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Spring 2023

VIDEO GAMES NEED TO CHANGE

Dear Game Developers,

We have made tremendous strides in feminism from getting voting rights in the year 1920 to letting women have access to education and better their lives. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go. As a woman, I've experienced many unpleasant encounters due to my sex. While this seems unavoidable, the one place I should not have to deal with it would be in gaming. In this letter, I will be discussing the sexism towards women in video games perpetrated by the consumers and the companies themselves. The history of video games indicates that the genre has had poor female representation from the developers themselves, and this fuels how male gamers perceive women. The stereotypes surrounding the hobby also add to the negativity that gamers themselves have towards women. Game developers, I hope you can hear me out on my reasoning why I think the gaming industry right now is toxic and why we need to fix it.

After thoroughly researching this topic, I found that most women's experiences playing video games in public forums have been overly negative. This doesn't seem to be a coincidence; there is malice and ignorance behind this mistreatment. When you think of a gamer, the first thing that probably pops into your mind is an antisocial male. While this seems to be a popular stereotype from jokes on the internet to movies from the 2000s, it is far from the truth. In fact, statistics from GameTrack data, provided by IPSOS MORI and commissioned by ISFE, show that in Europe, 47% of video game players are women (SFE & EGDF, 5). Despite such a large

population playing video games, they seem to be isolated from their male counterparts due to the harassment they face. In my personal experience, I would rather play in single-player mode due to the negative experiences I've had playing in multiplayer mode. When I joined online and the players are able to perceive my voice as a female, the reactions have been comments such as "Go back to the kitchen" and "Eww". While I find these reactions unnecessary and a bit weird, they truly do display how the men are isolating the women players in these games. If I join these games as a male avatar and only typed in the chat, I would be perceived as a male and I would have better reactions from my peers.

When the video game industry was first starting out, it pandered more toward younger boys. Typically video games are seen as a male hobby and companies themselves also view it as such. In recent years, I have seen a lack of tailoring to women in video games because, "video games tend to be designed by men for men, and female needs and requirements are not sufficiently taken into consideration by game designers." (Kuss et al.). This is also shown in the gameplay of the games themselves. When we are introduced to a female character, she is oversexualized. There's no doubt about it, that when we see armor on men versus on women in video games, men tend to have more coverage and practicality within their clothing than women. It's clear that the game developer's intentions are not to provide us with a character that has a story behind her but to show off her body.

In addition, most of these female characters seem to be only two-dimensional, they usually fit a stereotype but lack actual depth. Similar to the Bechdel test that tests sexism in films, there has been a theory that was created online that was called "the sexy lamp test". The

test suggests if a female character in a movie can be replaced by a sexy lamp and if that doesn't considerably change the plot of the movie, that character was written as an afterthought, and the only reason she was written into the movie was to be attractive, and not have characteristics. This results in the poor writing of female characters. I believe that this theory is shown a lot throughout video games. When I'm playing story mode games, and we are introduced to female characters, they have very unrealistic proportions and extremely revealing clothes that would not be relevant to the plot. In turn, I believe this fuels the negative attitude that male gamers themselves have. They are only shown women as these beings that lack personality and depth, and this negatively affects how these men interact with their female counterparts, because this is the representation that they will think applies to all women.

The solution that could be done is for gaming companies to produce games that have more realistic representations of women and actually give them personalities. They can create a game where we educate male gamers in their behavior, and how we can work on fixing it. This will help male gamers see women as something more than two-dimensional beings. Unfortunately, the problem is changing attitudes toward a gender which will take a lot of time. There is no immediate solution that we can implement. We can try to connect with the male audience to help them understand that harassing their female counterparts is wrong but I doubt that will be effective. We need to show them the reality of their actions, I think we would have to have education courses towards this so they understand that isolating the female counterpart does harm females but it also does significant harm to males. Since men are taking these courses of action they are harming themselves by creating barriers to communication between the opposite sex.

As we all know the stereotype that gamers are usually antisocial males but their treatment of women worsens the stereotype and brings it to reality. From personal experience, these men don't know how to communicate with women in real life, and in video games, their social development has been stunted due to their attitude towards a population. So, reader, I hope we share the same conclusion about how bad the toxic environment is within gaming. I hope that within the coming years, we are able to see games with realistic female characters and create an environment for the new female gamers that they would be comfortable. While this may not seem like a big issue, it is a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Dominika Drozd

Citations:

1. SFE, and EGDF. *Video Games in Europe: 2020 Key Facts - Isfe.eu*. SFE & EGDF, Dec. 2021, <https://www.isfe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GameTrack-ISFE-EGDF-Key-Facts-2021-event-2021-12-09-FINAL.pdf>.
2. Kuss, Daria J, et al. "To Be or Not to Be a Female Gamer: A Qualitative Exploration of Female Gamer Identity." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 21 Jan. 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8835226/#B3-ijerph-19-01169>.