

Stretching the Code: Sexual Performances and Online Gaming Economies

Lyndsay Michalik

New online gaming technologies are normalized, and the demographics of gamer communities are changing. Meanwhile, stereotypes of the lonely, socially challenged, “hardcore” gamer man and the sexy game girl of his dreams continue to shape videogame character design. Sexualized characters and gender stereotypes in videogames is not a new story. Yet, multi-player online gaming is adding a new chapter. World of Warcraft, for example, has no “sexual content” in the game, but players can (and do) manipulate characters to look like they are engaging in sexual activity. Second Life’s Adult Continent, meanwhile, hosts the virtual equivalent of a red light district. Additionally, the gaming/dating website GameCrush extends gendered videogame stereotypes beyond in-game characters, into users’ “about me” descriptions, profile pictures, and interactions. In this light, this study focuses on how stereotypical roles of women in videogames are performed by players, who engage in various forms of sex work (an exchange of sexual services for non-sexual compensation, including financial and social capital) on web-based gaming platforms. Drawing examples from World of Warcraft, Second Life, and GameCrush, I show how each of these platforms encourages (or allows for) specific types of sexual performances, how online gamers manipulate the games to engage in various types of sex work, and how each type of sex work fits a different online economy.

[Gamers.](#)¹ ← For a good time, click here.

The word “gamers” for many, conjures stereotypical images “of overweight, acne-ridden males, living in their parent’s basements,” surviving on Burger King and energy drinks. Gamers, those “smelly, unsociable cave dwellers,” sit at computers or consoles for days, wearing “sweat laden t-shirts [of] the latest internet meme that would only ever make sense to another gamer that they have no chance of running into, as they never leave their darkened rooms.”² This gamer

Lyndsay Michalik (PhD, Louisiana State University) is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Cinema Studies at Oberlin College & Conservatory, where she teaches courses in Video Production, Remix Culture, Digital Adaptation, Performance and Intermediality, and Video Art.

Editor note: the hyperlinks in this essay are active if you are reading on a screen.

¹ YaoiVixenBoi, “Dead Alewives - D&D,” YouTube video, June 6, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_9VPqMbxUM.

² Shaun Cahill, “Gamer—The Stereotype,” Wordpress (blog), Aug. 29, 2010, <http://gamerstereotype.wordpress.com/>.

archetype is the nerdy, masculine, grotesque. Meanwhile, the social and technological factors that have shaped popular game design—including advertising targeted at the stereotypical gamer, movies, television, and game purchasing trends—have created [additional gaming stereotypes for women](#).³ According to Nancy Baym, “female avatars available in online games, characters that are almost uniformly shaped like pornographic fantasy figures,” are likely designed “by people—primarily male—who are embedded in a patriarchal culture that views women as sex objects and thinks of their primary audience as men and boys.”⁴ Women in videogames are often sexualized, with large breasts, thin hips, accentuated buttocks, visible midriffs, and likely to be shown “engaged in sexual behaviors.”⁵ Common roles for women in videogames include the “‘victim’ (or ‘damsel in distress’), the ‘evil obstacle’ that the hero must conquer,” and the prostitute (e.g. the [health-replenishing prostitutes in Grand Theft Auto 3](#), and the brothel-building game Ho-Tel).⁶ Stereotypes of lonely gamers and sexy game girls drive videogame character design.

Sexualized characters and gender stereotypes in videogames is not a new story, yet online video gaming is adding a new chapter. Before I discuss this new chapter, for clarity, I will briefly define the terms sex, sexual, sexuality, and gender, which are related but are not interchangeable concepts that I refer to throughout this essay. According to Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, the words “sex” and “sexual” have two meanings: “they can refer both to the physical distinction between male and female and to intimate erotic activity.”⁷ However, attributing this *double* meaning to the terms reinforces heterosexist thinking, as “what is sexual in the second sense concerns relations between the sexes in the first sense.”⁸ Following Judith Butler, I define “sex” as “an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time,” rather than a purely biological or anatomical “fact or static condition of a body.”⁹ Sex is a “process whereby regulatory

³ “The 50-Greatest Female Characters in the History of Video Games,” Tom’s Hardware, Feb. 19, 2007, <http://www.tomshardware.com/picturestory/382-the-50-greatest-female-characters-in-the-history-of-video-games.html>.

⁴ Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, (Malden: Polity Press, 2010), 39.

⁵ Tom Robinson et al., “Violence, Sexuality, and Gender Stereotyping: A Content Analysis of Official Video Game Web Sites,” *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research* 13 (2009): 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, *Feminism and sexuality: A reader*, (Columbia University Press, 1996): 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1990): 2.

norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.”¹⁰ The term “sexual,” meanwhile, will refer to intimate erotic activity of all kinds. The term “sexuality” will signify “aspects of personal and social life [that] have erotic significance”¹¹ and “forms of action that shape and direct bodies toward certain objects (and not others).”¹² Finally, following Butler, I use the term “gender” to refer to performances of masculinity and femininity. Gender, for Butler, is “real only to the extent that it is performed,” and the body becomes a gender “through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.”¹³

When the body is rethought to include digital extensions of a person—like N. Katherine Hayles explanation of the “posthuman,” for whom “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation”¹⁴—online games open up possibilities for transgressive erotic activity, and safe(r) spaces where people might explore non-normative performances of gender, sex and sexuality. According to Jenny Sundén, in videogames, “transgressive play is play as innovation and, possibly, subversion, of finding, exploring and exploiting loopholes in the game fabric.”¹⁵ Espen Aarseth similarly asserts that transgressive play challenges the character that is inscribed in the game, and is thus “a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subject to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself.”¹⁶

Using videogame platforms for erotic interaction, when these platforms were not intended for such use, is a form of transgressive play. While World of Warcraft has no “sexual content,” (i.e. the game is not intended to be used for sexual acts), players can still manipulate characters to look like they are engaging in various sexual acts. Second Life’s Adult Continent hosts the virtual equivalent of a red light district. Additionally, the website GameCrush extends gen-

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, (New York, Routledge, 1993): 2.

¹¹ Jackson and Scott, 2.

¹² Sara Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*, Duke University Press, 2006, as paraphrased in Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson, *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play*, (New York, Routledge, 2012): 173.

¹³ Butler, “Performative,” 278; 273.

¹⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2-3.

¹⁵ Jenny Sundén, “Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory,” Proceedings of DiGRA, Department of Media Technology, Royal Institute of Technology (Stockholm, Sweden, 2009): 1.

¹⁶ Espen Aarseth, “I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player,” Proceedings of DiGRA, University of Tokyo Hongo, (Tokyo, Japan, 2007): 132.

dered videogame stereotypes beyond in-game characters, into users' "about me" descriptions, profile pictures, and interactions. Meanwhile, game design limits the types of erotic activity that are possible, and often these limitations adhere to traditional, heterosexual, Western concepts of sex and gender performance. In this light, this study focuses on how stereotypical roles of women in videogames are performed by players, who engage in various forms of sex work (an exchange of sexual services for non-sexual compensation, including financial and social capital) on web-based gaming platforms. Drawing examples from World of Warcraft, Second Life, and GameCrush, I show how each of these platforms encourages or allows for specific types of sex work, how players manipulate the games to engage in various types of sex work, and how each type of sex work fits a different online economy.

World of Warcraft

The prototypical gamer stereotype is losing its greasy fingered grip as more games are marketed to audiences including women, children, and families. Gaming has expanded into our everyday lives, and gamers are shuffled into subgroups: traditional "hardcore" gamers (the stereotype described above), retro gamers, pros, n00bs (new players), and even casual gamers—who play Facebook or smartphone games. People play videogames for various reasons: for fun, to escape everyday pressures, for social reasons, and for a sense of accomplishment. Games offer "opportunities for a deeper immersion than we can get through movies or television, experiencing worlds and stories that are not attainable in the 'real world.'"¹⁷

Gamers are also quite social. In World of Warcraft (WoW), a popular MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game), players interact with each other to fight battles and complete quests. Players are rewarded for in-game success in ways that allow them to improve their character and move on to more difficult battles. WoW player statistics also discredit the stereotype that women do not play videogames. Studies indicate that women underreport their MMORPG playing habits, "making it difficult to estimate accurately how many and how much women play."¹⁸ Even so, women accounted for nearly 40% of all reported WoW players in December, 2008.¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert Ashley, "Why Game?" *A Life Well Wasted*, April 29, 2009, <http://alifewellwasted.com/2009/04/29/episode-3-why-game/>.

¹⁸ Lina Eklund, "Doing gender in cyberspace: The performance of gender by female World of Warcraft players," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17 (2011): 324.

¹⁹ "The State of the Video Gamer: PC Game and Video Game Console Usage," Nielsen Survey, Fourth Quarter, 2008.

New technologies are normalized and gamer communities are changing, but traditional gamer and gender stereotypes continue to shape character design. Avatars, player-designed characters, function in two ways: as the tool players use to interact with others, and the player's literal "game face" (i.e. what the character looks like). As for avatars' abilities, WoW is gender neutral; feminine and masculine warriors are equally fierce. Gender in WoW is primarily visual, and gender is one of the first choices one must make when creating a WoW avatar. While players can customize their avatars, options are limited. Avatars' appearances, including body shape, size, hair, voice, and movement are "pre-programmed into a gender-stereotyped role clearly based on a heterosexual expectancy."²⁰ Women dance sensually, for example, while men jump and thrust. Additionally, WoW avatars' "joking" and "flirting" performances are always directed at the "opposite" gender.

Steve Dixon notes, "the audience's identification with [a] character is closer with a videogame than in traditional theatre... [as] the audience is the participant, the participant is the player, [and] the player is the character."²¹ This is intensified when the player also has agency in the creation of the character. Players generally create MMORPG avatars for ongoing (rather than singular) online performances within game worlds. Players "maintain, nurture, and develop [these characters] indefinitely."²² Depending upon the gaming platform, avatar performances can include voice chat, textual interaction, gestures, and emotions (often through facial expressions). These "character performances" can also extend to online forums outside of the game, "where participants [spend] time interacting with others..., writing detailed character stories and histories,"²³ and creating videos of or about their avatar. Research has shown that "the choice of avatar for women who play computer games is a very conscious one,"²⁴ and that women gamers "stylize their online bodies in conscious performances of gender identity."²⁵ According to Mateusz Woźniak, recent research on the neural activity of gamers in response to their WoW avatars also suggests that players often have quite complex relationships with their avatars; "The latest inquiries into [players] relations with [their] virtual bodies... suggests that, at least to

²⁰ Eklund, 331.

²¹ Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art and Installation* (Cambridge, MIT, 2007): 601.

²² Dmitri Williams, Tracy LM Kennedy and Robert J. Moore, "Behind the avatar: The patterns, practices, and functions of role playing in MMOs" (*Games and Culture* 6.2, 2011): 191.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eklund, 327.

²⁵ Ibid., 330.

some extent, avatars are perceived as extensions of the body.”²⁶ Other studies found that many WoW players perceive their avatars as “more similar to [their] ideal self than to their actual self.”²⁷

Behind every WoW avatar is a *real person* who created and cares for that avatar, and real people will stretch the limits of the possible. While gender performances in WoW are limited by game design, as described above, sexual performances are less so. WoW has no in-game sexual content (in terms of avatars being programmed to engage in erotic acts), yet characters can be manipulated to look like they are engaging in erotic activities. WoW contains no nudity, for example, but taking off an avatar’s equipment leaves the men in briefs and women in bras and underwear.”²⁸ Chat in WoW can also be “significantly more explicit than the pre-programmed game elements.”²⁹ Blizzard Entertainment (the makers of WoW) might not approve of cybersex, but they can do little to deter it. Blizzard thus “allows role-playing, even the erotic kind, between two consenting adults if the chat is private.”³⁰ When sexual role-play becomes public, Blizzard steps in. In 2010, for example, a concerned parent cancelled his 15-year-old son’s account after discovering the boy was frequenting “the Lion’s Pride Inn... a place that [had] become a hot-spot for... erotic role-playing.”³¹ Blizzard closed the [Lion’s Pride Inn](#) soon after the complaint.

Sexual acts in WoW extend beyond in-game public “hot-spots.” One player posted on Craigslist that she would have WoW cybersex for 5000 in-game gold (and at least one person took her up on this offer).³² Yet sex-for-money exchanges are rare, as success in WoW largely relies on community building, group participation, and trust, rather than individual accomplishments. WoW’s design “thickens the community as a way to improve the play of the game.”³³ The game is built upon non-monetary exchange, what Lawrence Lessig calls a “sharing

²⁶ Mateusz Woźniak, “Embodied Agent or Master of Puppets: Human in Relation with his Avatar,” In *Beyond Artificial Intelligence* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2013): 79.

²⁷ Klimmt Christoph, Hefner Dorothee, and Vorderer Peter, “The Video Game Experience as ‘True’ Identification: A Theory of Enjoyable Alterations of Players” Self-Perception,” *Communication Theory* 19.4 (2009): 365.

²⁸ Suburban Plankton, “How much sex in World of Warcraft?” Straight Dope Message Board, Aug. 8, 2010, <http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=573931>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Mark Sharkey, “Digital Town, Inn Labeled WoW’s Red Light District, Blizzard Attempting Clean-up,” Gamespy, Aug. 5, 2010, <http://pc.gamespy.com/pc/world-of-warcraft/1110605p1.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lu Sancea, “WoW has a red light district!” *The Lighter Side of Code*, Apr. 18, 2010, <http://www.vintagecoding.com/2007/04/18/wow-has-a-red-light-district/>.

³³ Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, (Penguin Press, Kindle Edition, 2008): loc. 4360.

economy.” Players value “connecting with other people, creating an online identity, expressing oneself... [and] garnering other people’s attention.”³⁴ Thus, most of the performances of “sex work” that WoW inspires are more often like “sex play” for the players’ entertainment and enjoyment. Some players, for example, create and share online videos of their erotic WoW activities. In one such video, depicted in Figures 2, 3, and 4, an Elf-Hunter transforms herself from stereotypical vamp to a more innocent-looking virgin/vixen. She seduces a knight into a secluded area and has a simulated sexual encounter with him, using various animation commands, including “praying.” After simulating the sexual acts, she slays the knight and returns to her original evil-vamp look.³⁵



Figure 1. Screen shot of lap dances at the Lion’s Pride Inn. Source: E13Production.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., loc. 4635.

³⁵ GloriousMachinima, “Red Light District Snippet,” YouTube video, Nov. 24, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTROWFGYaSU&list=UUHXrkOig0EmDr_aPG4kNTVA.

³⁶ E13Production, “World Of Warcraft Red Light District,” YouTube video, Aug. 5, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_4o05sZgiY.



Figure 2. WoW vixen/virgin simulating sex. Source: GloriousMachinima.



Figure 3. WoW vixen/virgin “praying,” to simulate oral sex.
Source: GloriousMachinima.



Figure 4. Virgin-turned-vamp after having sex with, then slaughtering, a knight.
Source: GloriousMachinima.

This type of transgressive *doing* of sex in WoW does not so much queer the game as much as it challenges the code of the game through machinima, video that remixes the pre-created videogame images. This short machinima's storyline indicates that the woman character is in control of the entire exchange (from sex to slaying), and was created by the gamer playing the woman's character. The role reversal, indicating an active feminine hero rather than passive feminine victim or object, also blurs traditional gender representation in videogames. However, while this technique may work to open up alternative gender possibilities, re-appropriating established patriarchal archetypes implies that the characteristics that are traditionally assumed as masculine are also heroic.³⁷ The fetishized female victim (virgin) is replaced by the fetishized female hero (vamp), which undermines possible alternate gender performance possibilities. The heroine is still encoded within a heteronormative framework, and represents a "patriarchal rather than feminist fantasy."³⁸

³⁷ Lorna Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2005): 21.

³⁸ Gwyneth Bodger, "Buffy the Feminist Slayer? Constructions of Femininity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 2 (2003).



Figure 5. WoW music video, “The Ballad of the Sex Junkie.” Source: Phixor2000.

In [another video](#), heteronormative ideals of (failed) performances of masculinity are depicted. As seen in Figures 5 and 6, a beefy, under-sexed dwarf searches the world for sex. His sexual fantasies, however, do not come true; this dwarf—an avatar that would be considered unattractive and undesirable by conventional Western standards—remains an ever-unsatisfied lurker.³⁹

Most WoW players do not seem to expect financial returns for sexual performances. WoW’s ethic of user generosity inspires players who are interested in sexual activity to pursue it within WoW’s established sharing economy. Meanwhile, WoW users do pay to play the game. Lessig explains how sharing economies can “coexist with an ethic of profit.”⁴⁰ Companies like Blizzard build business by profiting from users’ sharing behavior. This can be positive, as long as the business continues to benefit players “who remain within that economy.”⁴¹ These “hybrid” economies combine aspects of commercial and sharing economies. While workers/volunteers in hybrid economies might not be paid in mon-

<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2003/03/06/buffy-the-feminist-slayer-constructions-of-femininity-in-buffy-the-vampire-slayer-gwyneth-bodger/>

³⁹ Phixor2000, “The Ballad of the Sex Junkie,” YouTube video, Oct. 12, 2007,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz-RmSG2s1k>.

⁴⁰ Lessig, loc. 4635.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, loc. 2970.

ey, they are compensated in other meaningful ways. Thus, players continue to contribute their work/creativity to the game, helping to ensure the game's commercial success. While WoW offers a possible space for transgressive erotic in and out-of-game activity, it still adheres to many heteronormative standards and ideals.



Figure 6. Wow music video, "The Ballad of the Sex Junkie." Source: Phixor2000.

Second Life

The MMORPG Second Life's (SL) hybrid economy also owes much of its success to its users' sharing economy. In addition to the avatars, players (not game designers) create many of the "places" in SL. Linden Lab (the makers of SL) describes the site as "a 3D world where everyone you see is a real person and every place you visit is built by people just like you."⁴² According to Lessig, SL "invites and enables customers to collaborate and add value on a massive scale. The members do this with one another (mainly) for free; the product of what they do for free is a much richer, more interesting virtual world for Linden Lab to sell membership to."⁴³ SL users build personal bonds and communities by

⁴² "What is Second Life," Second Life, 2012, <http://secondlife.com/whatis/>.

⁴³ Lessig, loc. 4276.

helping new users learn the game, keeping neighborhoods aesthetically pleasing, writing game code, building institutions to make the game work better, and through democratic “acts of self-governance.”⁴⁴

Second Life’s hybrid economy is more complicated than WoW’s in terms of how commercial exchanges and user sharing economies are integrated. Unlike WoW, SL is free to play; players pay to upgrade their gaming experience. Commercial economies exist within SL to provide these “upgrades,” including a large sex industry. SL also inspires a wider variety of sexual performances than WoW. According to one blogger, SL is “the ultimate sex dating site, where you can show off your perfect body.”⁴⁵ SL offers many opportunities to customize avatars, with thousands of options for “clothing, hair and fashion accessories.”⁴⁶ Yet, SL is no exception to traditionally sexualized characters in videogames. Bonnie Ruberg explains why one would customize an (assumedly female and feminine) SL avatar for maximum sex appeal:

[Y]ou can have chat-based cybersex without worrying too much about your mannequin-esque crotch... For the full experience though, you’ll need virtual genitalia. Maybe you don’t think it’s that important. But the first time you take off your cyber shirt in front of a hot date and his jaw drops at the site of your horrific nipple-less breasts, you’ll understand.⁴⁷

Players buy anatomically correct “skins,” which cost “up to \$2000 Lindens (about \$10).”⁴⁸ Technologically advanced skins include clickable body parts that monitor the avatar’s arousal. Clicking elicits avatar responses, and can even lead to avatar orgasm. SL advertisements, meanwhile, depict thin, sexually dressed avatars, boasting that SL is a place to connect with other players, “free yourself” (assumedly from that pesky corporeal body), love your look, and love your life.⁴⁹ According to these advertisements, a conventionally sexy SL avatar will improve anyone’s quality of life.

Shelling out money for an “anatomically correct” virtual body seems pointless if the intention is not to show it off. According to Ruberg, “striking up a conversation with just about anyone” in certain areas of SL can lead to sex.⁵⁰ One island on SL is “adult only.” Entire clubs on this island are devoted to sex

⁴⁴ Ibid., loc. 4318.

⁴⁵ Gwyneth Llewelyn, “Second Life’s New Red Light District,” gwynethllewelyn.net, March 12, 2009, <http://gwynethllewelyn.net/2009/03/12/second-lifes-new-red-light-district/>.

⁴⁶ “Avatar,” Second Life, 2011, <http://secondlife.com/whatis/>.

⁴⁷ Bonnie Ruberg, “Getting Started with Sex in Second Life,” *The Village Voice*, June 19, 2007.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “What is Second Life?”

⁵⁰ Ruberg.

simulation. Dirty Talk Voice Sex Lounge (DTVSL), the most popular SL “sex place” in January 2011, is a “voice club” complete with bouncers and an entrance fee.⁵¹ DTVSL allows sexual activity, including avatars showing genitals and using “pose balls” to visually simulate sexual positions. According to DTVSL’s owner, the club’s popularity is due to its unique combination of voice technology and sex simulation. “Voice places” offer the option to voice chat, while sex clubs “tend to not have ‘voice’ activated, so people are typing, and then they go into private talk” for cybersex.⁵² DTVSL was created for “exhibitionists and voyeurs,” to “voice sex in the open so everyone in the club can hear them.”⁵³ DTVSL also offers “sex shows” and streams live (screened) SL webcam footage into the club, which is displayed on a screen for VIPs. Voyeurs pay \$250L (about \$1) to give VIPs a two-hour personal show. Finally, DTVSL hosts “date auctions” where VIPs place themselves on auction boards, and players bid, buy, and own the auctioned avatar for two hours.

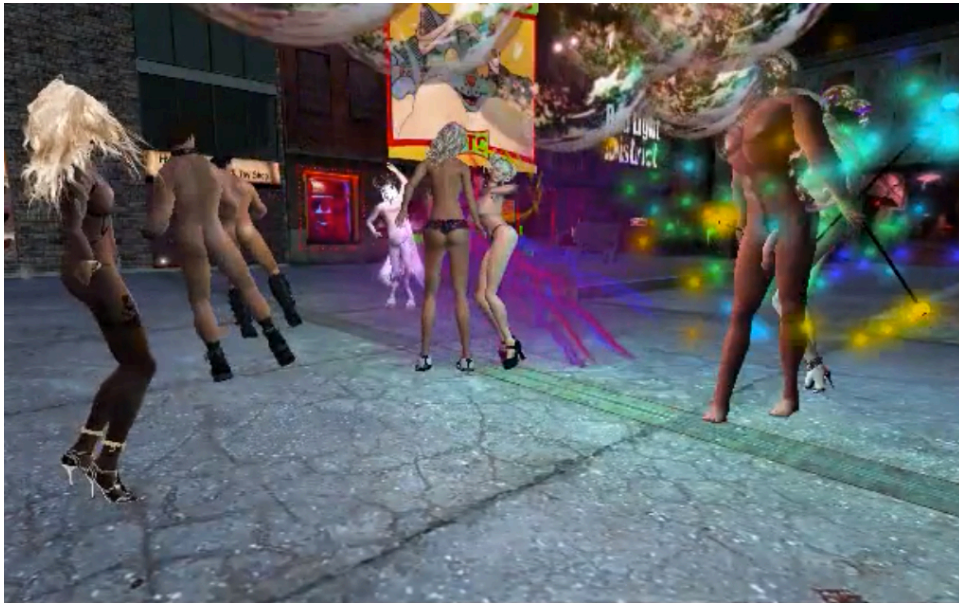


Figure 7. Screenshot of [Zindra unzipped Red Light District Dance Party](#), in Second Life. Source: ClovisLuik.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Paisley Beebe, “Steve Rumsford, Dexter Morph Ihnen, Stephanie Steamweaver,” treet.tv video file, Sept. 26, 2010, <http://treet.tv/shows/tonightlive/episodes/tlpb-26sep10>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ClovisLuik, “Zindra unzipped Red Light District Dance Party,” YouTube video file, Apr. 25, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G59ca0eV6TE>.

Lessig concludes that regardless of whether an economy is commercial, sharing, or hybrid, what is most important is that everyone involved understands what is happening; “transparency is key.”⁵⁵ Second Life’s combination of commercial activity, including various forms of sex work and sex play, within its larger sharing economy, works for the site and its users. In regards to sexual activity, Linden Lab allows players to write “adult” code for the game, and SL players seem to know what they’re paying/working for. Both WoW and SL are also clear about what types of in-game sexual activity are (and are not) permitted, and the game code for each reflects these limits. When a gaming site attempts to disguise its commercial economy as either a hybrid or sharing economy, however, problems arise. This is exemplified by the online platform GameCrush.

GameCrush

Despite larger cultural and market changes, many individuals still use the word “gamer” to associate themselves with specific groups and stereotypes. Gamers actively “build identities for themselves, build interpersonal relationships, create social contexts,” and create their own hierarchies and rules about who does and does not fit in.⁵⁶ Historically, women have not fit into most gamer groups. Reinforcing heteronormative expectations of women gamers, these groups see women as a scarcity and/or a welcome sexual distraction. The website GameCrush (GC) was born from this stereotypical notion of the scarce, sexy, woman gamer. GC catered to lonely gamers who would pay to play videogames with a sexy “PlayDate” he could see via webcam. In the context of online gaming platforms, GC was a novel idea, as it combined gaming with live webcam video. In the end, however, the gender and sexual stereotypes that inspired the site proved too weak to ensure commercial success.

According to GC’s developers, in early stages GC was “the gaming equivalent of buying a girl a drink to chat her up.” Players would buy points, and use these to buy game time with a PlayDate. Ten minutes of playing Halo 3 cost 400 points (about \$8); games like Checkers and Tic-Tac-Toe cost less. Players could browse PlayDate profiles, check out player ratings, profile pictures, written descriptions, and self-reported stats including body type, eye color, hair color, height, relationship status, ethnicity, likes, dislikes, and “play schedules.” The player would then send a gaming invite to his PlayDate of choice; “If the Play-

⁵⁵ Lessig, loc. 4360.

⁵⁶ Baym, 52.

Date accepts the invitation, she can set her mood to ‘Flirty’ or ‘Dirty’ and it’s game on... The pair can chat, play, or both for the amount of time purchased.⁵⁷ After the game, the player can tip his PlayDate and/or rate her performance (as a gamer and/or date) on her profile. PlayDates cash in points they earn for a paycheck. Despite their use of the term “PlayDates,” GC maintained it was “a site for gamers to be social [and] play their favorite games... [not] an official dating site.” GC compared itself to “hostess bars,” where “wonderful ladies” offer their company, “and all you have to do is buy them a drink. It really takes the pressure off of ‘is this girl gonna reject me?’”⁵⁸ They held strong that “GameCrush [was] not an adult site and no one, female, male, ewok, should be expected to do anything besides kick your butt at a game.”⁵⁹

On the day of their beta launch (March 2010), GameCrush crashed, as high demand overloaded their servers.⁶⁰ Three months later, GC returned as an invitation-only site, with 5000 women members and 1000 men. *Business Week* called GC “part social network, part online dating site, and a lot of Grand Theft Auto.”⁶¹ IGN’s Senior Editor Daemon Hatfield stated, “I have no doubt there are many gamers out there who would be willing to pay a little cash to play and flirt with hot girls.”⁶² Dean Takahashi of VentureBeat similarly wrote, “A hot girl who can beat you at a game of Halo is probably... close to an ideal date for a lot of gamer dudes.”⁶³ Blogger responses to the site were more skeptical. GC’s 18-and-up rule, and use of “dirty” talk, webcams, and tips, lead some critics to compare the site to phone sex lines.⁶⁴ One blogger commented, “The hardcore game community... shuts [women] out of their ranks on the corporate side, hyper-sexualizes them in games, and then wonders why they have a hard time at-

⁵⁷ Matt Hickey, “GameCrush: Pay to play--with girls,” CNET, March 23, 2010, http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-10470279-1.html.

⁵⁸ “Forum,” GameCrush, May 17, 2011, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Kevin Parrish, “GameCrush Servers Overloaded in 5 Minutes,” Tom’s Guide, Mar. 24, 2010, <http://www.tomsguide.com/us/Xbox-Live-GameCrush-Dating,news-6242.html>.

⁶¹ Adam Satariano, “GameCrush Offers Male Gamers a Social Life,” *BusinessWeek*, July 1 2010, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_28/b4186072409005.htm.

⁶² Daemon Hatfield, “GameCrush Lets Gamers Pay to Play with Flirty Girls,” *news.com.au*, March 23, 2010, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/gamecrush-lets-gamers-pay-to-play-with-girls/story-e6frfro0-1225844277216>.

⁶³ Dean Takahashi, “Dudes can pay hot girls to play online video games with them,” *GamesBeat*, March 23, 2010, <http://venturebeat.com/2010/03/23/dudes-can-pay-hot-girls-to-play-online-video-games-with-them/>.

⁶⁴ Jessica Rovollo, “PlayDates for the Lonely,” *The Huffington Post*, Mar. 25, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jessica-rovollo/playdates-for-the-lonely_b_513121.html.

tracting more female players.”⁶⁵ Another wrote, “there’s something inherently sexual about GameCrush—but that’s mostly due to the over-sexualizing of women in both American society and particularly in gamer culture.”⁶⁶ A third blogger stated that paying money “for a short 10 minutes of game play with a cute girl is equal to gaming prostitution.”⁶⁷ Further implying that the PlayDates who worked for GC were somehow less than real people, this blogger claimed, “For the \$50 you’d pay for GameCrush... you could take a *real girl* on this thing called a date [emphasis added].”⁶⁸ Yet, the initial 5000 PlayDates were *real women*; they performed as sexually ideal “gamer girls” (for the lonely male gamers whom they imagined would be their clients) as a job, for money.

During my first venture into the world of GameCrush in late 2011, I was bombarded with hundreds of profile pictures. More men populated the site than women, yet the women’s profiles were mostly located at the top of the page. These women were scantily clad, showing skin and cleavage, many with unnaturally colored hair (e.g. blue, pink, purple). Several held pink videogame controllers like weapons, and most had come-hither usernames like BrassyBabe, Miss_Epic_Pr0p0rtions, and sexxiebebe. In their profile pictures, these women looked like digital-born avatars turned into human bodies; some were even dressed up as recognizable videogame characters, with push-up bras, cinched waists, and lots of makeup. GC’s guidelines for profile pictures specify that the image must show the face of the person “reasonably assumed to be the account holder.” Beyond this, image guidelines insinuate that users should push the boundaries of what is allowed, by stating quite explicitly what is and is not permitted. Users cannot be shown nude, touching genitalia, simulating violence, or simulating sex.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, users are allowed to lick “something nonsexual,” wear swimsuits, and depict S&M, bondage, ball gags, lingerie, and “touching boobs.” The PlayDates on GC performed gender in ways that visually reflected overly sexualized avatars and traditional stereotypes of women in videogames.

PlayDates have asserted that GameCrush fostered community and did not pressure them to engage in any web-cam enabled sex play. While PlayDates en-

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Maddy Myers, “GameCrush.Com: Girls Who Play for Pay,” *The Boston Phoenix*, Mar. 23, 2010, <http://blog.thephoenix.com/BLOGS/laserorgy/archive/2010/03/23/gamecrush-com-girls-who-play-for-pay.aspx>.

⁶⁷ Millionaire Hoy, “GameCrush: When Video Games Meet Prostitution,” *Associated Content*, Mar. 30, 2010, <http://voices.yahoo.com/gamecrush-video-games-meet-prostitution-5733242.html>.

⁶⁸ Millionaire Hoy, “GameCrush or XXX Webcam Sex Chat: Which Costs the Most?” *Associated Content*, Mar. 30, 2010, <http://voices.yahoo.com/gamecrush-xxx-webcam-sex-chat-which-costs-most-5764662.html?cat=19>.

⁶⁹ “Forum.”

counter players who are “obviously looking for more than a casual, videogame companion,” the women get to choose what type of gaming interaction they welcome (i.e. “casual gaming,” “highly competitive,” “lessons in playing,” or “the more risqué ‘The Edge.’”) EarthwormJane explains that much of her job as a PlayDate “is to entertain... [and] to show our guests a good time, whether it’s just having a conversation or having a buddy to blow-up zombies with. It really is what role you choose to fill... Some PlayDates are comfortable enough to go a little bit further with things.”⁷⁰

In the summer of 2011, GC stopped “certifying” PlayDates. Payouts from the site no longer came in the form of a paycheck. Instead, all players—men and women, PlayDates and Players—could cash out credits they earned or bought for items or gift cards in the “Rewards Zone.” PlayDates were not excited about the new system. One newer PlayDate stated, “I didn’t join this to meet people (like dating) I signed up here to make money (without spending any) is that even possible [sic]??” Meanwhile, PlayDates who “had adapted to the previous play style of GameCrush,” began a “Pay-to-Play (P2P) Movement,” creating profile banners that stipulated how many credits it would cost to play with them.⁷¹ Men also complained about the new system. In a forum post titled “Sausage Feast” [sic] one player commented, “I dunno what incentive girls need to come here but we definitely need more girls or we will be drowned out again.” Another responded, “6 girls online, 20 guys online. Sausage fest for sure. I don’t see why we have to see the men’s profiles when the men are all here to play with chicks.”⁷² According to the site, the most users online at once were 587, in January 2011. By November 2011, it was common for only six or seven players to be online at once.

Regardless of whether the initial PlayDates were paid for gaming or sexual activity, *they were paid*. When GC began paying all players with gift cards and other items, these payments still had monetary value in the “real world.” In October 2012, however, GC changed their M.O. yet again, transitioning from a commercial economy that paid all its players, to a sharing economy that no longer offered players any financial compensation. According to a site administrator, “in response to feedback... [GC] transitioned to be focused on natural social interaction rather than ‘pay-to-play.’”⁷³ Lessig points out how the ethics of sharing and commercial economies differ: workers should be paid in a commercial economy or they will stop working; volunteers in a sharing economy generally

⁷⁰ Lori May, “GameCrush Review: Working ‘PlayDates’ Offer Opinions,” *Associated Content*, Jan. 11, 2011, <http://voices.yahoo.com/gamecrush-review-working-playdates-offer-opinions-7556288.html?cat=41>.

⁷¹ “Forum.”

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ GCEric, “Welcome to the New GameCrush,” message to the author, Oct. 4, 2012.

feel they should not be *financially* compensated for participating. Meanwhile, it is less clear if and/or how workers in a hybrid economy should be compensated. Drawing from Brewster Kahle, Lessig states, “people have no problem being in the gift economy. But when it blurs into the for-pay commodity economy... people have a ‘jerk reaction,’ [...] the feeling that they, the volunteers, are jerks for giving something to ‘the man’ for free. No sense could be more poisonous to the hybrid economy.”⁷⁴ PlayDates had similar “jerk reactions” when GC changed its economic model from a for-pay system to a sharing system. Former PlayDates lamented their loss of income, as game credits could not be cashed in for anything except webcam or gaming time, “worthless” to PlayDates. These women had agreed to work for one type of website, their work was used to make money for both the site and themselves, and then the site began offering them worthless rewards for the same work. GameCrush also made this change overnight, without warning any users, causing an uproar among players who did not get a final payout for credits they bought or earned.

Several women commented that site now feels too much like a dating site, rather than a gaming or sex site. One former PlayDate predicted that soon all the women players would leave, turning GC into a “sausage den of creepers passing meaningless pictures of gifts to one another back and forth while playing boring flash games.”⁷⁵ (The “pictures of gifts” she refers to are digital images of “gifts” that have no monetary value, and do not exist in tangible form outside of GC.) In response to user backlash, GC claimed, “while the financial reward worked for some, it turned off most who were on the site to just make new friends.” GC wanted to “get back to what we intended all along, for the site to be a fun place to meet, match, and play others.”⁷⁶ Longtime users did not buy this “just make new friends” story. The site, to them, was always about playing games with sexy women and spending or making money. One user wrote, “I was here back when girls got PAID PER MINUTE! [...] So any BS about this site ORIGINALLY being to meet ‘friends’ is insane. Who has to PAY their friends per minute they talk to them?!”⁷⁷ Another wrote, “How many ‘serious gamer’ [women] do you know who are in a hurry to get online and play tic tac toe with a random guy they don’t know? [Men are] only here because of the girls, but I promise you that the girls aren’t here for [the men].”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Lessig, loc. 4607.

⁷⁵ CaliGirl420, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 5, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁷⁶ GCeric, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 7, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁷⁷ CaliGirl420.

⁷⁸ BriannaBest, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 13, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

GC eventually admitted that “the original GameCrush went broke.”⁷⁹ Rather than shut the site down, administrators decided to move forward with the new sharing economy ethic. Forum conversations then turned to the “real reasons” for GC’s initial success—the site banked on long-held stereotypes of lonely, gamer guys, and the sexed-up women these gamers fantasized about. One user pointed out that GC capitalized on the idea that “girl gamers are a commodity.”⁸⁰ Another noted that GC took “advantage of the stereotype that girls don’t play videogames... to make a profit,” concluding that, “GameCrush... was an insult to gamers and the gaming community as a whole (for both males and females). In trying to eliminate one negative stereotype about gamers (that girls don’t play games), they strongly reinforced another negative stereotype (about male gamers in general).”⁸¹ A third user posited, “Some [men] are really lonely... The incentive for the girls to [game here] with *this* specific lonely person instead of, say, the 30 million other not-lonely guys was the money... Now ALL incentives are gone for the girls.”⁸²

Meanwhile, several former PlayDates adopted GC’s original business model. They advertise their services as gaming companions on their GC profiles, but specify other ways to buy their gaming/webcam time *not* on GC. One states, “I have had several ‘old’ players asking me if we could continue how it was, just with them gifting [me] over paypal.”⁸³ Another advertises, “Want a game? Inbox me for details on how to play. I don’t accept GameCrush gifts anymore, sorry guys!”⁸⁴ Other former PlayDates post their amazon.com wish lists on their profiles, or request payment in the form of gift cards.

Conclusion

Online gaming involves worlds where sex both is and is not a commodity, and lines cannot be easily drawn between work and play. MMORPGs like World of Warcraft and Second Life are sites of social networking and business. Consumers “buy into virtual dreams and fantasies based on sexual ideals, and own virtu-

⁷⁹ GCEric.

⁸⁰ shmzng, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 12, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁸¹ KaoticFlame, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 13, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁸² Behemothxp, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 19, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁸³ Seraphlyn, “Subject: The New GameCrush - all bright, shinny and different,” GameCrush, Oct 15, 2012, <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.

⁸⁴ DJ_Poprocks, GameCrush, accessed Dec. 20, 2011, http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=profile:username,DJ_Poprocks.

al goods that they might never possess in a tangible, material way.”⁸⁵ SL and WoW exemplify how sex work can be performed within and help create online economies. Rules and expectations in these spaces vary, and are largely player-created within the guidelines of each gaming world. WoW, a sharing economy in which sexual acts are not part of the code, is still used for erotic sexual activity. For the most part, sex work on WoW exists as an extension of the sharing economy, as user-generated images and videos. Sex work on SL, meanwhile, exists as player-created code, and accepted commercial practices, within SL’s complex hybrid economy. Players purchase sexy avatar upgrades, pay entrance fees into Sex Clubs, and pay for various forms of voyeurism and virtual sex. WoW and SL users are queering these digital spaces by using them for various sexual purposes that they were not intended for, and/or creating places for users to explore non-normative gender and sexual performances. Yet, the game code can only be manipulated so far. There is a limit to this queering of space, as the visual representations of avatars on both platforms ultimately reinforce heteronormative ideals of the masculine male and feminine female, and conventional Western ideals of physical attractiveness and desirability.

GameCrush, meanwhile, exemplifies what happens when an online business is not clear, in terms of what type of economy/community users should expect. GC began as a commercial economy, but seemed to want to claim “social network” status. Yet, the price and compensation for player networking was financial. After going under, GC re-created itself as a sharing economy, and administrators acted as if the site had always been primarily about social networking. Longtime users felt betrayed and ripped off. Some users left the site within days of the change. Others adopted GC’s original commercial premise; they advertise their flirty/dirty gaming services on GC, but now are paid directly by clients. These former PlayDates, now private contractors, no longer share profits with GC. Unlike GC admins, the PlayDates seem to understand that economic transparency in the online gaming business is crucial. GameCrush, through its economic foibles, has shown that while the traditional gamer stereotype exists, it is a niche market online. While GC PlayDates capitalize on traditional gamer stereotypes by physically embodying idealized, sexy, female videogame characters—initially to generate business for the site, and now to generate business for themselves—it seems only a few are still in business.

Like World of Warcraft and Second Life, many online gaming platforms are embedded within long-held, traditional, heteronormative gender structures.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Mike Molesworth and Janice Denegri-Knott, “Digital Play and the Actualization of the Consumer Imagination,” *Games and Culture* 2.2 (2007): 114.

⁸⁶ Maureen A. Flanagan, “Navigating the narrative in space: Gender and spatiality in virtual worlds,” *Art Journal* 59.3 (2003): 74.

While the internet may allow us space to create alternative gender narratives and explore non-normative sexualities, players are still limited to avatar aesthetics based on established gender and sexual stereotypes. Traditionally masculine characteristics remain “heroic” despite the avatar’s gender, women avatars do not stray far from the traditional fetishized virgin, vixen, and vamp looks, and there is generally no transgender avatar option. Users can create sexually “ideal” avatars, but these must be created within the confines of traditionally masculine, consumer gamer culture. Yet, the creators of WoW and SL seem to acknowledge that the real people behind the avatars will use the game in ways the company cannot predict. Rather than pre-scribing player behavior, these companies make their policies clear to users, and allow for user exploration and experimentation within established boundaries. Player performances—both sexual and non-sexual—become a large part of what makes these games successful and appealing to other players. These performances also help create and maintain the delicate balance between sharing and commercial economies for each platform.

As Steve Dixon notes, “digital performance is predominantly created *by* people who are (or believe themselves to be) posthuman *for* people who are posthuman.”⁸⁷ In online gaming worlds, where avatars are extensions of their posthuman creators, users are both paying for and readily creating methods and spaces for safe (and potentially anonymous), transgressive performances of gender and sexuality. When translated to the corporeal world (as in the case of GameCrush), however, women players’ attempts at physically emulating the sexy, coded, in-game character exposes the fantasy of the avatar for what it is: a visual representation based on heteronormative sexual practices and unrealistic Western standards of beauty. GameCrush’s failure is thus not necessarily a result of the changes the site made to its economic model. Rather, GC’s ultimate changeover from a commercial to an (attempted) sharing economy was symptomatic of its creators’ misunderstandings about who current online gamers are, and what they want. GC failed to acknowledge that the stereotypes they were drawing on did not accurately reflect the larger online gaming community. GameCrush’s “play games with sexy girls” model *might* have worked in the 1980s as a phone sex line for role-playing gamers. At a certain role-of-the-di, perhaps, the player could call a 900-number and pay someone (whom he can see only in his imagination) per minute, to perform via telephone as the sexy night elf of his dreams. Applying these unrealistic stereotypes to “real life” and real bodies, however, is not the type of player interaction that much of the current online gaming community seems to want.

⁸⁷ Dixon, 152.

Meanwhile, in MMORPGs like WoW and SL, gender and sexual stereotypes still exist, but are created and performed through user-manipulated avatars. At the same time, both games can still be played in queer ways, whether in the minds or behavior of the players' or by what Alexander Galloway calls "countergaming." According to Galloway:

Conventional gamic form relies on a notion of purposeful interactivity based on a coherent set of game rules. Narrative and form are smoothly joined. But countergaming often has no interactive narrative at all and little gameplay supported by few game rules, if any. In this sense, countergaming replaces play with aesthetics, or perhaps something like the play of signification.⁸⁸

For example, in WoW, a player might decide to not participate in many battles or quests, and spend more time engaging in activities the game was not created for, like sexual activities. Further, players can also use WoW or SL to create sexual or non-sexual machinima to subvert the narrative coded into the game, and create their own. Thus, while these gaming platforms limit avatar aesthetics, and limit what users can and cannot do in regards to playing the game proper, there are numerous other creative possibilities in terms of what players can do and create in regard to playing *with* the game.

⁸⁸ Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press (2006): 115, 118.

Bibliography

- Aarseth, Espen. "I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player." Proceedings of DiGRA, University of Tokyo Hongo, Japan, 2007.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- "Avatar." Second Life. 2011. <http://secondlife.com/whatis/>.
- Baym, Nancy K. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Malden: Polity Press, 2010.
- Bodger, Gwyneth. "Buffy the Feminist Slayer? Constructions of Femininity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 2 (2003).
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Christoph, Klimmt, Hefner Dorothee, and Vorderer Peter. "The Video Game Experience as 'True' Identification: A Theory of Enjoyable Alterations of Players' Self-Perception." *Communication Theory* 19.4 (2009): 351-373.
- Dixon, Steve. *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art and Installation*. Cambridge, MIT, 2007.
- Eklund, Lina. "Doing gender in cyberspace: The performance of gender by female World of Warcraft players." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17 (2011): 323-42.
- Flanagan, Maureen A. "Navigating the narrative in space: Gender and spatiality in virtual worlds." *Art Journal* 59.3 (2003): 74-85.
- "Forum," *GameCrush*, n.d., <http://www.gamecrush.com/#page=forum>.
- Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. *Feminism and sexuality: A reader*. Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- Lessig, Lawrence. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. Penguin Press, Kindle Edition, 2008.
- Molesworth, Mike and Janice Denegri-Knott. "Digital Play and the Actualization of the Consumer Imagination." *Games and Culture* 2.2 (2007): 114-133.
- Robinson, Tom et al. "Violence, Sexuality, and Gender Stereotyping: A Content Analysis of Official Video Game Web Sites." *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research* 13 (2009).
- Sundén, Jenny. "Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory." Conference proceedings of DiGRA, Department of Media Technology, Royal Institute of Technology: Stockholm, Sweden, 2009.
- Sundén, Jenny and Malin Sveningsson, *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

“The State of the Video Gamer: PC Game and Video Game Console Usage,” Nielsen Survey, Fourth Quarter, 2008.

“What is Second Life?” Second Life. 2012. <http://secondlife.com/whatis/>.

Williams, Dmitri, Tracy LM Kennedy, and Robert J. Moore. “Behind the avatar: The patterns, practices, and functions of role playing in MMOs.” *Games and Culture* 6.2 (2011): 171-200.

Woźniak, Mateusz. “Embodied Agent or Master of Puppets: Human in Relation with his Avatar.” In *Beyond Artificial Intelligence*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg (2013): 223-235.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA