Publish AND Perish: On Publishing, Precarity and Poverty in Academia

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Abstract

We have all heard the phrase 'publish or perish' but what does perishing actually look like? Are you publishing and still perishing? In this article, Vossen probes into the complexity of academic publishing from her perspective as both a poor PhD student and the editor-in-chief of Game Studies publication *First Person Scholar*. Vossen argues that academic publishing (examining both journal articles and academic manuscripts) exploits the labour of grad students and contract workers by encouraging them to publish their work without compensation in the hopes of attaining tenure-track employment in the future. This 'work for exposure' method is dependent on the optimism of young scholars, the majority of whom will not attain tenure-track positions. Vossen focuses specifically on how academic journal articles function as both currency and commodity, devaluing alternative forms of research sharing (such as the work published in *First Person Scholar*) which is seen as 'academic waste' that doesn't 'count'. Academic journal articles are intrinsically linked to an academics 'worth' both culturally and financially and therefore, many untenured academics feel they can't take the financial risk of publishing outside of traditional venues for fear of furthering their descent into debt and poverty. Vossen and the staff of *First Person Scholar* have attempted to remedy the system in their field of Game Studies by both paying academics for their writing and firmly rejecting opportunities to become an academic journal to instead be considered a 'middle state publication'. Lastly, Vossen discusses opting out of the publish or perish game as a grad student and what you lose when you decide not to play.

Keywords

Academic publishing, graduate students, exploitation, academic worth

Academic Publishing is Broken[1]

Academic publishing is broken and most of us can't afford to fix it. I mean this in two distinct senses; few of us have the economic capital to fix it, and even fewer have the academic capital. But, god help me, I've tried. This article is about my attempts to do *something* about the broken

[1] In 2016 I made a video entitled 'First Person Scholar: Publish with Purpose', which won the Social Science and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) 'SSHRC Storytellers Contest'. The video, as well as this post on First Person Scholar, were earlier versions of this article.

system through the middle state publication First Person Scholar. Furthermore it is about the intersections of poverty, precarity, and publishing. These three factors meet in our broken system, with its credo of publish or perish. The idea behind these much repeated words is that as a grad student or early-career academic you must publish as much as possible if you want to get a job, and/or ascend up the tenure track system. This model sounds like a meritocracy, put in the work and you are rewarded (and I'm sure it looks that way for those who have risen to the top). But now that full-time permanent academic jobs are so few and far between what about those who publish and have yet still seen their careers perished? Those who don't get to benefit from the supposed libratory potential of the academy, those who are poor as grad students, who spend countless hours writing, editing, and publishing in hopes of securing full-time employment, and then stay poor working as postdocs and contract professors? These are the victims of the publish or perish system.

The academic publishing system **stays** broken because we can't afford to fix it and because those profiting off of it don't want it to change. Those of us living in academic poverty, grad students, postdocs and contract instructors, *need* to participate in the broken system if we want to ascend to the well paid parts of the academy. But even if we do participate in the current broken system by publishing as many journal articles as possible, and by publishing a sole authored academic manuscript, *we probably still won't get jobs*. Some researchers have compared the production of PhDs to the number of jobs as an issue of 'birth rate' arguing that each professor is birthing more PhDs than there are academic jobs: 'only 12.8% of PhD graduates can attain academic positions in the USA' (Larson and Ghaffarzadegan, 2014, p 745). Furthermore, this is not just a humanities problem, in fact, 'less than 17% of new PhDs in science, engineering and health-related fields find tenure-track positions within 3 years after graduation' (Larson and Ghaffarzadegan, 2014, p 745). There just aren't enough jobs to go around, the solution is not to train all PhDs as if they are going to attain academic jobs, to not put pressure on all PhDs to publish journal articles and manuscripts – but we do. In other words, the pressure to publish journal articles and academic manuscripts to get jobs is causing young academics the world over to publish AND perish.

Journal Articles and Academic Waste

The largest piece of this problem is how we, as a collective, value research. We value some research more than others. Journal articles were once about sharing research, now that function is second to the *economic function* of creating journal articles. **Journal articles are currency in the academic economy.** While full-time faculty are compensated for their time pursuing research, grad students and new PhDs are not. We create journal articles for free, although it costs us an inordinate amount of time, and then we exchange them, or at least the idea of them, for employment and research funding. From our first month of grad school we are fed the narrative 'just present at conferences A B and C and publish in journals X Y and Z and you will get a job'. We are taught, not to produce the best research, the most needed research, but to exploit a system to secure employment. Rarely would someone talk to you about the content of your articles, they are most interested in simply the number of them, what journals they are published in, and what the rejection rate of that journal is. We place our worth in rejection, in resubmission, in outdated ideas of value.

Because journal articles are a currency, many people try to find ways to game the system and produce as many of them as possible, sometimes publishing four or five slightly different articles

on the same research. In many fields grad students and postdocs are exploited to do research and write journal articles for their supervisors just to get credit as 'second' author. Journal articles are not the research that researchers felt the need to publish. They are the research that researchers published in an attempt to get a job, or secure a raise, or a grant. In the end those who can play this game, who can fit into the system most easily, secure jobs and tenure and funding.

Furthermore, we've fundamentally devalued the other types of research in this economy. Not every bit of writing is, or should be, a journal article. Some conference talks should just be talks, some writing needs to be shared quickly and should be blogged, some research is short, some is personal, some writing doesn't come with a bibliography. Some information is better shared as a video, or a podcast, or a round table. But, because all other forms of research sharing are devalued, academics feel that all research and writing must 'become' a journal article to 'count' in the system. Like smelting all the chunks of ore you find into gold bars so they can be exchanged for money. This also means that other research and writing (blogging, freelance work, podcasting, journalism, research creation, art) doesn't 'count'.

But it is not simply digital contributions that are looked down on, in the humanities co-authored journal articles are often called a 'waste'. Even more shockingly, edited collections, which are physical books written and edited by a collective of academics on a single topic, are also seen by many as 'a waste of time'. Recently, while working on an edited collection I had two senior academics in my field explain to me patiently over drinks how they, and others in their position, didn't want to be part of my book of essays, or any book of essays because book chapters have no value in the academic economy. It was a 'waste' of research that could have become a journal article, something that would really 'count'. While I was shocked they were so cynical, none of the content of our conversation surprised me because for years I had been working at *First Person Scholar* and hearing that the work that we did editing and writing and publishing research was a 'waste' of time.

Middle State Publishing is The Future

First Person Scholar (*FPS*) is an online publication of critical writing about games and games culture run by a group of student academics from the University of Waterloo. It is not a blog, it is not an academic journal, it is *a publication*. I use the word publication quite strategically. We could go through the process of becoming an academic journal, or we could market ourselves as a games journalism website but we don't because our strength lies in not being either of these things in any official capacity. I have frequently been asked why we don't find a way to become a 'real' journal so that we as editors and as young scholars can 'get something' out of this experience for our careers. **Once I was told that *FPS* was 'a nice idea' but 'a big waste of time' considering that the work we are doing wasn't valued by the academy.** This sentiment implies an ignorance about what careers in academia are like, and about where academia is moving. I feel very strongly that game studies doesn't need another journal — it needs a way to open itself up to non-academics who are interested in what we have to offer. It needs a way to showcase our work to the largest audience possible in a quick but rigorous manner. As founding editor in chief of *FPS* Steve Wilcox has explained in his article 'On the Publishing Methods of Our Time: Mobilizing Knowledge in Game Studies':

> *FPS* strives to engage in *intercultural communication,* meaning that our contributors are encouraged to write for a wide audience for the purposes of engaging those situated in academic and non-academic cultures (2015).

You may be thinking, 'well you can't call yourself a publication, you must be a *type* of publication' — and we are! We are a middle state publication, a website that publishes middle state writing. This is writing that is somewhere between the poles of quick digitally published writing (like blogging) and academic journal articles. As Brendan Keogh has argued, a lot of the best, most influential culture-changing game studies work is being done in the middle state realm (2014). Academic researchers can benefit from using that writing in their teaching and research **but —** academics also need to care about publishing our research *as* middle state writing so that we can be part of the larger critical conversation about games and so that we can influence change beyond the walls of the academy. Unfortunately, this goal might seem lofty when you are a young scholar with no job security.

Middle state publishing is what you may imagine it is. It's an act of writing that is between the poles of blogging and academic writing. As Steve Wilcox has explained, middle state articles 'are digital publications that have the timeliness of blogs but the critical attention to detail of a journal' (2013). *FPS* has been at the forefront of discussions of the middle state since 2013 (Wilcox, 2013; Hawreliak, 2013) and game studies specifically has been a big part of the discussion around the middle state. Games critic and academic Zoya Street (who runs middle state publication *Memory Insufficient*) calls those of us who write somewhere between the spheres of academia and journalism 'cyborg critics'. Street explains that this position involves 'citing blogs in academic papers. It means tweeting at DiGRA. It means self-publishing books for a non-academic audience' it is 'academia without the purity complex. It's middle-state writing' (2014).

It is important to note here that middle state writing is not simply an academic journal article slapped onto a WordPress site. Everything about this writing is different, it is a totally unique rhetorical act as you have an entirely different, much larger and more complex, audience. It is about letting go of the pretensions of the academic journal article and writing about your research in a way that is both clear and enjoyable to read. This isn't to say that middle state writing isn't still curated and edited, but the editors at *FPS* aren't there to be 'reviewer number two' who tears your argument apart, nor are we there to send you a revise and resubmit to boost our rejection rate. The editors at *FPS* work closely and carefully with the authors of our articles and help them take their writing and build it into something clear and concise, something our audience, which is made up of academics, enthusiasts, developers and activists alike, will enjoy reading. The work published on *FPS* isn't peer-reviewed, it's reviewed by your peers.

It's increasingly hard for academics to value this type of public engagement when our worth as individuals is calculated by the number of academic journal articles and academic books we produce – for free. As grad students, we are expected to publish for the jobs we want – the jobs we likely will not get. While middle state publishing may be what is best for academia, many people move away from unconventional but accessible platforms of research dissemination because they fear for their jobs, and their financial stability.

The middle state is the future of academic writing, so why are the majority of voices in the middle state those of us without academic job security? Those of us with the least privilege in the

academy are doing the most to try to move it into the 21st century and we are doing it at the very real financial cost of our careers.

Open Access is Not Enough

I'm going to cut right to it — middle state publishing exists because traditional academic writing is an oppressive force that keeps our knowledge locked up in the light of academic libraries and keeps those not privileged enough to be part of the academy in the dark. Academic writing is so rarely about clarity and so often involves unnecessarily complicated or pretentious language, which can also keep the reader in the dark. As a university employee, I am complicit in this system of oppression and the hierarchies of knowledge it creates. As more and more people speak out against academic writing and publishing it becomes harder and harder to support the idealized vision of the university as an institution for learning. The purpose of academic publishing is so often presented to us as a method of adding lines to one's CV rather than sharing important information.

Many have pointed out the ways in which the corporatization of the University system is negatively affecting students and faculty alike by devaluing education (Chomsky, 2011; Stewart, 2015; Proctor, 2015; McKenn, 2014). Universities have become corporations and the instructors and professors are its machinery. We produce undergraduate degrees through our teaching, and we produce publications out of our research and this output fuels the university engine. The runoff from our machines are the students who leave saddled with unpayable debt and few job prospects. Now before you say, 'not all academics', or 'I'm only a grad student', or 'I'm only a contract instructor', let me say 'Yes, all academics.' We are all implicated in this oppressive structure — some of us just benefit more from it than others.

Luckily, there are some things that we can do about this. We can change how we publish and who we are publishing for. SSHRC has actually mandated that we do something about the traditional publishing structure in 2004 and has since been working to help academic journals become open access (Government of Canada, *Aid*, 2012) and encouraging their grant holders to publish their research in open access journals (Government of Canada, *Open*, 2012). In fact now the *Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications* actually 'requires that peer-reviewed journal publications resulting from Tri-Agency (NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR) grants be freely accessible within 12 months of publication' (Government of Canada, *Open*, 2012*)*.

I'm a big fan of their initiatives **but creating physical access to our scholarship is just one-half of the problem**. An open access journal article may be physically available to the public, but that doesn't mean the knowledge in the article is effectively disseminated or effectively translated to the public. If we want our research to make changes to culture, industry, and policy, we need our writing to not just be physically accessible but also readable, i.e. understandable by people who haven't spent a decade learning how to read academese or all the dialects of academese via discipline specific academic language. Our research may as well be in another language, and it is our responsibility to translate it, not the public's responsibility to learn how to read it.

Unfortunately, publishing outside a 'well-respected' journal is not seen as an option by most academics because they don't see anything to gain from the amount of effort put in. No one is

getting an academic job for writing in clear accessible language that the public can read. And we all really need stable jobs. If your institution or department doesn't value knowledge mobilization or public outreach, then you might feel like you are stuck in between a rock and a hard place. Worse sometimes universities value this type of publication culturally, or in theory, but do not reward the behavior or consider it as equal to other forms of academic work. No one wants to feel like their work isn't being read or has no impact, but if you are trying to get a tenure-track job you might feel like you don't have the luxury of making any 'mistakes'. Furthermore as a grad student, you may feel that publishing as many journal articles as possible will make all the difference when attempting to secure a tenure track job. Therefore our publishing strategies are tied in a very real way to our poverty and survival.

Academic Poverty and Precarity

I frequently work 16 hour days or 60 hour weeks, yet I still don't have enough money to cover my (very cheap) rent and bills. Sometimes I drive 12 (or more) hours in a week just to attend meetings and teach classes in another city. Sometimes I wake up at 5 am to get to the class I am currently teaching in another city on time. I'm also still technically a student and I'm still paying tuition to a university for the privilege of being a grad student there, despite setting foot on campus only 2 or 3 times a year. In an average semester of the funded part of my PhD I made about $7334 a semester, before paying $2863 in tuition for the privilege of making that $7334. That means my take home pay for a semester was about $4471, about $279 dollars a week. In case you can't do fast math that means I am getting paid about $6.99 an hour *if* I only worked 40 hours a week. While that wasn't enough to live on, it seems like a lot compared to what I make now as a contract instructor paying tuition. I used to be a cashier at Value Village (a used goods store) and I was in a much better financial state working there for minimum wage than at any point of my PhD teaching university and college students.

Furthermore, every hour I've spent writing, and giving talks, and running events, and in meetings, and editing, and course prep, and marking, for free is an hour I could have been paid to do work literally anywhere else. Once after outlining to a friend all the work I had to do that week and how poor I was he turned to me and said 'you know that outside of the academy people get paid to do all that right?' I did know that, but I often forget. I often forget that if I just left academia, I could get paid for all the work I do. I forget that if I added up all the hours I spent writing academic talks and articles and book chapters, and dissertations, and not getting paid for it, the number would be substantial. Huge even. Much like an unpaid internship, or a working 'for exposure' model we in academia demand free labour now for 'success' later. If I had a dollar for every hour of academic work I've done for free I'd have a lot of dollars, if I had minimum wage for every hour of work I've done I'd be rich. But I don't get paid for that work, so instead I do that work for free and to pay the bills, I teach.

I'm Your Teacher, and I'm Also Their Student

Despite my better judgement, I'm still a PhD student, and I'm still teaching. It's beyond weird to occupy the positions of student and teacher simultaneously. My students expect me to be well compensated and educated but all the money I made in the first 2 months of teaching them went

directly to another school to pay my tuition. I paid off the last $100 of my tuition one day before the deadline while getting constant emails saying that if I didn't pay soon I would be removed from my program. I can't tell them that I can just barely afford to get a PhD. Sometimes, for teaching, I'm paid only for the hours I'm physically in the classroom. Sometimes I'm paid $100 bucks per student for the semester. Sometimes I'm paid as little as $1,800 (Canadian dollars) for an entire semester of teaching work.

Currently the college I work for is on strike. I support this strike fully but I'm also not technically on strike as I 'only' teach two classes, and therefore I'm only paid for 6 hours of work which is not enough to be part of the union. The strike has me thinking a lot about the way people perceive college instructors and how little our students (or anyone) know, even during strike times, about discrepancies of wages between instructors and professors. The continued exploitation of instructors and students is based on this lack of knowledge and communication between these two exploited groups. The greatest thing for these institutions and their continued exploitation of instructors and students is for those students to hate us for striking – and they do.

I keep seeing an idea repeated by students affected by the strike: 'our tuition pays your salary'. This idea is ironic, because yes, their tuition pays for everything, but very very very very little of it pays my salary. I don't have a salary. I am paid by the hour, only for the hours I am in the classroom and only for four months at a time. Imagine, not being paid for course research and prep, assignment design, grading, talking to students, answering emails, administrative work – none of this is calculated in the hours of work I do in a week, yet without that labour the course couldn't run. I'm not paid for those hours despite my students paying incredible amounts of tuition. **Their tuition pays for the continued exploitation of students and instructors. As does my tuition as a PhD candidate. But most students don't know any of this. My students don't know any of this about me.**

This lack of knowledge is perpetuated because out of pride, or shame, or professionalism, or fear for our jobs, **those of us who teach hide how much money we make from our students**. It's hard not to because you are attempting to be seen as an authority. So, to get up there and say, 'I'm paid so little to teach you that I can't afford to pay my rent! I don't answer my phone because I don't want to talk to the bill collectors!' immediately undermines that authority. If you are an expert, why can't you support yourself?

This is especially true when you are young, especially when you are a woman. I find it *very difficult* to talk to my students about the difference between myself and their other instructors. Recently I've tried and failed to communicate it. I'll start talking but not get through the whole thing. I find myself terrified that my students will no longer respect me if they knew the full extent of my financial struggles.

When I was doing my undergrad, I was smart, but I had NO IDEA that *so many* of my favourite instructors were paid so little. I feel stupid looking back on this. I had no idea that the person teaching me in the morning was being paid ten times what the person teaching me in the afternoon was paid. **I had no idea that the instructors inspiring me to go to grad school and become a professor were grad students themselves. I had no idea that some of my favourite instructors were still paying tuition to the institution I thought they worked for as professors.** I didn't understand how tenure worked. I didn't know the difference between an instructor and a full professor. I didn't know the word sessional. As a student I saw teaching university as a good paying job. As a student I saw all my instructors as the same, no one more

qualified or well paid than the other – and while that should be a good thing, it's sadly part of the problem.

The wake up call for me was when I signed up for a class taught by one of my favourite instructors. I was excited on the first day but when I walked into the classroom he was nowhere to be seen. I heard countless telephone game style rumours over the following weeks that shocked my naive student self. I would hear stories that he turned down the teaching position because he got a job at a bar, or a coffee shop, or a copy shop, and that it paid much more money than teaching. I heard that he was never coming back because teaching paid so badly. That moment was important to me as a student to realize that many of these people I respected, who were doing what I thought was the most interesting job in the world – were paid almost nothing. **It was so hard to wrap my head around the idea that teaching at a university was not a well paying job.** There was all this inequality right under my nose that I had no idea about and I was paying into that system.

Now I experience that inequality first hand every day. There is a prestige associated with my job. It is seen as a 'cool' job or an important one. But that veneer of importance disguises the ways instructors are exploited just like students. I'm just paying money from one institution to another to be exploited twice, once as an instructor and once as a student. Those of us who are students teaching students fear what they will think of us, and most importantly we fear losing our jobs if we speak out too often or too loud.

I'm telling you all of this about myself to explain that even as I'm saying it's terrible to be constantly expected/asked to work for free, I've *also* bought into the idea that working for free (or for very little) now will lead to, if not an academic job, then at least getting paid to write later in life. I need to believe that all this working for free will pay off one day. Once you've bought into this almost pyramid scheme type logic, it's hard to stop. It's hard to accept that more education does not lead to more stability, that more publications don't lead to better jobs. That none of this is for our benefit. That we are all just unwitting pawns in a much bigger game to make as much money off of higher education as possible by maximizing the amount of students paying tuition and minimizing the cost of running the classes. This money making game extends to academic publishing as well, not just journals, as I've established above, but academic book publishing where academics write books for free, and publishers sell them for hundreds of dollars.

Publish an Academic Manuscript or Perish

Publishing has become a numbers game. First you publish as many journal articles as possible, and then if by some miracle you get a job, you will probably have to write a book to get tenure, but **that book must be for an academic audience and must be published with a 'good' academic publisher.**

As many before me have pointed out but as people outside of the academy rarely know, academic book publishing is criminal in concept but totally accepted by most in the academy (Academic, 2015). Academic books can cost between 40 and 300 dollars (in the arts — they can cost MUCH more in other disciplines) and are sold almost entirely to libraries with few

exceptions. Academic publishers who sell both to libraries and enthusiast audiences (such as McFarland) are considered 'lesser', to put it in the nicest way possible.[2]

Most importantly, the academics who write and edit these books more often than not aren't paid a single cent. **Some even PAY the publisher to have their work published** in order to qualify for promotions, or maybe just to live out a lifelong dream of having their own book, or maybe to avoid perishing at all costs. If you aren't in academia, you may ask 'why would *anyone* write a book for free?. But academics would argue that you're already being paid by your university, so it's quite simple: you are doing it for future money, future advancement. As Richard J. Evans explains in an article of publishing tips for academics:

> If it's a first book, don't worry about the money; go for a prestigious university press, unless you have an obviously commercial product (for example, a book with 'Hitler' or 'Nazism' in the title). Bear in mind that a successful first book with a good university press generates a lot of secondary income in terms of jobs, tenure, promotion and the like. (2014).

Later in the article he remarks:

> Forget about an advance for a first book unless it's with a commercial publisher such as Penguin, Bloomsbury or Little, Brown. Just think of the secondary income it can generate and benefits to your academic career (2014).

A lot of people support this logic (which is common knowledge in academia but often a surprise to new grad students who hold the assumption that writing a book is a job) because they desperately want the mythic, powerful, immortality of a tenure-track job. But if only one in five Canadian PhDs will actually get a tenure track job in their field then that means lots of grad students, junior faculty, and contract professors are publishing for free, to a purely academic audience and then *not* gaining the positions they seek (Tremonti, 2015). Therefore, to use Evans rhetoric, they aren't even generating a 'second income' out of it, in fact when considering the labour put in they are losing money. The 'work for exposure' or 'work for inevitable future' model may have worked at one point, but if there aren't enough jobs for the PhDs, this model is simply exploitation.

I'm not saying we need more jobs, I know that is a whole other can of worms, we just need to treat PhDs as what they are, university employees, teachers and researchers who are being trained in a specific subject and not for a specific job. But instead, we are all being trained and led as if we are all preparing for the same job, like a big game of musical chairs. One way to guarantee that you will be the one to sit in that chair is to write an academic book that will be sold to libraries, without being compensated for that writing, as a measure of job security or in some cases future job security.

This has led to a lot of academic books and a lot of people asking questions along these lines:

[2] I once exclaimed at a conference that I was excited that the editors of an anthology I had written for had picked McFarland as our publisher because my friends and family **could actually afford to buy the book** (I had found out that second via email). A fellow conference goer looked at me horrified that I could ever think that was a GOOD thing if my chapter wasn't worth anything due to the publishing house.

> So if academic books aren't exactly commercial endeavors, and they aren't exactly providing knowledge for the masses, what are they doing, exactly? (Berlatsky, 2014).

What they do is keep people flowing through the university ecosystem. They keep giving grad students the dream of having a book of their own, they fill library shelves, and sometimes, if they aren't read, they waste perfectly good research. But if there are fewer jobs and less tenure, will there also be fewer books? Or will there be more books as people desperately try to make themselves look appealing for the very few jobs? Getting paid for your work in academia makes your work less, not more, valuable. To gain cultural capital, you have to work for free, for no *financial* capital, and this tradition has led us to where we are today – poor and precarious.

As a young up and coming grad student, I hope I never publish an academic monograph. Despite writing a book being my #1 goal in life, I can't imagine writing a book, that will be sold for hundreds of dollars to libraries – for free. Call me an entitled millennial if you need to, but once I get my PhD I'm done working for free in hopes that I'll be graced with 'something more' down the line. While I can say that, I'm currently still in my PhD, in the final stages where the work of dissertation revision is heavy but funding from my institution is all dried up. Writing for free, including this article I should add, and teaching for very little, is part of the deal.

I will never ever pay to write a book or write a book for free, even if I *have* an academic job. Even if that means giving up the lifelong dream of writing my own book entirely. Maybe this is cocky or presumptuous of me, but I won't do it. I believe that my writing and the writing of my peers is more than just a means to a job. I want people to read my writing, I want to change people's minds, I want to communicate. I believe our work is important and interesting and is worth more than just a line on our CVs. It should be read, it should be circulated. Our research, our knowledge has purpose and I hope *FPS* showcases that.

I'm aware that many others also believe their writing has more value than all of this. They want to communicate and share but when confronted with the choice of publish or perish. They publish. But, what if we perished?

Join Me, Let's Perish

What if we perished? What if the public can no longer see the purpose of academic research, and slowly but surely people stop pursuing degrees for knowledge, or maybe like the recent case in Japan has shown, they just shut down humanities departments entirely (Dean, 2015)? Or what if we as young grad students just stop submitting to journals, stop writing articles and chapters that will just sit in libraries for free. If we aren't getting paid anyway why not put our research online for everyone to read and just … perish out of the academic system entirely?

This might all sound incredibly naive, but the enabling power of being a young grad student is that I have nothing to lose. I also have nothing to gain by pointing out how everything around me seems broken. I have nothing to gain by telling you that I feel a crushing guilt when I teach my students, not because I'm not giving them the best education I possibly can–I pour all I've got into it–but because I know that soon they will be confronted with their debt, that they are paying so much for the privilege of being here, and I'm being paid pennies to keep them here. The idea that 52% of students at a school can be taught by contract instructors makes you wonder why more money can't be invested in those teachers (Basen, 2014). Especially when they have PhDs

and mountains of debt. In my case about $68,000 in student loans with an estimated $30,000 of interest if I pay it off in only 10 years. That's $98,000 (killmeplease) and places me in the top 17.4% of humanities PhDs with the most debt *in the United States*, where tuition is much more expensive (Jaschik, 2016).

This is not an anti-academia or an anti-university argument, it is instead a pro-education and anti-poverty argument — *but* it is very difficult to be pro-academia while being pro-education, or pro-university while being anti-poverty. It's very complicated to reconcile all these ideas at the same time. That's why before I enter the world with a PhD and try to pay off 100k in debt I might as well use my privilege to point out that we can't keep doing this. We might as well perish.

Even still, with all the privilege I have as a white, cis, able-bodied, PhD candidate, it's incredibly difficult to speak up and talk about the flaws in the system you are a part of. As a young grad student working in academia, you know that you are constantly being judged and that your financial future (in the form of awards, teaching and research positions) is subjectively placed in the hands of your more privileged tenured peers. A student or a professor who challenges the status quo, or who fights for their rights, or who seems ungrateful might not seem like the ideal candidate for an award or promotion.

It's difficult for anyone to speak out. It is even more difficult if you aren't cis, or white, or a man. It's hard enough with those who have the privilege of tenure to speak up; those lacking privilege find themselves muzzled by their desire to have a career. In a similar scenario but in the literary scene, Saeed Jones wrote an incredible piece about what it's like to be a marginalized writer in his article 'Self-Portrait Of The Artist As Ungrateful Black Writer' Jones explains:

> You can make yourself crazy simply by paying attention. The publishing industry on which my work depends is 89% white. And so, when one of those white people puts their hands in my hair, it's difficult for me to speak up in the moment, or even months later, because I want to have a career, not just one book. I suspect there are limits to the literary elite's willingness to tolerate an insistently 'angry black writer' in their presence. Writers who speak out too loudly, too often will never be told explicitly 'you've bitten the hand that feeds you' but there are so many ways to starve (2015).

Jones, like so many of us, has to balance his desire to have a career, with his desire to confront the inequality of his industry. I think these thoughts too, and I wonder, what if all of us, as marginalized writers, just perished? What if we just perished out of academia? Out of literary circles? Like Jones says, there are just so so many ways to starve. In some cases, academics might be starving quite literally (Saacaro, 2014). Part of me wants to devour the hand that feeds me. Part of me wants to starve. Part of me wants to perish.

But another, bigger part of me wonders, what if we, the marginalized being forced out of academia – published?

What if we published with purpose?

Publish with Purpose

What if we weren't publishing for a tenure committee, or our supervisors, or job committees? What if we published for the public? What if we published for those who our research affects? What if we published for those who were interested in the topic? Even if they didn't have a graduate degree?

What if we published with purpose?

What is the rhetorical purpose of publishing? Is it to change people's minds about something? Is it to educate? How many minds do you want to change? Whose minds do you want to change? These are the questions I wrangled with as EIC of *FPS* and they are the questions I still ask myself when publishing today. This article, for example, is not being published because I want to put it on my CV, because I want to say that I *did* publish a single journal article during my PhD. I'm publishing this article with a purpose – to change the way you think about publishing.

There are benefits to publishing outside of academic journals. *FPS* articles are part of a larger critical conversation where we educate and change minds outside of the academy. I don't think you could say that about most, if any, journal articles. Our articles are frequently cited not just by academics but by publications like *The New Yorker*, *The Huffington Post*, (Parkin, 2014; Ryan, 2014) and most frequently by Gamergate, the public who is so confused about what the hell game studies academics do that they literally think we are part of a large communist conspiracy to ruin video games (Chess and Shaw, 2015; Vossen, 2014).

But, it's hard work educating and changing minds, it often feels like thankless labour. *FPS* was once an entirely volunteer-run endeavor, something I struggled with, but now we pay both our editors and contributors the most we can manage. Yes, that's right, we pay people (frequently academics!) to write things. It's unheard of. Running *FPS* takes countless hours of work but we work with the belief that game studies research is too important to only be read by those with access to academic libraries. We try as much as possible to help highlight the voices of those who frequently find themselves without places to speak in games and game studies. We do this not only through our weekly contribution but also through special issues composed of articles that are converted talks from game designers and critics from the Different Games Conference and the Queer Games Con. Most notably, of course, is that we have used *First Person Scholar* as a platform for those who have been oppressed, targeted, harassed and marginalized by GamerGate to not only speak out about the hate movement but also to discuss the implications of such events in a space where we can monitor the comments incredibly closely (Cross, 2014; Wilcox, 2015).

FPS offers contributors free editorial help and a large engaged public audience of designers, academics, gamers, and activists. Publishing with us probably won't get you a job in academia, but it will get your work read, and in my experience, cited. I've seen my *FPS* work (and the *FPS* work of others) cited in print and online *many many times* but I have yet to see any of my print work cited, very possibly because almost no one has ever read it!

As *FPS* Editor In Chief my goal was to disrupt the academic economy by helping scholars share their research with the public, and I continue to advocate for the publication, and other middle state publications. In the future, I would love to have *FPS* articles, and other writing like it, be treated as *valid* academic work in the future. I want to help end the tyranny of the academic journal article. I want to help set an expectation that we deserve to be compensated for all work,

even in academia. Furthermore, I would like to have the public be seen as a valid academic audience.

Most importantly, I would like academics to feel like they can publish with purpose, and not feel that we are dooming ourselves to poverty by doing it.

Author Bio

Emma Vossen is an award-winning public speaker, writer, and PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo Games Institute. Her research and writing about gender and games has been referenced by *NBC*, The *CBC*, *Rolling Stone*, and was selected as the focus of a 50-minute documentary made by CBC Radio and broadcast across Canada in 2016. She is the retired Editor in Chief of Game Studies publication *First Person Scholar*.

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