

Girls' Play: Context, performance & social videogame play

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It has been almost a decade since Gareth Schott and Kirsty Horell wrote their article "Girl Gamers and their Relationship with the Gaming Culture" in the 'Winter 2000' issue of *Convergence*. According to the abstract and introduction to the article, their goal was to "...focus upon the experiences and attitudes of females who already view themselves as 'gamers'" [36]. However, as the article develops, it is evident that the experiences of the respondents were framed in the context of the aptitudes and experiences of male gamers. While the respondents in the article considered themselves to be 'gamers' to varying degrees, they viewed their experiences in relation to the gameplay of the male gamers in their lives.

Over the last nine years, as video games have become more pervasive in popular culture, the amount of girls who play video games has increased significantly (ESA, 2008). With the expansion of game genres, the appeal of video gameplay has increased along with girls' aptitudes, leading more girls to self-identify as 'gamers'. While video game culture is often seen as connected to and dominated by male culture, video games are increasingly becoming part of girl culture as well. Within the vast and growing body of literature that focuses on girls and women who identify as gamers, a large portion of this literature focuses on gendered gameplay, and situates girls' play experiences and styles within the boundaries of male video game culture. Although this literature is informative, and necessary, it is our goal to give voice to the experiences of the players from within girl culture, which for many, includes video games.

One of the most increasingly popular genres among girls are games that are physically interactive (beyond the use of a traditional console controller) and require some element of performance as part of its success, such as *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1999), *Sing Star* (SCEE, 2004), *Wii Sports* (Nintendo, 2006), and *Rock Band* (Harmonix, 2007). These games are most often played in groups (either by choice or by game design) and often encourage creative gameplay as part of the play performance.

Through an in-depth literature review spanning the last 10 years, coupled with ethnographic field research, we aim to consider video games as part of girl culture. Focusing on video games selected by the respondents, this paper discusses how player performance and goals are influenced by the social context and play environment of the player. Based on ethnographic research with girls between the ages 10-16 who have direct access to these video games, either at home, or through a friend, and who have previous video game play experience, and identify as a gamer (defined as someone who plays video games), this paper will investigate how girls play and perform differently in group and solo play situations, and how it affects levels of creative play. By exploring both group-play (two or more players) and solo-play in girls, we aim to explore the notion of

player performance which not only includes game success as determined by the game design, but also the terms of performative elements and group created goals for purposes of entertainment outside of the game itself.

The long-term goal of this ethnographic research is to consider girls' voices and actions and to contextualize them within current video game research on girls and games (Jenson & de Castell, 2008; Beavis & Charles, 2007; Bryce & Rutter, 2007; Royce et. al., 2007; Schott & Horrell, 2000), while at the same time exploring methodological issues that surround the process of studying digitally mediated social interactions (Volda & Saul, 2008; IJsselsteijn et al., 2007; Consalvo & Dutton, 2006) which has significant implications in game studies and the Social Sciences as a whole.

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