

Balancing multiple identities in subcultural online spaces

Catherine Goodfellow

University of Manchester

@CatG138

My research

- Focuses on Russian online videogaming communities as spaces for identity construction and identity play amongst young people
- Uses a combination of different data collection methods:
 - surveys
 - analysing forums and community discussion
 - analysing media coverage of games

Challenges in online research

- Often no defined ethical guidelines
- My gender, nationality and position as researcher could affect data
- My experiences as a gamer blurred the line between researcher and participant in subculture
- Drawing boundaries around ‘public’ and ‘private’ when gathering data

1. Being honest vs. safeguarding the researcher

- **Problem:** my gender could be a hindrance when collecting data
- **Ethical concern:** needing to deceive participants
- **Solution:** deception within limits - gender passing

2. Showing language proficiency vs. showing subcultural knowledge

- **Problem:** game culture is often informal and slang-based, and I did not always have the vocabulary for this
- **Ethical concern:** I had to show subcultural knowledge of gaming to encourage participants to discuss their lives with me
- **Solution:** find a balance between formal and informal, be careful not to construct an inaccurate persona

3. Gathering data vs. respecting community norms

- **Problem:** data being visible online does not necessarily make it 'public' in spirit
- **Ethical concern:** accurately discerning public and private data, and knowing when not to intrude upon a community
- **Solution:** using official communities with moderator permission, using own knowledge of internet communities to navigate grey areas