Masculinity at the video game arcade: 1972-1983

Date
2012-05

Author
Kocurek, Carly Ann

Abstract
As the United States shifted toward a service-based economy and an increasingly digital media environment, American youth -- particularly young men and boys -- found an opportunity to play with these values in the then-novel video game arcade. The video game industry first came of age between the successful commercialization of Pong in 1972 and the U.S. gaming industry crash of 1983. In the interim, economic and play practices in the arcade itself and media representations of the arcade and its habitués shaped and responded to the economic and cultural upheavals of the period. Arcade machines were the first computers many Americans confronted. Through public discourse about gaming and gamers, Americans engaged in a critical debate about computerization, the move to digital media culture, the restructuring of the U.S. labor economy, and the competitiveness of American youth -- particularly boys -- in a Cold War culture conceived as both hostile and technologically oriented. This study demonstrates that video gaming was an arena in which Americans grappled with larger tensions about masculinity, globalization, labor, and digitalization. By analyzing gaming as a practice of everyday life, this work not only offers a cultural history of this period of gaming, but critical insights into the crystallization of masculine identity in a postindustrial, postmodern economy.

Department
American Studies

Subject
Video gaming
Video games
Masculinity
Arcades
Arcade
Gender
Video gamers

URI
http://hdl.handle.net/2152/22133

Collections
Video gaming: it's a boy's world, right? That's what the industry wants us to think. Why and how we came to comply are what Carly A. Kocurek investigates in this provocative consideration of how an industry's craving for respectability hooked up with cultural narratives about technology, masculinity, and youth at the video arcade. Whether conducting a phenomenological tour of a classic arcade or evaluating attempts, then and now, to regulate or eradicate arcades and coin-op video games, Kocurek does more than document the rise and fall of a now-booming industry. Throughout the book the author touches on this masculinity and the fact that there are plenty of female gamers back then, as there is now.