

Play in between:
**Women Player Identities
and the Practice of Skin Making**

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- The practice of **skinning** computer games 
- ***The Sims*** as an extraordinary platform
- **Identity**

Next:

- Constructing **player identities** through difference
- Results
- New play styles, new definitions for games?

Player Co-Production: 'Skinning' *The Sims*

- Gabay 2006: “[n]o identity can be an identity without excluding something, i.e. what is different from itself”
- Connolly 2002: “[i]dentity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty”
- Butler 1990: gender identities via ‘otherness’
- Hall (using Derrida) 2007: identity is “constructed in or through *différance* and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out”

Identity

- 2) Outside the “hegemony of play”: *The Sims* players
- 3) Beyond the assumed player: Women players
- 4) Between industry and fandom: Co-productive players

Interview Material: Categories

- Concept of **hegemony** to understand assumed and proposed 'natural' state of things
- Fron, Fullerton, Morie & Pearce 2007: existing power structures in games development have created an implicitly male dominated status quo which ignores the needs and desires of so-called 'minority' players such as women

Outside the 'hegemony of play': *The Sims* players

- *The Sims* as unusual:

I am interested in the Sims because it differs totally from other game products.

- *The Sims* affording multiple player groups:

As neither a restricting/restrictive narrative nor an end closure has been coded in the game, playing it is really liberating, free and creative [...] This is what I personally respect [...] in the Sims. And I think this is the reason why many other people (women, gay people, older players and sometimes even also [...] hetero males) like the game too. :D

- *The Sims* play, not usual game play:

No, I am definitely not any kind of expert on this [playing/games]! Neither am I an active [hard core?] player. I just play The Sims...

Outside the ‘hegemony of play’: *The Sims* players

- **Woman player, not like any other player**

Game and player magazines do not have the smallest gender-sensitivity in what they do. Alternatively there is a lot of gender segregation [...] Women who play are left (I assume unconsciously instead of willingly or knowingly) to the margins.

- **But not like the usual woman players**

I just don't think I am a "typical" player, because most of the other players are quiet, shy people, who don't pluck their eyebrows and use ugly clothes. I am sorry, I sound like a superficial bitch again :D

Beyond the assumed player: Women players

- **Productivity beyond ordinary play**

So my “play” is particularly about building and doing [...] And here we get into a question where does the line between play and non-play go, which in my opinion is in the Sims sometimes more like a line drawn on the water ...

[...] the time I spend for playing is divided into actual gameplay, play for maintaining the site (such as making instructions) and skinning, lion’s share of which is spent by skinning.

So I think in my playing the emphasis is on making custom content [...]

Between industry and fandom: Co-productive players

- Women's leisure and instrumentality/utility/gain
- Knitting, sewing, gardening, baking, handicrafts

...

→ **SIMMING:**

I sim approximately couple of hours per week. In simming I also include both making of custom content and the actual gameplay, which I actually do quite little.

Between industry and fandom: Co-productive players



Between industry and fandom: **Cosplay**
players

- **Not fans either:**

*I m not one of those stereotypical bristling **fanatics** who **look forward to new expansions** like the rising moon and pelt into the stores immediately after launch to buy their own copies or pre-order the dvds weeks before the publishing from an online store.*

*No, I am not really a fan, it is a nice game but **I would manage on a desert island for many many years without it.** [...] A fan is a person who looks a lot for the expansions, pre-orders them and hypes about them after buying. I do buy all the expansions but I buy them on my own pace whenever I have the time. [...] I think I am a fan a little bit but a serious fan would be like what I just described, always know what is happening.*

Between industry and fandom: Co-productive players

- **Nor hackers:**

For some reason I am not interested, and in addition I know it is technically so difficult :) It would require me to really put my mind to it and I can't do it, because modding is anyway a nonsense hobby. Usually people who hack objects have a lot of experience in coding and other mystical stuff.

Only couple of times I have tried to change objects' functionalities [...] It is enough for me what other people do. There are extremely good object hackers out there and one can get anything she wants from them. I haven't felt a need to bother to do them myself. It is easier and handier to download readymade [hacked objects].

- **But recognise the value of skills and possibility to work in the industry later on:**

I believe that in my future job I need these 3D skills, graphics editing skills etc. etc. which I have mainly learned through the Sims. I have dreamed about being a game designer.

Between industry and fandom: Co-productive players

- skinning inseparable from the actual *Sims* gameplay
- game play that goes beyond the borders of playing the game in the traditional sense
- lack of preset rules and goals has made it easier to create challenges and rules outside the gameplay in a fictional world, within the practice of 'simming'
- **Huizinga's** (1950) and **Caillois'** (2001): games as something that stand out from ordinary life as it is not serious and nor productive
 - at least some women prefer to play in a way that may be closer to earlier women's leisure activities than as an expression of freedom from productivity and ordinary life

Not just ordinary play, not just ordinary players

thank you! 😊

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Full paper available at www.hannawirman.net



Player-made Skins