

Plug & Play: The Intersections of Television Studies and Game Studies

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TV studies and game studies can and should have an intersecting and reciprocal relationship, both methodologically and theoretically. This position paper argues that it is essential to bring methodological and theoretical approaches from TV studies into conversation with game studies, because this can help us make sense of shifts among domestic technology, space, gender, and sociality. Although these are often seen as mutually exclusive fields, they are necessarily intertwined.

I focus on how and why work in TV studies has influenced my work in game studies. From my position as a feminist game studies scholar, bridging the two bodies of literature is necessary in order to understand video games as domestic technologies and the construction of women. More specifically, TV studies work is essential for understanding how and why, despite the Wii's introduction over 50 years after TV was first introduced, 1950s ideals of gender have been resuscitated in the contemporary exergames (fitness games) ecology.

Methodologies

Video game consoles, such as Nintendo Wii U, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One and their “television based video games” by nature necessitate owning a TV. These consoles may be located in a variety of spaces within the home and outside of the home—but the sheer necessitation of TV for video game play demonstrates why it is crucial to understand these technologies in conversation with methodological approaches in both fields.

One approach is to examine discourses surrounding TV, such as among promotional materials, articles, reviews, and magazines. For instance, Spigel's (1992) *Make Room for TV* approaches the study of a domestic technology through a historical, textual analysis of a variety of sources, in arguing that these express the messages and concerns surrounding TV and family life in the 1950s. She finds that these discourses maintain the nuclear family ideal that is white, middle class, and consists of a mother, father, and children. In “selling” TV to women, TV was conceptualized in relation to the daily life of the “ideal woman” (wife, mother, and domestic caregiver).

This is a useful model for explaining how and why a particular domestic technology, and in particular, video game technologies, are conceptualized within a historical context. TV studies allow me to make sense of the domestic technology of console-based exergames (also known as fitness games) and the construction of gender in the post-2006 American landscape. This time period represents the advent of the Nintendo Wii and prevalence of “casual” games, or games that are marketed to a broad game playing demographic—a period when

adult women in domestic space have increasingly been targeted to as a game playing demographic. I take a similar methodological approach of a significant body of work in TV studies: analyzing discourses among various sources surrounding a technology that is primarily conceptualized for the domestic living room space.

Theories

There are many theoretical positions in both bodies of scholarship in regard to the relationship between technology, domestic space, and gender. It is not my aim to give an exhaustive overview of these theories; rather, I bring a few theoretical positions in TV studies into conversation with game studies.

Taking technology itself as fundamentally changing domestic space and people's relationship with technology is one way these TV studies and game studies needs to intersect. Some have already done so. For example, it has been argued that we have moved beyond the centrality of TV in the living room space, and that there is not a "digital hearth" in people's living rooms (Levine & Newman 2012). Indeed, people have TVs and video game consoles in multiple rooms in their homes, and can watch and play video games on handhelds, laptops, and cell phones. Therefore, game scholars can approach console-based video games in relation to the technology of TV, which, over time, has to varying degrees disrupted domestic space.

Some scholars veer from a technology-centered framework to a framework of social and historical construction. For instance, game studies can learn from TV studies work that has examined the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic climates in order to understand how and why console-based video games are conceptualized the way they are. Indeed, many argue that video games as domestic technologies do not exist in a vacuum, for they are situated within a broader historical context.

In sum, bringing methodological approaches of TV studies scholarship on domestic technology into conversation with game studies scholarship on console-based video games allows us to have productive conversations in both fields, and to view them as necessarily intersecting.