

Chapter 15

Gendered Harassment and Bias in Online Gaming: Experiences of Female Gamers

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ABSTRACT

The chapter provides an overview of the history of online gaming, highlighting its evolution from the early days of home video games to the emergence of online gaming communities and the rise of eSports. It also explores the gender dynamics within the gaming industry, discussing the challenges and discrimination faced by female gamers and the efforts to create a more inclusive gaming environment. The chapter further examines women's roles as players, game designers, objects of the male gaze, and viewers in the gaming industry, emphasising women's increasing participation and contributions in various capacities. It discusses women's representation in games and objectification's impact on female gamers. Additionally, it touches on the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the gaming industry and the role of online gaming as a social platform. The chapter also attempts to address the gendered themes in popular online games and the potential for alternative gaming experiences to challenge traditional notions of gender in gaming.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Evolution of Online Gaming and the Importance of Gender Inclusivity

In recent years, online gaming has undergone an extraordinary surge in popularity, establishing itself as a global phenomenon that captivates a diverse player base through a myriad of gaming experiences. What initially began as a simple pastime has since matured into a comprehensive industry, encompass-

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ing not only game production but also promotional activities and the orchestration of online gaming tournaments, among other endeavours. The expansive landscape of online gaming is home to various platforms, notable ones including Steam, Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, and Nintendo Switch Online. Within these platforms, a wide spectrum of gaming services is offered, ranging from game distribution and multiplayer functionality to cross-platform compatibility, socialisation features, and player incentives. Adding another layer of engagement, players frequently live stream their gaming sessions on platforms like YouTube and Twitch, thus opening new avenues for interaction and even potential monetisation. The accessibility and utilisation of these platforms experienced an unprecedented upswing during the Covid-19 lockdown period, as individuals – including those not professionally engaged in gaming – turned to online gaming for solace and connectivity from the confines of their residences.

1.2. Platforms and Their Proliferation

The online gaming universe, characterised by an extensive array of platforms, has bestowed upon itself the status of a diverse ecosystem that caters to a global gaming community. Noteworthy platforms, including but not limited to Steam, Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, and Nintendo Switch Online, have emerged as significant platforms for various gaming services. These encompass multifaceted functions such as game distribution, cross-platform compatibility, social interaction features, and rewards systems that attract more players. It is also pertinent to acknowledge the surge in streaming platforms like YouTube and Twitch, providing players with an innovative medium for engaging their audience, thereby also holding the potential for financial gain. As the gaming ecosystem diversifies further, it is imperative to acknowledge additional dimensions contributing to its complexity and dynamism.

The surge of mobile gaming, fuelled by the universality of smartphones and tablets, has democratised gaming even further, making it accessible to a wider audience. Additionally, the advent of cloud gaming services, exemplified by Google Stadia and Xbox Cloud Gaming, has begun to reshape how games are experienced, erasing the barriers of hardware limitations. Social integration is another vital facet, with platforms seamlessly embedding social features that foster connections among players, enabling them to forge communities and share their gaming escapades effortlessly. Moreover, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) platforms, such as Oculus and Microsoft's HoloLens, have shattered conventional boundaries, immersing players in realms that blur the lines between the real and the digital. E-sports, yet another advancement, and competitive gaming platforms have emerged as integral components of the gaming sphere, transforming it into a global spectacle that draws enthusiasts from across the world.

1.3. The Pandemic's Catalyst

The landscape of online gaming underwent a significant transformation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Lockdown measures imposed during the pandemic led to an unparalleled surge in the use of online gaming platforms. These platforms served not only as sources of entertainment but also as avenues for social interaction, extending beyond traditional gaming circles. The pandemic-induced lockdowns brought about a remarkable shift in how online gaming was embraced, blurring the boundaries between recreational and professional gaming realms. This transition underscored the vital role of online gaming in fostering entertainment and social engagement during times of isolation.

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