

The Global Digital Citizenship Lab Speaker Series presents

JENNIFER R. WHITSON (University of Waterloo)

**CITIZEN, SUBJECT, AVATAR:
Gamifying Social Problems with Surveillance**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

1:00pm–2:30pm

Qualitative Research & Resource Centre (N141 Ross)

York University

The presentation provides an introduction to gamification and the quantified self. By first defining gamification, games, and play, and then linking the effectiveness of gamification to the quantification of everyday life, the paper shows how quantification in gamification is different from quantification in both analog spaces and digital non-game spaces. The presentation draws from governmentality studies to illustrate how quantification is leveraged in terms of surveillance, using three examples to demonstrate the social effects and impacts of gamified behaviour. These examples range from gamifying everyday life using self-surveillance, to the participatory surveillance evoked by social networking services, to the hierarchical surveillance of the gamified call-centre. Importantly, the call-centre example becomes a limit case, emphasizing the inability to gamify all spaces, especially those framed by work and not play. Ultimately, without knowing first what games and play are, we cannot accurately respond to and critique the playful surveillant technologies that gamification leverage, and the very real, very insidious, governance structures that are embedded within.

Jennifer R. Whitson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology & Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. She works at the nexus of digital games and surveillance studies, having conducted ethnographic fieldwork with game developers since 2012. Her research centres on the shifting production models of the global game industry, tracing how risk management practices, datamining, and digital distribution shape developers' creative work and the larger cultural role of games and play. More generally, she studies digital media surveillance, social influences on software development processes, gamification, and governance in online domains. She is on the board of the University of Waterloo's Games Institute and their Cybersecurity and Privacy Centre, and is a Research Advisor for Execution Labs, an investment platform for game studios. She is an associate editor of *Surveillance and Society*, and her work can be found in a number of edited collections, such as *The Gameful World* (MIT Press), as well as journals such as *First Monday*, *Economy & Society*, and *FibreCulture*.



Discussant: Alex Cybulski (iSchool, University of Toronto)

Sponsored by the York Research Chair in Global Digital Citizenship (Fuyuki Kurasaawa)

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