

Personal Essay

On the Internet, No One Knows You're a Girl

The elusive “girl gamer”, not to be confused with the “gamer-girl” has been spotted in the wild. She sits at a computer—just like you—has a mouse and headphones—just like you—holds the controller just like you—and swears uncontrollably—almost like you, but better. There are more than you think out there, they just like to make themselves scarce as to not attractive too much attention, whether it be positive or negative. They just want to be treated the same as the other players. We want to be treated the same—no worse, no better.

Video games are for everyone. They are supposed to be at least. But like most other things they seem to belong to the male population. As a female gamer, this becomes difficult for many reasons. The first is how we are treated outside of games. Like many other hobbies or interests that are more male oriented, women seem to have to prove themselves fans before we are accepted. This happens a lot on sports as well, if a woman tells a man she is into hockey, and maybe her favourite team is the leafs she is all of a sudden quizzed on the player's names, what years they have won and the coaches uncle's pet's blood type, a gauntlet men never have to go through. In the case of video games, the standards for women to be able to like the industry means they have to play everything. If you don't play Call of Duty, you don't know anything. If your only consoles you've owned are Nintendo, you're not a 'real gamer'. If you've never played on a PC, who are you even? These rules don't apply to men like they do to women, like a penis is equal to a free pass in the video game world. Lacking the proper genitalia apparently means you lack the skill, knowledge and right to play video games. This is where we run into the problem with being a girl who games, and the meme of “gamer-girls”. These gamer-girls are the label girls who play games have gotten when they assume we know nothing about what we are

doing, and are just doing it to “impress boys”. But the last time I checked, I do not sit at my computer at 3 in the morning without having touched running water in 48 hours, stuffing Kraft Dinner into my mouth between team fights in *Dota2* to “impress boys”. I’ve gotten the comments time and time again, but it never goes the other way. Boys who join cheerleading squads are never accused of doing so just to meet girls, although it is a great way to do it. Boys always talk about how they wish they could meet a girl who was into games like he was, but when they do meet one, they harass her instead. The double-standards are endless, just let us like what we like, and play what we want to play without constantly having to pull a sword out of the stone just for you to believe us. Yes, we play games! And yeah, we are probably better than you.

The second problem female gamers get happens usually while playing. Most of the time I try to not make it apparent that I am female, because once they know it could go one of two ways. The first is favourable, once it has happened to me. In a popular MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena) game there is an in-game voice chat, where you can use a microphone to communicate with your four other teammates by speaking instead of typing. I most often tend to not use this because I am either ousted as a girl or I am flamed for being 12. But occasionally, it is necessary as typing while you are trying to play can be a problem and tedious. As a gave some information to my teammates via voice chat, one of them responded with surprise that I was a girl, as he does not come across many in that game, and we all moved on. I wish I could say this happens more than the alternative, but alas, we all wish we could have it easy. The second scenario of using the voice command in the game is everyone loses their minds. I either get some crude variation of getting hit on like asking for a bra size, or the very common but always a little hurtful “you’re probably just fat and ugly”. Yes, those exact words have been written to me during a game. I once had someone ask what my dress size was, and I wasn’t sure which kind of

response to file that into. These are just examples that have happened to me, I'm sure there are hundreds of other examples from other female gamers that could be given here. At least I only hope it is not just me. These kinds of situations make me hide my gender and my identity during games which in turns hinders my attitude towards games and playing in general. Of course it hasn't stopped me from wanting to play, but it keeps me from interacting with the other players properly, and perhaps the lack of communication and mutual understanding is the cause for many of my loses.

Every once in a while I do run into another female gamer, but I have yet to know one that speaks English, because, like me, they are probably hiding behind using a keyboard instead of speaking out loud, probably for the exact same reasons I do. It's a shame, because we lack the same kind of community that male gamers have. Some people have met their best friends on a video game, and as a female gamer I cannot experience that the same why. By hiding my identity it keeps me from getting too close with anyone I meet online to even start to have a friendship. And if I do make it clear that I am a girl then I run the risk of them only talking to me *because* I'm a girl. I cannot even meet other girl gamers because we are all hiding. Although I have to make a slight contradiction here because I met my boyfriend on *Dota2*, but it's a little more involved than that. When I first started to play Dota, the friend that showed me the game whom lived on my residence floor in first year university had a few buddies who also played. In the game you can party up with your friends to play together on the same team. I played a game with him and his friend who he knew in his program, so we were all in a party together and playing the game together; and this is how we met. After that game he added me on Steam and we started talking for a few months before we actually went on a date. So, the two sides of that are, we did in fact meet in an online game and have had a lasting relationship, but it wasn't random and we

technically met through a mutual friend. He also previously knew that I was a girl when we played together, so we kind of cheated.

The third issue lies in the grand scheme of things in the industry—lack of representation. Or a better way to put it, lack of *accurate* representation. Professional Esports are becoming more popular and the tournaments for all kinds of games are happening everywhere around the world, and it is a big deal. In 2015, The International (TI5), the largest Dota2 tournament was held in Seattle at the KeyArena, with a prize pool that was over \$11 million dollars for the top 16 teams, 5 people per team. These pros train every day for these tournaments and they come from all over the world, some of the best teams come from Ukraine, Korea, China, Philippines and Russia, and some are a mix of all different nationalities on teams like Secret, who have one of the most famous Canadian players EternalEnvy. All the players, at least the ones that make it to tournaments to win the big money are male. Is it because boys are just better at video games? Well studies have proven that women actually have better dexterity and small motor skills, perfect for precise keyboard and mouse skills. So is it because there haven't been any pro girl players yet? That is possible, since Esports is so new, and so male dominated in the professional and amateur world. But it is probably because of the discouragement we get from playing while still at the amateur level that keeps us from rising up to the professionals. I would love to see some female players, and maybe even a female team on that big stage in Seattle, winning that \$10 grand, and show those boys that female gamers are valid.

The problem does not lie only there, of course it starts with the games themselves, and are the cause of why many female gamers are not taken seriously. I am talking about the female characters in games. Now not all of them are like this, of course I can think of a few counter examples right off the bat, however it is more prominent to have big-breasted and barely clothed

woman standing next to the heavily armoured and buff men. This image of women is in all media, but it definitely has a bigger effect in games. Female gamers then tend to either refuse to play the female characters because of their image of pure sexuality, and are therefore not taken seriously, or we play whichever character we want. When we do pick a girl though, we get the “you’re only playing her cause she’s a girl”, or “you only ever play girl characters”. Not going to lie though, I am of course drawn to the female characters more because I identify with them as a women, it is only natural. But as I more often play female characters, I do not get taken seriously as a gamer because it appears like I only play the game for the girl characters and I never branch out, when a male player can only play male characters and no one even notices. Now assuming that I would only play female characters, in a perfect world that would probably be fine, except there aren’t very many. In *Dota2* there are 111 “heroes” to choose from split into three categories of primary stats: strength, agility and intelligence. These primary stats determine the strengths of the hero you’re playing, so having all three kinds at once is good for a versatile team. Out of 111 heroes, only 15 of them are female. In agility: 8. In intelligence: 6. In strength: 1. This is only one game example, but this happens all the time. In the latest *Mortal Kombat* release there are 24 characters that start in the game, just 5 of them are female. Yes, they all have huge boobs, and yes they are usually showing a lot of skin. If all we get is 15 out of 111 characters to choose from, then yeah maybe I won’t be as good at the game as the male player who gets 96 to play and grow his skill in all kinds of roles and abilities. Also, why do they always have to have huge bouncing boobs, isn’t it distracting?

After harassment and insults, we female gamers still want to play games. We love them just as much as the guys do, we just need a little respect, through taking us seriously, and giving proper representation in the industry and games. The need for equality arises in all media outlets,

but video games get forgotten because it is such a male-dominant world. If you are trying to stop us from playing, it won't work, just accept us as we are and let us all enjoy the wonderful world of gaming, from Consoles to PCs; it is all beautiful. I love to play, I just would love it even more if I could play in peace, so I can f*** some noobs up.