

The Silent Work of *The Sims 2* Bedroom(s)

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

co-creativity, gender, productivity, *The Sims 2*

ABSTRACT

The Sims 2 is a game with an extremely productive fan base. A big part of this productivity concentrates on creating new in-game artifacts such as clothes, furniture and architecture. These simple visual alterations are distributed and discussed online on dozens of fan sites. One of these fan sites is Radola, a Finnish *The Sims 2* community, forum created by an amateur web publisher. This paper suggests an analysis of interview material with members of the Radola community as well as a broader mapping of the subculture of *The Sims 2* player-producers.

I propose that the characteristics of 'simming' - the practice of productively playing *The Sims* games - and the ways in which it contributes to simmers' identities can be eloquently opened up through the concept of 'culture of the bedroom'. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber [4] originally presented this concept in 1976 as they proposed that a child's or young person's bedroom is a space with great potential for safe explorations of identity. In their research and many succeeding texts, the bedroom has also been considered the primary space for girls' leisure, whereas boys' activities, which often seek to gather admiration and recognition, spread around the public sphere outside the home.

Mary Celeste Kearney [3] has already updated the idea of the culture of the bedroom to cover not only consumerist and 'passive' activities, but also a multitude of user-productivity. The aim of this paper is 1) to discuss the diminishing importance of age in an online community such as Radola and 2) to look at different levels of 'bedroom' in the practice of simming where online and offline spaces are strongly interconnected, thus, to revisit and broaden the concept of bedroom culture to adult players and to spaces outside the (physical) bedroom.

In order to discuss *The Sims* play in particular, the special case of gendered nature of these games needs to be articulated. I will discuss how *The Sims* games are often considered non-games or games that cannot be evaluated or discussed in the same terms of other computer games. A parallel topic in this context is viewing *The Sims* games as mainstream. Whereas *The Sims* remain the best-selling PC

game franchise [2], it is surprising how many of their characteristics have led to infantilization and devaluation of the game. This situation bears a strong resemblance to other media products with a strong popularity amongst female audiences. Thus, one of the aims of this paper is to connect the understanding of simmers as a culture of the bedroom to theories on women's leisure in general and two major works in particular, *Watching Dallas* [1] by Ien Ang and *Reading the Romance* [5] by Janice A. Radway.

This approach draws together notions of women's leisure as invisible, productive, separated and as actions without monetary benefit. It also tries to unwrap some of the reasons why the players interviewed feel outsiders in the larger player community and why places like Radola are such popular meeting points for female players who still constitute a poorly recognized category of players.

Ultimately, this paper concentrates on the player identities of Radola community members. Gender does not seem to be the primary identity of *The Sims 2* 'skimmers'. Neither is Radola established as an exclusively feminine space. However, cultural discourses on *The Sims* game(r)s, female players in general, and real gameness all significantly contribute to their player identities.

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