

Playing With(out) Golden Hands

A Conversation About Controllers and Gamer Identity

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Thank you for coming to my research talk! I approach teaching and talking about my research in a very similar way: through conversation. Please feel free to ask questions. Interrupt. Ask for clarification. Ask me to slow down if you need to. I'm here to have a conversation with you about something I find very exciting!

research focus: technology, bodies, and culture

Broadly: How do intersectional identities shape our experiences with technology? How, in turn, do UX/UI design impact understandings of community and culture?

Narrowly: I'm focused on gaming peripherals, hardware design, and gamer identity.

technical communication

Scholarship on games primarily focuses on documentation and pedagogical uses.

Technical communicators are well-positioned as user advocates to research, analyze, and communicate within complex networks.

Since the social justice turn, we have better focus on complex, non-standard, embodied users.

game studies

Scholarship on representation and identity primarily focuses on software and media.

Games are complex systems of communication within social, economic, and political ecologies.

Many scholars work as consultants in industry and have a seat at the table (so to speak). Tangible impacts are a real possibility.

>> but! <<

research questions

1. How is gamer identity reified through hardware design and depiction?
2. In what ways have depictions of controller use and mastery supported understandings of gamer identity & in-/out-groups within gaming culture?
3. How do experiences with controllers differ amongst groups?
4. What recommendations can be generated for a more inclusive controller design process, based on the data available?

research methods

- experiential narratives
- unstructured survey: 30-minute survey on every standard console controller for Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft
- semi-structured interviews: 10 one-hour long interviews
- visual/textual analysis: 182 issues of *Game Informer* magazine

significant findings

- controllers are more uncomfortable, unusable, and frustrating for women and marginalized players
- when we see controllers, they are masculinized; women are more often in passive roles
- women and marginalized players express a desire to make change within the community
- heuristic changes should be made at the iterative design stage

women in games

- women consistently average 43% of the gaming population in the US (ESA)
- 47% of console players are female; 54% of mobile game players are female (Circana)
- primary demographic: adults (ESA)
- average age: mid-30s (ESA)
- women aged 18 and older represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population than boys 17 or younger (ESA, 2005-present)
- "gamer" is socially constructed by both the industry and society