

ON THE CULTURAL INACCESSIBILITY OF GAMING: INVADING, CREATING, AND RECLAIMING THE CULTURAL CLUBHOUSE

Department:

English Language and Literature

Program:

PhD

Project type:

Dissertation

Project co-researchers:

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Vossen develops the concept of “cultural inaccessibility” to describe the ways that women are made to feel unwelcome in spaces of game play and games culture, both offline and online. Although there are few formal or physical barriers preventing women from purchasing games, playing games, or acquiring jobs in the games industry, Vossen’s dissertation explores the formidable cultural barriers which define women as “space invaders” and outsiders in games culture.

Women are routinely subjected to gendered harassment while playing games, and in the physical spaces of games culture, such as conventions, stores, and tournaments. This harassment and abuse has intensified toward journalists, developers and academics who choose to speak publicly about bigotry within the culture since the 2014 rise of gamergate.

Vossen also explores her own experiences as a female gamer as a means of reflecting on developments in the broader culture. This includes discussion of various projects she worked on including a short machinima (a film made within a video game) created with Elise Vist inside Lord of the Rings Online entitled Lady Hobbits, the gender and games advocacy group the Games Institute Janes (GI Janes), and her tenure as a staff member and editor-in-chief of game studies publication First Person Scholar.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the harassment Vossen faced from gamergate, and members of other far-right groups while writing her dissertation. Vossen asks how women can study games culture if doing so puts them at risk of becoming targets of harassment and abuse. It underscores the cultural inaccessibility of social justice-oriented work in academia and at large.

Interesting fact: In 2017, Vossen made a 60-minute radio documentary “The Dangerous Game: Gamergate and the ‘Alt-right’” with CBC Ideas that was broadcast nationally by CBC Radio.