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Women and Computer Games (Workshops and Tutorials)

Letizia Jaccheri¹(✉), Alf Inge Wang¹, Kristine Ask²,
Sobah Abbas Petersen³, and Kristina Brend⁴

¹ Department of Computer Science, Norwegian University of Science
and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway

{letizia.jaccheri,alf.inge.wang}@ntnu.no

² Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU,
Trondheim, Norway

kristine.ask@ntnu.no

³ NTNU and SINTEF, Trondheim, Norway

sobah.petersen@sintef.no

⁴ NxtMedia, Trondheim, Norway

kristina.brend@gmail.com

Abstract. This full day workshop welcomes contributions that enhance the state of the knowledge about the relation between women and computer games. Women have often been seen as consumers of computer games. The current landscape of computer games show an increasing number of both game designers and players. This workshop aims to bring together game designers, developers and players in engaging discussions about women and computer games. We look for theoretical contributions, specific aspects and examples, and pedagogical frameworks. The workshop is organized as discussions and group work.

Keywords: Computer games · Gender issues

1 Introduction

Gender issues in computer games have been a hot topic the last few years. In the wake of the Gamergate harassment campaign of 2014 that targeted women players and designers, the gendered aspects of play has warranted attention [7]. While research on gender and computer games has been going on since the 1990s [5], it is no longer a topic reserved for the ‘ivory tower’ [2, 3]. Major news outlets across the world is covering how computer games persists as ‘boy’s toys’, and the women gamers demanding equal treatment [6]. Even though women make up half of the total gaming population, their place and role in gaming culture and industry is still contested. This is visible in both how AAA titles are targeted at male audiences, and in how female gamers and developers are being disproportionally targeted for harassment [1, 5, 9]. As games are increasingly being brought into education, the need for gender inclusive games is also becoming more urgent.

A key step in bridging the digital divide in games is to empower women as game designers, and to develop methods for inclusive game design. Informal discussions among game designers highlight differences between female game designers and male designers; e.g. male designers are more interested in the technical aspects of the design while the female designers are interested in the aesthetic aspects. While it may not be easy to generalize on such observations, there is a need to explore the landscape of game design to identify the strengths and creative designs that female designers could contribute. More importantly, inclusive game design methods could leverage on the benefits of females designers' contributions. For this, we need qualified research on gendered aspect of design and play, and ways to disrupt existing design methods and paradigms.

In this workshop, we will look specifically at design processes and research processes of computer games, and how games can be designed for inclusion [4]. The topics for discussions include, but are not limited to:

1. Theoretical contributions, such as analysis of Self Determination Theory and how the different aspects are implemented differently by female designers.
2. Pedagogical frameworks for teaching and learning computer game design related gender issues.
3. Specific aspects of gendered play, like sexual harassment and stereotype threat, but also gamer identity and role in gamer communities. Of particular interests are ways to combat and disrupt discriminatory practices [10].
4. Examples of games for learning, designed and developed by women
5. Examples of inclusive game design or processes of inclusive design [8].

The workshop will ideally server as an arena for networking among researchers interested in women and games, and for seeding ideas and discussions for future research. The organizers anticipate a special issue of the Elsevier Entertainment Computing Journal that is related to this topic, Participants of the workshop will be invited to contribute articles for the special issue.

The Workshop will be held 18th September 2017 in connection with IFIP ICEC. Workshop participants will be invited to present their ideas and there will be room for discussions and creative reflection work.

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