

Intersectional Pleasures and Limits of Game Cultural Participation and Belonging in Finland

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

There are many ways to participate and feel belonging in game cultures. These include not only playing games and watching others play, or taking part in game creation, but also engaging with, for example, social activities surrounding games (e.g. discussion platforms, communities, clubs, events), game-related media materials, esports and other forms of competitive play, and fan creation such as fan fiction, fan art, or cosplay. All these forms of participation may provide pleasure stemming not only from the activity itself, but also from the feeling of belonging in game cultures.

However, neither the opportunities for participation nor the feeling of belonging are equally available for everyone. Potential participants are actively repelled by the physical, cultural, and social environments of game cultural activities (e.g. Gray 2020, Phillips 2020, Taylor 2024). These boundaries are identity-based, reflecting the sexist, racist, queerphobic, ageist, ableist, and otherwise discriminatory structures within game culture (e.g. Cote 2020, Gillin and Signorella 2024, Gray 2024, Lavenir 2022, Ledder 2024). Furthermore, they appear and are experienced differently based on local cultural contexts (e.g. Maletka 2026).

In this presentation, we will approach the topic of intersectional pleasures from the perspective of game cultural participation and belonging (Friman 2026). We will explore the great variety of ways in which people participate in, feel belonging to, and get pleasure from game cultures – as well as how these opportunities for game cultural participation and belonging are limited based on the participants' identity positions. Our investigation is both intersectional and contextually grounded. We will focus on experiences of game cultural participants residing in Finland, aiming to map out the ways of participating and belonging – as well as the intersectional identity positions that are affecting these – that are specific to the national, cultural, and linguistic context of this country.

We have collected 245 responses to a qualitative online survey (Braun et al. 2021) from game culture participants who are at least 15 years old and reside in Finland. The survey was available between 10 March and 10 April 2026 in Finnish, Swedish, and English. It included questions on playing games and other forms of

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game cultural participation; on experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation in game cultural environments; and on products, events, communities, and practices that support game cultural inclusion and belonging. In our presentation, we will present preliminary results from our ongoing reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) on this survey material. We will describe the different ways in which our participants engage with game culture, what made them experience game cultural inclusion or exclusion, and how these experiences were connected to their intersectional identity positions.

With this contribution, we wish to highlight the great variety of ways in which people can engage with games and their culture, the multitude of pleasures that people can find in these engagements and in their feeling of cultural belonging, and also the intersectional yet local nature of the boundaries that can prevent game cultural participation, belonging, and pleasure.

Keywords

game cultural participation, game cultural belonging, inclusion, marginalisation

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