

Positioning Geography: Strategic Issues in Geographical Education
University of Waikato, Hamilton

Cyber/space, gaming and 'gender-bending'

By Cherie Todd
Department of Geography, Tourism and
Environmental Planning
University of Waikato

Introduction

- Masters Research:
 - Thesis title:

*Gaming and gender: Home as a place of
(non)conformity for women gamers*
- Gaming avatars and gender re-presentation

Continued ...

- Research participants:
 - 8 Hamilton women
 - Game at home
 - Are 30 years of age or older
- Gaming with:
 - Computers, PlayStations, Xbox, Game'boys', PSP's etc ... On-line and off-line gaming
- Positionality

Games and Avatars



- Have an awareness of:
 - What games do (and don't) represent?
 - Who is behind game creation, design and production?

Virtual representations of gender



Lara Croft – Tomb Raider

“Although gender representation has altered during the last decade, game developers openly state that their rationale for the inclusion of female characters is based upon the premise that they appeal more to the average boy gamer than an equivalent male character” (Schott and Horrell 2001, 37)

Gaming and Gender-bending

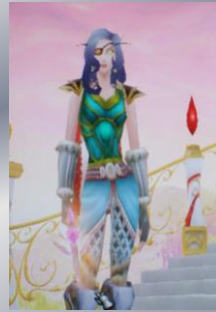


- Heteronormative spaces of gaming
- The majority of women gamers prefer to game as same-sex characters (Yee 2007)
- Up to 80% of men who game use female avatars (Yee 2007)
- Out of 8 women, seven preferred to play as women, with only one preferring to play as a man

Research Participants

Name	Age	Gaming	Relationship Status	Lives with	Occupation	Fav Genre/Gender
Gran	58	16 years 23hrs per week at home / 8hrs per week at the lake house	Divorced / PlayStation 3, Poker machine, PS2 (x2), Nintendo 64, Nintendo DS, Gameboy (x2), Laptop	Cat, Daughter, son-in- law & grandkids stay in 'main house'	Retired but does admin for the family business	Action / Man
Suzy	49	22 years - "beck like forever" (80+ hrs per week)	Married / Computer (x2) PS2	Husband & three children	Housewife / Partime Student	Role Play / Woman
Sheryl	42	28 years (6 hrs per week)	Divorced / Computer (x2), PS1, PS2, Nintendo DS, Nintendo Wii, Laptop	Teenage son & cat	IT Worker	Strategy / Woman
Mitch	36	5 years (28+ hrs per week)	De facto / Computer (x2) PS2, PlayStation Portable	Partner & 2 dogs, Son & daughter stay weekends	Web Administrator	Role Play / Woman
Nika	35	20+ years (6-10hrs per week)	Married / Computer, laptop, Xbox, Wii, Sega	Husband & son	IT Worker	Strategy / Woman
Wendy	33	20 years (40+ hrs per week)	Married / Computer (x3) Nintendo 64, Nintendo DS (x2), Nintendo Wii, Nintendo Gameboy (x2), Laptop	Husband & 'one on the way'	Housewife	Role Play / Woman
Talon	52	15 years (15hrs per week)	De facto / PlayStation2 (x2)	Partner, father & cat	Public Servant	Role Play / Woman
Jordan	31	8 years (25hrs per week)	Single / Computer (x2), Laptop, PS2, PS1, Cellphone games	Son and sister & two cats	Retail	Role Play / Woman

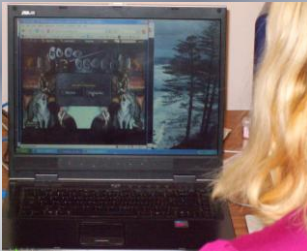
Jordan – “I am Aria – that’s me”



Jordan: "I suppose [my characters] are just an extension of myself really. I've got multiple characters in WOW [World of Warcraft] but my main character is [Aria], and I suppose because I've spent so much time with her I kind of identify with her as well because I am [Aria] – that's me. Admittedly, I don't have purple hair and an eye patch and [I'm not] quite that tall ... there is somebody else whose name is exactly the same as mine but one letter different. And I'm thinking to myself 'you better not be wrecking my reputation girl'" *(laughs)*.

8

Gender-bending in RuneScape



Suzy: "The guys on *RuneScape* say they make a female character for about seven reasons. The biggest reason is that they get a different perspective on playing. People interact on the game differently with them. They don't see the swearing. They get to play the game in a more 'softer' manner, rather than their normal male macho attack style".

Women gaming as men



Gran: "I always go for the male because they usually have the advantage. In most games, to start out with, you need the strength and [male characters] usually have more access to weapons".

"Watch him flirt. He's a handsome son of a gun"

Men gaming as women



(Guildwars elemental avatar)

Jim: "Well if I'm going to be staring at a screen for several hours, I want something nice to look at and if a guy tells you otherwise, he's lying. In most games there's no difference now between men and women avatars. Women [characters] are just as strong, if not stronger than men. So why not play as a woman? It just makes better sense – I've got something nice to look at and I kick ass."

(Autoethnography Journal Entry 9 April 2008)

Conclusion

"Cyberspace is a performative space, one where new subject positions are 'tried out' in and through practices of everyday life and these acts, or fabrications, produce over time an identity 'effect'"

(Madge & O'Connor 2005, 85)

12

Thanks for listening



- Any questions or comments?