hollander).

Groups were made up of individuals who had pre-existing social relations, in locations familiar to group members, and in some groups, existing social relations between facilitator and group members.



Findings: an interesting paradox

I found that focus group members demonstrated some conflicting tendencies: both rejecting militarisation in reflexive critiques of military recruitment:

C: That's the thing that I really have a problem with because it's like, you're literally like kind of appealing to people that have...

G: Nothing

R: No one (Group 3)

But also holding a number of militarised opinions, particularly in discussions of personal experience:

B: I suppose like it's one of those jobs, like you know, you have to have an armed force, you have to <inaudible>

J: I don't think that's necessarily...

A: Yeah

B: Occasionally they have to kill people (Group 5)

B: Do you feel he's become a better person after joining the army or?

H: It has, it really has. I mean he was a very violent person, at school he was always in detention, he was in isolation. Now he's doing tests for a HGV Lorry, to drive lorries, [erm] he's also doing alongside training in the army as well (Group 5)