

# The Concept and Research of Gendered Game Culture

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## ABSTRACT

Despite gender having become a central topic in the game cultural discussion of today, there does not seem to be clear understanding of the concept of gendered game culture or general theoretical framework that would define and support the study of gendered game culture within the field of academic game studies. This paper argues that there are two starting points for understanding the concept of gendered game culture and for its research: the first being how the concept of gender is understood in the context of games, and the second being defining the central gender questions in game studies and locating them in the field of game culture. The paper also presents a preliminary model for the concept and research field of gendered game culture. The model consists of the central research questions on the topic of gender and games, presented in selected leading level game studies journals and conferences and located in the various sectors of game culture. At the same time, the model reveals some of the gender questions not yet presented in these central publications as well as some of the areas of game culture not yet widely studied from gender perspective.

## Keywords

gendered game culture, gender, game culture, game studies

## INTRODUCTION

During the past few years gender has become a hot topic in digital gaming, and the various gender issues in gaming such as hate campaigns towards feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian and indie game developer Zoe Quinn, discrimination of female game developers, and exclusion of female players from certain e-sports tournaments have received a great deal of attention in both game and mainstream media<sup>1</sup>. These individual cases have led to wider questions and discussion on the genderedness of game culture and the role of gender in game cultural participation. This discussion is also present in game studies, where the trend can be seen in recent and future conferences and journal issues dedicated to the topic<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the popularity of the topic however, there does not seem to be much discussion on the concept of gendered game culture: essentially, what it means for the game culture to be gendered and how this genderedness has been, can be and should be studied. As Shaw (2010) has noted, a similar issue with the lack of conceptual discussion can also be seen with the concept of game culture and the so called cultural approach to game studies in general. Shaw (2010, 407) has suggested that “[t]he issue who ‘counts’ as a member of

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video game culture is central to studying games within a cultural studies framework”. Cultural access and participation are also central questions to studying gendered game culture, and gender is one of the central factors in defining who “counts” or “passes” as a member of game culture at large. As such, it is vital to the study of game culture to understand the role gender has in game cultural participation as well as to understand the ways in which game culture is gendered. The first step in this process and the study of gendered game culture in general is to clarify how the concept of gendered game culture itself is understood within the context of academic game studies.

In this paper I will explore the research history of gender and games as well as the starting points for the current and future research of gendered game culture. The paper consists of three parts. In the first part I will describe the research history of gendered game culture: how the past research on gender and games has commonly been presented, what are the problematic aspects in this way of presentation, and what these presentations of earlier research on the topic can offer to the current and future study of gendered game culture. In the second and third parts of the paper I will examine the field of research of gendered game culture. First I will examine what kind of gender questions have been presented in journal articles published and conference papers presented in selected leading level game studies journals and conferences in the years 2001–2014. Then I will describe how these gender questions can be located in the various sectors of game culture. In conclusion I will argue that the study of gendered game culture demands conceptual framework that will both define and support the research of gendered game culture as a part of the disciplinary field of game studies. For this purpose I will present a preliminary model for the concept and research field of gendered game culture, consisting of its central research topics and their positions in the field of game culture.

## **PRESENTING THE RESEARCH HISTORY OF GENDER AND GAMES**

The research history of gender and games is, as in many other fields, generally divided in three separate phases, or “waves”, as they are often called<sup>3</sup>. In this way of presenting research history of gender and games, the phases are defined by common research topics, shared approaches to the topic of gender and games, and also the way in which gender is defined and how it is seen to affect gaming. The three waves of research on gender and games are commonly timed on three decades: the first at 1990s, the second at 2000s, and the third at 2010s. In this first part of the paper I will describe what kind of research themes and approaches have been attached to each wave in some research history presentations, what are the main issues in this way of presenting research history, and what these research history presentations can offer to the current and future understanding and research on gendered game culture.

### **Focus on Girls and Gender Difference in the 1990s**

Although there has been research on gender and games since at least the 1980s (Richard 2013, 269), in historical presentations its first wave is often timed at the 1990s (Richard 2013, 269; Game History CfP 2015; Jenkins & Cassell 2008, 5–6). The article collection *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, edited by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins (1999b) and published in 1998 is commonly presented (Richard 2013, 269; Kafai et al. 2008a, xi; Jenson & de Castell 2007, 769) as the first, groundbreaking academic volume on the topic of gender and games. As such, the book is seen to represent the contemporary research paradigm, and the descriptions of gender-focused game research of that time are often based on its content. The volume consists of contributions from various fields, such as media studies, psychology and education. A few female game designers and female players were also interviewed for the publication.

Jenkins and Cassell (2008, 6) have “half-ironically” named the 1990s as the “first wave of game feminism”, and later the same and similar wave terms have been used in various research history presentations. Based on the contents of *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* and certain research history presentations, the most visible discussions on gender and games from this time were largely based on the idea of gender difference. At the time, digital games were strongly viewed as boys’ toys (Cassell & Jenkins 1999a, 13). Their audience was overwhelmingly male (Cassell & Jenkins 1999a, 10–11), and their content included mostly themes that are traditionally defined as masculine (Cassell & Jenkins 1999a, 7–8). Even the game characters were mostly male, and the rare women characters were usually cast in the passive role of damsel in distress and portrayed as objects of sexual desire (Dietz 1998, 437–438). Girls, on the other hand, were seen as simply not playing games, and were also assumed not to be interested in games in the first place. This was considered a problem as games were seen as an important pathway to wider technological know-how, much needed in an ever technologically advancing society, education and working life (Cassell & Jenkins 1999a, 11–14). In search of an answer to this issue a variety of research on girls’ game preferences was conducted. As a result the so called “pink games” (Kafai et al. 2008a, xiv) were born, and girls were lured into gaming with bright colours, social themes close to girls’ real lives and lack of challenging mechanics to prevent frustration.

Even though this so called girls’ games movement (Cassell & Jenkins 1999a, 4) claimed to offer the girls the kind of products they wanted, not many of the pink games ended up successful. The movement has also been criticised for essentialising and stereotyping gender (Kafai et al. 2008a, xvi). With the basic assumption that girls and women were not interested in games and were not playing them, the girls and women who already were playing games and enjoying them were also rendered invisible. Despite having good intentions, the movement thus worked to exclude and marginalise girls further from the core game culture still reserved for boys.

### **The Context of Game Experience in the 2000s**

The first decade of the 2000s represents what has been called “the second wave of research on gender and games” (Richard 2013, 272) and “the second wave of game feminism” (Game History CfP 2015). It could also be called the game cultural or contextual turn in the research on gender and games, as during this time the most visible discussion seemed to shift from gender differences to the socio-cultural environment and contexts of gaming. The central questions became how one becomes a player (and stays as one) as well as how one gains access to the game culture in the first place. Additionally, market studies in the United States conducted by the Entertainment Software Association since 2004 were showing that the gender gap in gaming was not as wide as suspected, but girls and women were in fact already making as much as 40 % of the market (Entertainment Software Association 2004, 2). The same market studies showed that gaming was not only a children’s hobby, and that the average age of gamers was continuously rising. Statistics like this helped to change views on who could be seen as a gamer.

As *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* (Cassell & Jenkins 1999b) is often presented as the representative for the study of gender and games in the 1990s, its ten years later published successor *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming* (Kafai et al. 2008b) is commonly seen to represent the study of gender and games of the 2000s. As its predecessor had ten years earlier, this second volume rounded up the current discussion on gender and games with contributions from researchers from various fields

as well as interviews from selected female game designers and female gamers. The articles also conversed with those from the earlier volume, presenting some of the changes seen in the decade of discourse on gendered game culture.

As an example of the prevalent socio-cultural discourse in the study of gender and games in the 2000s, Taylor (2008) notes how it is important to pay attention to, in addition to the women and girls who do not play games, also to the women and girls who do, because it can tell much about how one ends up a gamer. According to Taylor (2008, 52), social networks and access are “core considerations for play” – for both men and women. “Most people come into game culture through their networks and learn to be gamers within specific social contexts”, she writes, and adds that “[w]e should not overlook the power such introductions provide in both legitimating inhabitation of that space and providing the tools to stay” (ibid.). Taylor (2008, 52–53) also notes that previous endeavours to explain the differences between genders in gaming had failed because they had focused on the game products, their content and mechanics, instead of seeing the more important question of access: “how people come to know about the game, get reviews of it (formal or informal), get their hands on it, are taught how to play it, and indeed have people to play with”. Similarly, Carr (2005, 6) notes that “[d]istinctions in taste [in games] between male and female players reflect patterns in games access and consumption that spring from (very) gendered cultural and social practices”. Furthermore, Yee (2008, 85–86), who has studied MMO player demographics, has noted that even though on the first decade of the 2000s the vast majority (85.4 %) of MMO players were men, there were not any significant differences in how much time female and male players spent on the games or in the ways they played them. Instead, the main difference between women and men who played MMOs was in the way they had ended up as players (ibid.). In this socio-cultural discourse, in addition to the social and cultural contexts of playing and becoming a player, attention was also paid to the social and cultural power structures and the hegemonic nature of game industry (Fron et al. 2007).

### **Towards Intersectionality and Redefining Masculinity in the 2010s**

Based on some presentations of history of research on gender and games, we are currently experiencing its third wave in 2010s, when the research is focused on questions of intersectionality and masculinity (Richard 2013; Game History CfP 2015). According to Richard (2013, 278) “[t]he current research on gender and game culture is heading toward understanding nuance of expression and experience, particularly by looking at how gender relates to intersectional concepts, like sexuality, ethnicity and class. Research in this area is also revisiting how we define and study masculinity”. In these central themes and concepts, the study of gender and games seems to be following in the footsteps of gender studies where the theoretical focus has also shifted from gender difference towards a broader understanding of gender and its intersections (Shields 2008).

As the games themselves, their consumption and their culture have changed, there have also been changes in the ways they are discussed and studied. Presentations of research history often manage to offer only a glimpse of the whole variety of research done on any particular topic. Presenting a plethora of academic work in the form of separated “research waves” is problematic for multiple reasons. Nevertheless, some leading discourses and commonly appearing research themes and approaches can be detected, based on the available presentations of research history, bearing in mind they do not present all of the research done during the time, and that similar research has been done during other times as well.

Based on the common research history presentations described earlier, in the 1990s the most visible academic discussion on gender and games was based on gendered differences in interest towards games, while in the 2000 the focus shifted towards the socially and culturally constructed, gendered access to games and their culture. It has also been suggested that the central themes in the current research in the 2010s are intersectionality and masculinity. Regardless of the chosen way to present research history, what is relevant is that all these “waves” are defined by the way the concept of gender is understood in the context of games. This is the first starting point for understanding the concept of gendered game culture as well as for its research. The second starting point is defining the central gender questions in game studies and locating them in the field of game culture, which I will explore in the following two parts of this paper.

## **GENDER QUESTIONS IN CENTRAL GAME STUDIES JOURNALS AND CONFERENCES**

During the first two decades of the 2000s, the field of academic game studies has been forming, offering new forums for presenting research and critical discussion on gender and games. 2001 has been called the “year one of computer game studies” (Aarseth 2001). It was the year when *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* was first published, and it was also the year of the first international academic conference for game studies, as well as the first year when regular graduate programs in game studies were offered in universities (ibid.). Two years later in 2003 the *Digital Games Research Association* was founded. Especially for relatively young, multidisciplinary fields such as game studies these kind of central publications and conferences are significant defining factors. For a wider understanding of how the study of gendered game culture has been present in game studies so far, I have conducted a content analysis on research articles published and conference papers presented in selected central game studies research journals and conferences.

The data used in the analysis consists of research articles in two leading level<sup>4</sup> academic game studies journals, *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* and *Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media*, as well as conference papers presented in the conferences organised by the *Digital Games Research Association*. All the research articles and conference papers published in the two journals or DiGRA’s digital conference library by the end of 2014 were included in the data. This included a total of 1074 research articles and conference papers published in the years 2001–2014.

The titles and abstracts<sup>5</sup> of all the articles and papers published in the journals and the digital conference library were read and analysed in chronological order. The data was analysed using the method of content analysis, examining (1) how many journal articles and conference papers examined gender as their primary or secondary subject or as a mention, (2) what were the gender questions presented in the journal articles and conference papers, and (3) whether the gender questions were approached from a woman-centric, man-centric or gender neutral perspective<sup>6</sup>. The genders of the authors were also written down. In this second part of the paper I will present my findings from this analysis.

### **Game Studies**

*Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* is the first international, academic and peer-reviewed game studies journal, published since 2001.

According to the description on the journal’s website<sup>7</sup>, their “primary focus is aesthetic, cultural and communicative aspects of computer games” and the articles “should attempt to shed new light on games, rather than simply use games as metaphor or illustration of some other theory or phenomenon”. Content analysis was conducted to all Game Studies numbers published in years 2001–2014. This included a total of 22 journal numbers, including a total of 156 articles. None of the articles published in Game Studies were excluded from the analysis, so also editorials, game and book reviews as well as interviews were included.

<b>Article</b>	<b>Primary subject, secondary subject or mention</b>	<b>Article subject</b>	<b>Gender question</b>	<b>Woman-centric, man-centric or neutral approach</b>
Kennedy 2002	Primary subject	Textual analysis of game characters	(Study of) Female character representation	Woman-centric
Nakamura & Wirman 2005	Primary subject	Counter-playing tactics of female players	Female game preferences	Woman-centric
Hitchens 2011	Secondary subject	First-person shooter avatars	Gender of game characters	Neutral
Nooney 2013	Primary subject	Gendered writing of game histories	Women’s places in game histories	Woman-centric

**Table 1:** Articles examining gender questions as their primary or secondary subject, published in Game Studies in years 2001–2014.

Out of the 156 articles published in Game Studies in years 2001–2014, only four (2.6 %) dealt with gender questions based on their title or abstract. These four articles are presented in table 1 above. Gender question was the primary subject in three of these four articles (Kennedy 2002; Nakamura & Wirman 2005; Nooney 2013), and in those three articles the gender question was approached from a woman-centric point of view. In the fourth article (Hitchens 2011) the gender question was a secondary subject, and the approach to it was gender neutral. The gender questions examined in these articles were (study of) female character representation (Kennedy 2002), games responding to preferences of female gamers (Nakamura & Wirman 2005), genders of main characters in first-person shooter games (Hitchens 2011), and women’s places in game histories (Nooney 2013).

### **Games and Culture**

The second academic game studies journal I examined was *Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media*. Games and Culture is an international and peer-reviewed

journal for study of games and interactive media and it has been published since 2006. According to the journal's description<sup>8</sup>, its "scope includes the socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions of gaming from a wide variety of perspectives, including textual analysis, political economy, cultural studies, ethnography, critical race studies, gender studies, media studies, public policy, international relations, and communication studies". The journal description also specifically mentions "issues of gaming culture related to race, class, gender, and sexuality" as part of its scope.

Content analysis was conducted to all Games and Culture journal numbers published in 2006–2014. This included a total of 43 journal numbers including 205 articles with abstracts. Articles without abstracts, such as introduction texts to theme numbers, were excluded from the analysis. However, theme number introduction texts with abstracts, as well as all other articles with abstracts, were included.

<b>Article</b>	<b>Primary subject, secondary subject or mention</b>	<b>Article subject</b>	<b>Gender question</b>	<b>Woman-centric, man-centric or neutral approach</b>
Leonard 2006	Secondary subject	Race- and gender-based game studies	Gender-sensitive game studies	Neutral
Hayes 2007	Primary subject	Enactment of gendered identities in play	Gendered identities in play	Woman-centric
Heeter et al. 2009	Primary subject	Designer's gender's effect on design outcome and game reception	Gendered game design; gendered game preferences	Neutral
Shaw 2009	Secondary subject	Cultural production and GLBT content in games	Transgender presentation in games (production perspective)	Neutral
Lehdonvirta et al. 2012	Primary subject	Effects of avatar gender on help-seeking behaviour in an online game	Gendered game behaviour	Neutral
Ciccoricco 2012	Primary subject	Concept of flow in	Gendered flow in game mechanics and	Woman-centric

		Mirror's Edge	narratives	
Searle & Kafai 2012	Primary subject	Boys' participation and playing in tween virtual world Whyville	Boys' play in a virtual world	Man-centric
Johnson 2013	Primary subject	Social boundaries at a game studio	Gender boundaries at game studios	Neutral

**Table 2:** Articles examining gender questions as their primary or secondary subject, published in *Games and Culture* in years 2006–2014.

Of the 205 articles with abstracts, 16 articles (7.8 %) examined a gender question based on their title or abstract. Gender question was the primary subject in six (2.9 %) and a secondary subject in two (0.98 %) articles. These eight articles are presented in table 2 above. Out of the six articles examining gender question as primary subject, three had a gender-neutral approach, two a woman-centric approach and one a man-centric approach to the question. Both articles with gender question as secondary subject had a gender-neutral approach to the question.

The gender questions examined in these eight articles were gender-sensitive game studies (Leonard 2006), gendered identities in play (Hayes 2007), gendered game design and gendered game preferences (Heeter et al. 2009), transgender representation in games (from game production perspective) (Shaw 2009), gendered game behaviour (Lehdonvirta et al. 2012), gendered “flow” in game mechanics and narratives (Ciccoricco 2012), boys’ play in a virtual world (Searle & Kafai 2012), and gender boundaries at game studios (Johnson 2013). In eight (3.9 %) articles gender question was only mentioned.

### DiGRA Conferences

In addition to the two leading level game studies journals, I also examined gender questions in the papers presented in the conferences of the *Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)*. The DiGRA digital library<sup>9</sup> includes a total of 713 papers<sup>10</sup> from eleven different conferences organised in 2002–2014. The conference papers were analysed the same way as the journal articles, based on their titles and abstracts, and none of the conference papers or abstracts in the digital library were excluded from the analysis.

Out of the 713 conference papers in DiGRA digital library, 40 (5.6 %) papers examined gender questions based on their title or abstract. 27 papers (3.8 %) had a gender question as the primary subject, and gender question was a secondary subject in one paper (0.1 %). In 12 papers (1.7 %) gender questions were only mentioned. Of the 27 papers that examined gender questions as their primary subject, 17 approached the question from a woman-centric perspective, 7 approached the question from a gender neutral perspective, and 3 approached the question from a man-centric perspective. The one paper with gender question as a secondary subject had a gender neutral approach. Some examples of the DiGRA conference papers examining gender questions as primary or secondary subject are presented in table 3 below.



<b>Article</b>	<b>Primary subject, secondary subject or mention</b>	<b>Article subject</b>	<b>Gender question</b>	<b>Woman-centric, man-centric or neutral approach</b>
Jansz & Martis 2003	Primary	Representations of gender and ethnicity in games	Gender representations in games	Neutral
Carr 2005	Primary	Girls' gaming preferences	Girls' gaming preferences	Woman-centric
Jenson & De Castell 2007	Primary	Research on gender and gaming	Gender in game studies	Woman-centric
Sundén 2009	Primary	Transgressive play	Gender transgressive play	Neutral
Jonsson 2010	Primary	Meaning and function of game café as a "third place" for boys and young men	Game café as a public place of their own for boys and young men	Man-centric
Enevold 2012	Secondary	Domestication of play	Gendered domestication of play	Neutral
Fortim & De Moura Grando 2013	Primary	Players' perspectives on self-identification as women in MMO communities	Players self-identifying as women in MMO communities	Woman-centric

**Table 3:** Examples of conference papers examining gender questions as their primary or secondary subject, presented in DiGRA conferences in years 2002–2014.

Based on my analysis, despite of gender being a central topic in wider game cultural discussion of today, it was present in only 2.6–7.8 % of the articles published and papers presented in the selected leading level game studies journals and conferences between 2001 and 2014. Although the number seems low, it is impossible to say if it is due to for example lack of articles and papers offered on the topic or editorial decisions. The selected data is limited to a few publications and does not cover or represent the entire field of game studies. However, it does cover two journals defined as leading level

publications in the field of game studies as well as the conferences of the premiere international association for game studies, both of which have a strong part in defining game studies as an academic discipline. At least on these central publication forums in game studies, gender has not been a central topic based on the results of my analysis.

In the journal articles and conference papers that dealt with gender questions, gender was most often the primary subject of the article or paper, and it was most often approached from a woman-centric perspective. The majority (60 %) of journal articles and conference papers with gender question as primary or secondary subject were also written by women. Based on these results combined with the research history presentations described in the previous part of this paper, in the research on gender and games so far, there seems to have been a strong focus on girls and women. This can be at least partially explained by the historical exclusion of girls and women from game culture and the aim for greater inclusiveness as a motivator for research. For the same reason girls and women are also often the focus of discussions on gendered game culture in gaming communities and mainstream media today.

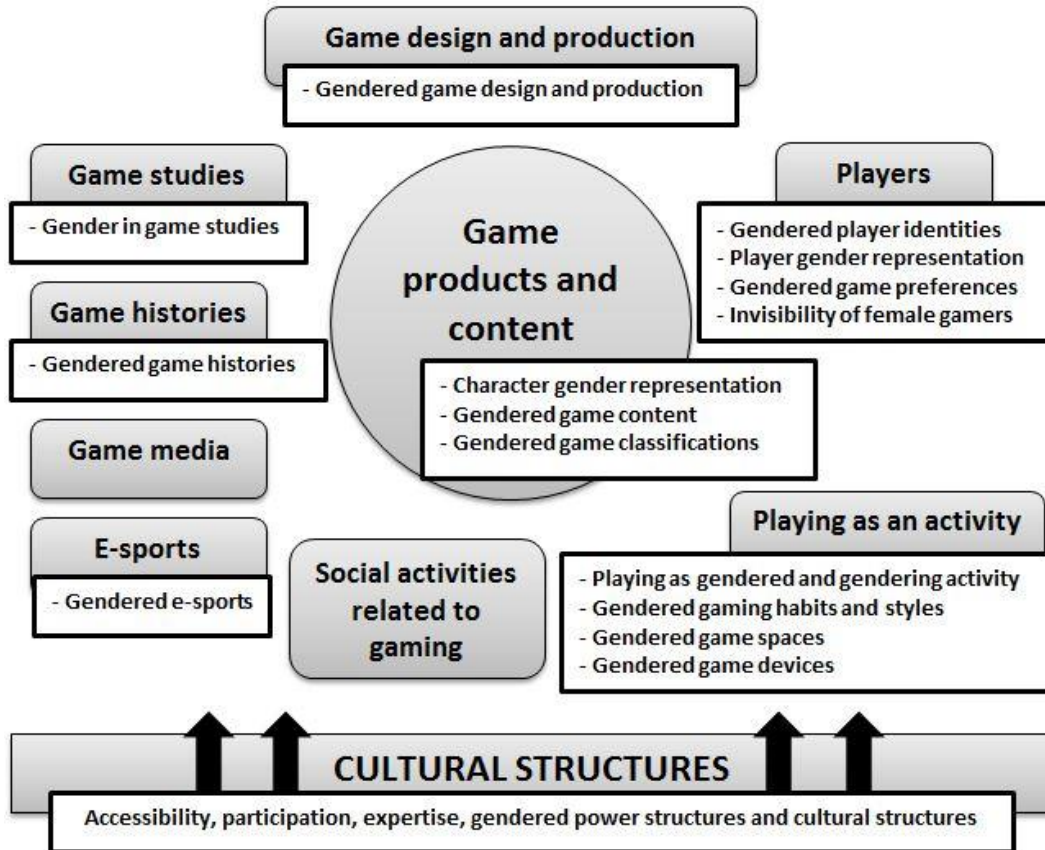
## **LOCATING THE GENDER QUESTIONS IN THE FIELD OF GAME CULTURE**

In the previous part of this paper I described how strongly the gender questions were present in the game studies publications in my data, what kind of gender questions were presented in the selected game studies journal articles and conference papers, and what perspectives were the gender questions approached from. During the content analysis of both game studies journals and the papers in the DiGRA digital library I first defined and later categorised the gender questions found in the titles and abstracts of the articles and papers. Combining related questions into categories provided me with a list of gender questions viewed as central in the academic discussion on gendered game culture in the selected publications in my data. However, defining these “core gender questions” of game studies alone is not enough to be able to define the research field of gendered game culture. They also need to be located in the field of game culture. This process of defining the central questions and locating them in the field of game culture is what I suggest to be the second starting point for understanding the concept and research field of gendered game culture.

During the content analysis, I defined and categorised gender questions from all the journal articles and conference papers with gender as their primary or secondary subject. In some articles and papers, there were several separate gender questions, and I placed some of the questions in several categories. Of the 1074 articles and papers analysed, there were a total of 40 articles and papers with gender question as primary or secondary subject based on their title or abstract. These 40 articles and papers included a total of 56 separate gender questions, which I placed in 22 categories. The categories were created from the gender questions found in the data, the sectors of game culture I had defined partially in advance, as well as the three core questions in the past discussion on gender and gaming, defined by Jenkins & Cassell (2008, 13): access, participation and representation. In the end, 18 of the 22 categories included questions found from the game studies journals and conference papers in my data.

The concept of game culture can be widely understood as, for example, the meaningfulness attached to games and the act of playing (Mäyrä 2008, 13–21), to games as a cultural form or cultural objects (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2008, 132–147), or to various player (sub)cultures (Mäyrä 2008, 21–27; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2008, 148–168).

There is not a single, unified game culture, and the game culture does not exist separate from other forms of culture. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term to refer to all different forms of communication, actions and activities related to games and game-related products. Based on this, I have defined ten different sectors of game culture on which I have located the aforementioned gender question categories to construct the preliminary model for the concept and research field of gendered game culture. The model, presented in figure 1 below, shows the central gender questions in academic game studies and their locations in the field of game culture, as well as the areas of game culture that are, based on my data, yet uncharted by game studies from gender perspective.



**Figure 1:** Central gender questions in academic game studies and their placement in the field of game culture.

Against the dark background I have set what I have defined as ten sectors of game culture. At the centre there is the core of game culture, formed by (1) game products and content. This sector includes things such as game characters, game content (for example game mechanics and narratives) and game classifications. Above the game products and content, I have placed (2) game design and production. On the right side, I have placed two sectors closely related to each other and the core: (3) players and (4) playing as an activity, which also includes things such as gaming habits and styles, game spaces and gaming devices. Next to playing as an activity, I have placed (5) social activities related to gaming (this includes things such as participation in gaming communities and events, different forms of fan art and modification), and next to it (6) e-sports. On the left side of

the figure I have placed three sectors of game cultural authorities: (7) game studies, (8) game histories and (9) game media. The last sector, influencing all others, is (10) cultural structures, which include subsectors of accessibility, participation, expertise as well as gendered power structures and cultural structures. These sectors are not independent, but there are various, often interactive relations between them.

While analysing and categorising the gender questions found in the game studies journals and conference papers, I placed each gender question category in one of the game cultural sectors described above. The most popular gender question category with nine questions was “gendered gaming habits and styles”, including questions on gendered game preferences, playing activities and styles. The second most popular gender question categories were “gendered game design and production”, “playing as gendered and gendering activity”, and “gendered game spaces” with six questions in each category. These categories included questions on, for example, gendered game design and gender boundaries at game studios, gendered game behaviour and activities in game, and gendered physical and virtual game spaces. The fifth most popular gender question category was “character gender representation”, which contained five questions.

Categories of “gendered game content”, “gendered player identities”, “gendered game preferences”, “gendered gaming devices” and “gender in game studies” had three questions each. The single question categories were “gendered game classifications”, “player gender representation”, “invisibility of female gamers”, “gendered game histories”, “gendered e-sports”, “accessibility”, “expertise” and “gendered game culture”. There were four categories without a single question: “gendered game media”, “social activities related to gaming”, “participation” and “power structures”.

Examining the most and least popular gender question categories in central game studies publications as well as how these questions are located in the field of game culture can tell us something about how gendered game culture is understood in game studies. Based on the analysis of the gender questions found in the game studies journal articles and conference papers in my data, game studies have been interested in the game cultural areas of playing as an activity, game design and production, and game products and their content from gender perspective. The most central gender questions in game studies found in my data were gendered gaming habits and styles, gendered game design and production, playing as gendered and gendering activity, gendered game spaces, and character gender representation.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

As can be seen from the presentations of the research history of gender and games described in the first part of this paper, it is usually presented as separate “waves” with different research approaches and themes attached to each of them. This common way of presenting research history only covers a fraction of all research done on gender and games, and it also diminishes the varying nuances of different studies while trying to fit them all under a single wave tied to a certain time. I suggest that instead of the wave model based on certain research themes or approaches, the study on gendered game culture should be examined and developed by taking as its first starting point the understanding of gender in the context of games.

The second starting point for the research of gendered game culture is to locate the central gender questions in game studies as well as the different sectors of game culture already researched from gender perspective. At the same time, it is possible to detect the

gender questions not yet presented and the sectors of game culture not yet widely studied from gender perspective. For this purpose I have suggested a preliminary model for the research field of gendered game culture, consisting of the gender questions presented in the selected leading level game studies publications in my data and locating them in the various sectors of game culture.

As games have become a part of our mainstream culture, and the number of gamers is constantly rising, it is crucial that game studies keep examining not only game products, their players, their content and production, but also game culture as a whole from the perspective of cultural participation and social inclusiveness. Attention should also be paid to the public discussion and representation of game culture, in mainstream media as well as gaming communities, game media outlets and game histories. Considering the number of gender issues in game culture brought up in the recent years, it is clear there is a demand for both theoretical and empirical academic work on the subject. Game studies are slowly responding to this demand, which can be seen from the various Calls for Papers for gender focused journal issues, conferences, seminars and workshops. In addition to individual studies on the topic, there is also a demand for theoretical framework that both defines and supports the study of gendered game culture within the field of game studies. Although the analysis presented in this paper only covers a narrow selection of the entire field of game studies and of all the research done on the topic of gender and games, it offers a starting point for a wider theoretical understanding and discussion of the concept of gendered game culture and its research.

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## **ENDNOTES**

1 For examples, please see Wingfield 2014; Plunkett 2012; Stuart 2014.

2 For examples, please see Call for Papers for *Game History* Annual Symposium 2015: History of Gender in Games; Call for Papers for *Well Played: A Journal on Video Games, Value and Meaning* special issue Diversity in Games; *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology* issue 2 Feminist Game Studies.

3 One of the best known examples being the “three waves of feminism” (Kroløkke & Sørensen 2006).

4 The journals were chosen based on being defined as “leading” level journals in the field of game studies in the Finnish Publication Forum (Julkaisufoorumi) <<http://www.tsv.fi/julkaisufoorumi/english.php?lang=en>>.

5 The articles published in *Game Studies* did not always contain abstracts, so in those cases the first few phrases of each article, visible on the journal number’s page in the journal archive, were used instead.

6 The categorisation was based on the use of gender-specific words in journal article and conference paper titles and abstracts. For example, an article about female game

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preferences (Nakamura & Wirman 2005) was categorised as woman-centric while an article about boys' play in a virtual world (Searle & Kafai 2012) was categorised as man-centric. Articles and papers without gender-specific words in their titles and abstracts were categorised as neutral.

7 About Game Studies <<http://gamestudies.org/1401/about>>.

8 Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media – About the Title <<http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal201757/title>>.

9 The DiGRA Digital Library <<http://www.digra.org/digital-library>>.

10 Some of the papers have been listed in the library multiple times, so the number of papers is not entirely accurate.

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