

## **Amy Bruckman**

**Abstract ihres Vortrags während der Konferenz "feminist\_spaces im Netz. Diskurse, Communities, Visionen", 16./17. November 2001 in Berlin organisiert durch das Feministische Institut in der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung**

### **"Beyond Ideology: Challenges for Empirical Research about Gender and Feminism Online"**

Inquiry into issues related to gender is unusually susceptible to ideological bias. Researchers often set up studies that inadvertently assume their own conclusions, and consequently find exactly what they expected to find. In this talk, I'll discuss the difficulty of doing objective research on gender and feminism in online environments. I'll present three projects under way in the Electronic Learning Communities (ELC) research group in the College of Computing at Georgia Tech.

MOOSE Crossing is a text-based virtual world (or "MUD") designed to help girls develop an interest in and fluency with computer programming. Palaver Tree Online takes a feminist approach to history: kids interview elders to learn about history from those who lived it. History is presented as something personal, lived by real people. Finally, in The Turing Game, participants learn about gender and other aspects of identity in online environments. A panel of contestants all pretend to be a particular identity (women, under thirty years old, from Canada, etc.), and the audience asks questions to try to determine who is telling the truth, and vote with sliders.

At the end of the game, contestants reveal their true identities, and a discussion ensues about who was fooled and why. In the process, participants get an opportunity to reflect on issues of self-presentation in text-based communication and the difference between (in Goffman's terminology) "impressions given" and "impressions given off." I'll conclude with some thoughts on important issues for future research from both academic and activist points of view.