

ber seven: $1+6=7$, $2+5=7$, $3+4=7$. In other words, in a book that unfolds in a loosely chronological sequence, chapters 1 and 6, 2 and 5, and 3 and 4 each complement one another to demonstrate how ludo-Orientalism has reverberated across space and time. For example, chapters 1 and 6 together illustrate how Asia has long been associated with “the ‘dark’ side of gaming” (p. 178). In chapter 1, Fickle examines how gambling served as a device for framing Chinese Americans in the nineteenth century as threats to the ostensibly “honest” labor of the white working class. Chapter 6 identifies an echo of this history in the discourses surrounding Chinese gold farmers accused of undermining the putative fairness of massive multiplayer online games by playing for profit.

Similarly, chapters 2 and 5 serve as a complementary pair: Chapter 2 looks at how ludic metaphors of strategy and probability became rationales used to justify Japanese American incarceration, while chapter 5 studies how *Pokémon GO* transformed the threat of the Japanese empire into the soft power of a *kawaii* (“cute”) game based on virtual conquest. Finally, chapters 3 and 4 together form the heart of the book’s argument. In chapter three, Fickle illuminates how the same gambling logics that fed nineteenth-century Yellow Peril discourse helped construct the model minority myth in the midtwentieth century. During this time, the idea of Asian Americans as consummate gamblers was reworked into the myth’s glorification of Asian immigrants who “risk it all” to achieve economic success in a new country. If chapter 3 thereby reframes the model minority, chapter 4 reframes play theory by exposing its Orientalist founda-

tions. Here, Fickle casts light on how Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois relied on “Orientalist notions of the mystical East and rational West” to structure their theories of play as a “magical circle” marked off from everyday life (p. 25).

Altogether, *The Race Card* is a groundbreaking book that makes profound contributions to game studies, Asian American studies, and global Asian studies. Fickle reaches across wide-ranging historical phenomena to connect more obvious examples of ludo-Orientalism to instances in which the discovery of play proves far more surprising. For scholars of play, *The Race Card* models a unique method of analysis that attends to the specificity of distinct media forms while casting light on how they reflect surrounding cultural discourses. Moreover, given the prominence of Asia and its diasporas to the rise of gaming technologies today, this book is an important read for anyone desiring to understand better the racial politics in which games are necessarily enmired.

—Erica Kanesaka Kalnay, *University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI*

Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture

Amanda Phillips

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Amanda Phillips provides a fresh reboot to video game studies in this new work, drawing from feminist, queer, and women of color scholarship. This research pushes the boundaries of game studies through what Phillips calls a “disciplinary remix” (p. 181), opening up the study of video games to a range of fields and centering analyses of race, gender, technology, and politics. Each chapter explores discourses surrounding particular “troubles” in games, ranging from online harassment and trolling campaigns such as #Gamer-gate to industry practices and technologies that reinforce oppressive cultural norms to how players push back against these controversies.

Phillips invokes the term “trouble” for many purposes. Trouble refers to the struggles within gaming culture, especially as it relates to misogyny and racism. But Phillips also uses the term to refer to what the late U.S. Representative John Lewis dubs as “good trouble,” or challenging established norms for social justice ends. Her end goal is to show how video games are influential storytelling platforms that allow players to imagine new ways of being, even if there is still some work to be done.

One of the long-standing troubles within gaming culture has been anti-feminist sentiment as feminists have entered these spaces. In chapter 1, Phillips describes the dynamic of boundary policing within gaming communities both inside and outside of the academy, reflecting anxieties about diversity in gaming. Women’s critiques of misogynistic practices in gaming culture, including rape jokes, as well as the marginalization of feminist academic research in the field,

show how feminist knowledge production has always been deemed illegitimate.

Racism and misogyny cannot be separated from the technologies that produce these conditions. Throughout the text, Phillips connects software design with cultural notions of race and gender. In chapter 2, Phillips deconstructs quantization—the animation process of breaking down facial characteristics to reflect racial and ethnic characteristics. The video game industry celebrates technological advancements for developing more racially and ethnically diverse characters, yet Phillips convincingly argues that these are modern-day forms of physiognomy. What appears on the surface to be diverse actually masks the social and political choices that software designers make in creating characters. Using a novel deformance methodology, in which Phillips tests the limits of the avatar interface, the author reveals how customizable faces are variations of Caucasian male faces, reinforcing scientific conceptions of race and gender.

The limits of technology become clear in chapter 4, with the case study of Femshep, the female version of *Mass Effect’s* (Bioware 2007–2012) customizable hero. Femshep is a female avatar built on the framework of a male body. The game was praised for appealing to players who wanted a female protagonist, yet this case shows that the narrative within the game reinforced heteronormativity. It was in the fan production of alternative storylines and videos, however, that nondominant groups were able to queer the system.

Another important contribution to the field is Phillips’s discussion of the gamic gaze, an alternative to Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze that has

been dominant in film studies and some game studies research. Through close readings of *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2007) and *Bayonetta* (Platinum Games, 2009), Phillips shows how the gamic gaze offers voyeuristic entry into the game's virtual world while also allowing players to be present alongside the avatars. The gamic gaze flips the male gaze, offering to help liberate different forms of identification. While Phillips recognizes the post-racial and postfeminist tendencies of both games, their reading offers alternatives to available research.

Throughout the book, Phillips troubles what is meant by diversity, as defined by the game industry, academics, players, and politicians. In the final chapter, the troubles speak to the tension inherent in conceptualizations of diversity that tend to neutralize difference rather than confront frictions that can emerge in these communities. This critique is especially salient

given contemporary social movements for racial and gender justice. Their end goal, then, is to “understand how the forces of hegemony shape any particular system so that we game it in ways that move toward justice” (p.183).

One of the strengths of the book is the road map provided in both the introductory and concluding chapters. Phillips takes complex concepts and makes them accessible to a broader audience who may be unfamiliar with game studies scholarship. By engaging in conversations with scholars such as Chantal Mouffe, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sara Ahmed, and bell hooks, this text will be of value to a range of disciplines including critical race studies, women's and gender studies, communication, anthropology, and sociology.

—Carolyn M. Cunningham, *Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA*