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# INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND GAMING IN LATIN AMERICA

Phillip Penix-Tadsen

The dynamics of gender and sexual identity impact the production, circulation and signification of video games in myriad ways. In Latin America—and indeed in all regions and contexts—these dynamics are made manifold through their intersections with complex questions of class, race, ethnicity, nationality and cultural identity, among others. Likewise, the numerous approaches to analyzing gender's impact on games from development to reception demonstrate the ways gender remains a key consideration—whether as a stumbling block or a passageway to more meaningful gaming experiences—for all facets of video games' meaning. In contemporary Latin America, for example, gender affects games on the levels of women's underrepresentation in the video game industry workforce; in-game depictions of gender and lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/queer (LGBTQ) identity; online communication and harassment; the shifting player demographics of the 21st century; marketing strategies calculated to appeal to the gendered desires of imagined gaming audiences; the formation of gender- and sexuality-centered gaming communities on social media; and the effort to close the “gender gap” among eSports (professional competitive gaming) participants. Given the multivalent nature of the topic, this chapter will focus on several key aspects of the relationship between gender and video games in Latin America: first, representation, identification and gender in games; next, gender and player demographics in Latin America; third, the gender dynamics of Latin American game development; and finally, intersections of gender and gameplay in 21st-century Latin America.

## Representation, identification and gender in games

Research on character representation in mainstream video games shows that women, minority groups, children and the elderly are grossly underrepresented—and males, whites and adults are vastly overrepresented—relative to their overall percentage of the real-world population, as well as to their percentage of the gaming population (Williams et al. 2009: 828). Furthermore, Latin Americans and Latinxs in video games “typically appear as a non-playable character, obstacle to overcome, or simply part of the backdrop” (Aldama 2013: 241), and female characters, when featured, are frequently relegated to secondary roles or act as “accessories or rewards for the hero,” contributing to a cycle in which a male-dominated industry creates products for a presumed masculine gaming audience, which can push female or non-binary gamers away from gaming as well as from the game industry in general (Fernández Vara 2014: 93). Latin masculinity is

typically represented in video games through the types of characters analyzed by Frederick J. Aldama: generically “Latin” fighters, “all-body characters in sports games” or “knife-wield ominously dangerous types” in roving gangs (Aldama 2013: 242). While there are exceptions, these stereotypical depictions remain the rule in mainstream games.

Given the underrepresentation of both Hispanic and female characters in the medium overall, it may not be surprising that the history of Latina characters in particular is rather sparse. There is, nevertheless, a considerable history of female Latin American and Latina character games, including playable characters like Annet Myer, the “Peruvian sorceress” protagonist in Japanese developer Wolf Team’s platformer games *El Viento* (1991) and *Annet Futatabi* (1993); Colonel Corazón Santiago, commander of the Spartan Federation in *Sid Meier’s Alpha Centauri* (1999), or Sombra, the Latina character recently added to Blizzard’s popular first-person shooter series *Overwatch* (2016).

Likewise, it is common to find Latina characters who represent “members of the undocumented class” and/or “hypersexualized bodies” (Aldama 2013: 242) playing secondary roles in relation to a male protagonist—princess/damsel-in-distress, sidekick, family member, love interest—including Catalina in the *Grand Theft Auto* series (2001), Val Cortez in *Far Cry* (2004), Isabela Keyes in *Dead Rising* (2006), Eva Cortes in *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) and Presidente’s daughter in *Guacamelee!* (2013). Japanese binary combat fighting games have perhaps the lengthiest and most sustained history of representing Latina characters, from American SNK’s *King of Fighters* series, to a spectrum of scantily clad practitioners of Brazilian Capoeira including Christie Monteiro, who first appeared in *Tekken IV* (2001), Pupa Salgueiro in *Rage of the Dragons* (2002) or the more recent Laura Matsuda of *Street Fighter V* (2016). In many cases, these characters lean on longstanding stereotypes as shorthand to the representation of gender and culture. However, rather than merely appealing to the masculine gaze, recent characters like Sombra represent an attempt to attract gamers seeking more varied options among playable characters, an indication of some of the small steps the industry is taking to appeal to gamer diverse backgrounds.

Contemporary critics, however, have called into question the primacy of representation as a frame for debates on gender and games, suggesting that we need to move beyond basic critiques of stereotypical representation and simplistic presumptions regarding player-character identification in order to understand how gender truly impacts games. Jenny Sundén and Magnus Sveningsson promote the development of “intersectional, queer, feminist studies of online gaming” (2012: 7), a call echoed by Adrienne Shaw and Bonnie Ruberg’s advocacy for scholars that “turn[s] to queerness to challenge a variety of dichotomies that have long structured how scholars and designers alike understand games (e.g., narratology/ludology, production/recognition, control/agency, success/failure)” (2017: ix–x)—Shaw and Ruberg’s anthology *Queer Game Studies* ultimately “locates queerness in games beyond representation” (xv). By “queering” boundaries between long-standing binaries, intersectional critiques of gaming and gender have opened new pathways for understanding the ways games meld with our other lived experiences. In *Gaming at the Edge*, Shaw argues that although “industry-level discussion of representation presumes that a concrete group desire, such as that for representation, can be leveraged in production” (2015: 18), there is reason to question “the assumption that members of marginalized groups are ‘naturally’ concerned with representation of a group in which they might be classified” and therefore “identity, identification, and representation are much more complicated than this model allows” (22). Ultimately, this line of critique suggests that game studies and media representation studies should “break away from this reification of groups that reemphasizes their marginalization” (215), in order to focus on the real-life practices of female and non-binary players. To truly account for gender’s impact on players’ gaming experiences, then, we must

adopt a phenomenological approach capable of accounting for the specificity and complexity of the cultural intersections at play when gender and video games align. Toward that end, this chapter will now turn to examine some of the real-world gender dynamics reflected in the demographics of gamers and game industry workers in contemporary Latin America.

### Gender and player demographics in Latin America

Overall, the demographics of actual gamers in Latin America (and elsewhere) are much more diverse than the characters represented in mainstream games. Market data indicates that in Latin America respondents identifying as female make up 48.1% of the regional internet population age 18 and over ("Women on the Web" 2010: 5), while female respondents spent slightly more time online and a slightly greater proportion of their online time playing games than male respondents (7). Another survey of more than 25,000 respondents from seven Latin American countries estimates that online gameplay is more common overall among male respondents (46.4%) than female respondents (35.4%), with male players more prone to playing on consoles and female players showing a preference for the PC (Arango Forero et al. 2010: 47–53). A study of more than 3,500 Argentines found that 30% played video games, including 35% of the male and 23% of the female respondents, and echoed the gender divide between platform preferences reflected above ("Encuesta" 2013: 23–25). Market data also reflect differences in the gender demographics of gamers in different countries and contexts, a reminder of the importance of other factors such as socioeconomic class and political framework in gamers' experiences. For example, according to one source, 28% of Argentine gamers are female, while in Brazil female gamers account for 40% ("The Latin American Games Market" 2016). These numbers are further broken down when examining sub-segments: for example, the gender distribution of mobile gamers in Argentina is balanced more closely at 43% female and 57% male ("The Argentinean Gamer" 2017) than the distribution of Mexican console gamers, where females make up 39% to males' 61% ("The Mexican Gamer" 2017). Projections suggest that Latin America will soon surpass North America in number of smartphone users ("2017 Global Mobile Market" 2017: 15), expanding access to segments of the populace that were previously out of reach of many gaming technologies.

But lest we get too caught up in marketing segments and attempts to pin down gendered preferences of hardware and software, we must interrogate the assumptions underlying the questions being asked. Surveys based on yes-or-no questions, binary gender options and a market-based search for quantifiable and exploitable consumer preferences yield certain results. But we could also expand our view of gender and game-related practices, following Sinem Siyahhan and Elisabeth Gee, to include "legitimate peripheral participation" (2016: 95) aside from playing games and watching others play games, such as when "women and girls talk about games with other family members, solve problems or play a difficult part for other family members, and visit websites related to games," (101–102) taking on roles that impact the meaning and experience of games for all concerned.

Ultimately, making games that appeal to audiences with different gender identities may be less about making games specific to each sub-set of identity, and more about making games that avoid rigid and outdated gender categorizations. Indeed, all the market-based data and theories about gendered hardware and software preferences seem to fall out the window when we examine real-world player practices. An Argentine report on local female gamers showed a preference for hardcore console titles like *League of Legends*, *Counter Strike*, *Grand Theft Auto V* and *World of Warcraft*, among others (Perazo 2015), rather than the poppy casual games and social media titles the market research would suggest that female gamers prefer. Likewise, a study of 668 Brazilian

players aged 18 and older concluded that female players primarily took on roles associated with achievement, planning and exploration, avoiding the socializer role conventionally attributed to the feminine gender (Fortim et al. 2016: 1318). The incompatibility of player practices with market-based predictions of purchasing patterns suggests that the mainstream game industry still has much to learn about gender and gaming. As Shira Chess argues, "the category of 'women players' is neither consistent nor predictable," so "[d]esigners, executives and marketers should ask better questions, reaching out to a multitude of players" rather than limiting "womanhood to white, heterosexual, middle-class women" in ways that unproblematically rely upon "industry divisions between 'hardcore' and 'casual' gamers" that "essentialize play styles and tend to map 'casual' play to women and 'hardcore' play to male audiences," thus "repurposing tired stereotypes repeatedly used in media aimed at women audiences" (2013: 176). It is no longer enough (in fact it never was enough) to create "girl games" as a counter-measure to the overall dominance of hyper-masculine games among players and markets. Gamer preferences are as diverse as gamer demographics, and the data clearly show that the industry has some significant catching up to do in order to create games that are as diverse in their approaches to gender and cultural identity as the audiences they seek to attract. Because diversity and demographics are significant not just in games' reception but also in their production process, this chapter will turn now to an examination of gender's impact on game development in Latin America.

### Gender dynamics of Latin American game development

In the computer games industry, as in the information technology (IT) industries overall, women are significantly underrepresented, creating a "worldwide problem" for gender equity in the IT profession (Prescott and Bogg 2010: 140). In 2015, the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) released the results of a survey of nearly 6,000 game developers across the globe, which revealed that only 22% of the global games workforce identified as female, while 75% identified as male, 1.5% as transgender, 1% as other and 6% declined to respond (Edwards 2014: 10). Notably, of the total respondents to the IGDA survey, 4% identified "South America" as their region of work, though the survey offered only this option or "North America" (home to 59% of respondents), making it difficult to determine where responses from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean might fit in (Edwards 2014: 8). If we dig deeper into data specific to Latin America, the global game industry's 22% female workforce may begin to seem impressive by contrast—women make up only 12% of the workforce in the Chilean games industry (Angulo Cáceres) and only 9% in Argentina ("Estado de la industria independiente" 2016). In light of the severity of this gender divide, the industry has begun to strategize ways of attracting more diverse employees, while critics have focused on highlighting the enduring barriers to women's lasting participation in IT fields.

Considerable research has examined the reasons some women avoid careers in the video games industry and related fields, as well as the reasons that those who have found success in game development have decided to stay. Mia Consalvo's work examines the "marketing disconnects, structural sexism and resistance to change" that drive many women away from the game industry on a global level (2008: 177), arguing that there is a need to move beyond the question of how to attract female workers, since "programs, pipelines, and curricula meant to encourage girls and women to enter this industry will have little long-term impact if women leave the industry in a decade or less, as recent reports have suggested" (178). Consalvo concludes that, while women in game development are driven by a passion for their work, their employers "know this, and can trade on that passion to increase output" (185), leading to increased demands for crunch time (defined as "weekly periods of fifty to one hundred hours" for "periods lasting

from two weeks to several months” 182–183), as well as “rapid turnover, retention problems, and a work culture that valorizes youth, passion, and long hours over maturity and experience,” often resulting in frustration for women who feel they are being made to “fit in” to a masculine culture, or worse, feel that they are being ‘treated differently’ simply because they are women” (188). When this gender divide intersects with the economic divisions of neoliberal capitalism, we see the ways intersectionality transforms and magnifies the marginalization of women working in games in Latin America, particularly in contexts such as the *maquiladora* economy of poorly paid manufacturing work in facilities that line the U.S.–Mexico border. Nick Dyer-Witheford documents the episode that arose in 1995 when Alicia Perez, a young woman working in the Maxi-Switch factory that produced parts for the Nintendo GameBoy, led the charge to unionize; Perez was fired after being punched and knocked down by company thugs, along with three other union leaders (1999: 83). In circumstances such as this, it is evident that for many women working in IT industries in Latin America and other parts of the globe, the obstacles presented by gender imbalance are just the beginning.

While greater diversity and gender inclusivity are stated goals for many in the game industry, top-down attempts at reform have frequently missed the mark, while grassroots organizations are working from the ground up to promote IT and game development careers for women. Chess has argued that in the game industry, “women are welcomed while at the same time they are simultaneously marginalized and their tastes essentialized” in games and work conditions that “reify traditional stereotypes of femininity and narrow definitions of womanhood” (2013: 169). This has led some in Latin America and elsewhere to focus on reframing the narrative surrounding IT careers and entrepreneurship for women, such as the Mexico-based organization Epic Queen, led by Dany González, which runs regular events including code parties for girls ages six to 16, meetups, a club, a camp and an accelerator for supporting projects initiated by members. Young entrepreneurs further along their professional paths receive support from entities like Colombia’s Global Game Designers Guild, cofounded by design manager Ivonne Marcela Tovar and dedicated to fostering a professional environment that encourages new talent and supports their entrepreneurship—Tovar herself is also cofounder of Press Start Studios, a developer focused on original mobile games. Just like with representation, if the game industry really wants to diversify, it will require more than superficial changes and questions about “what women want” in their game libraries or their working conditions, built on false binaries and assumptions that preclude their usefulness for answering complex questions. Grassroots organizations that attend to the particular concerns of young women preparing for careers in IT and game development offer a platform for future development.

Perhaps the best answers as to how women and non-binary individuals find triumph in the game industry come from looking at success stories and the values and factors they represent. It should not be surprising that in spite of gender divisions in Latin America as in the rest of the world, women have historically played a significant role in game development and continue to do so, contributing to the myriad processes involved in game creation, distribution and promotion. From the earliest days of homebrew-style game development in Latin America, pioneers like Naomi Marcela Nievas of Argentina, alias “Sharara,” programmed original games like *Scrunff* (1985) as some of the few women among a male-dominated programming scene (Esnaola et al. 2015: 37). Other pioneering industry leaders in the region include Sofia Battegazzore of Uruguay, co-founder and co-director of Powerful Robot Games along with Gonzalo Frasca from 2002–2012, and currently a freelance game developer and professor of game studies; or Martina Santoro, president of the Argentine Video Game Developers’ Association (ADVA) and founder/CEO of Okam Studio, a Buenos Aires-based developer focused on cross-platform games, applications and interactive content. And new platforms for

game development and distribution have made it easier for innovative young creators to get a foot in the door of game development, leading to some truly original projects—examples include Paraguayan Gabriela Galilea’s 2014 game *Okima*, designed to help cure the ocular condition known as strabismus (Corredor, n.d.), or *Juatsjinyam/Aprendiendo* (2015), a game designed by 17-year-old Colombian student Ayda Milena España Jamioy to help preserve the language of the caniéntá people in Colombia (Calle 2015). As these standout examples demonstrate, women have played an important leadership role in Latin America’s game industry from the start, and advances in gaming technology are creating new possibilities for creative entrepreneurship and game development.

Of course, video games are not just the products of singular visionaries, but rather they are complex collaborations that involve a collective effort on development, distribution, promotion and circulation. And in spite of the male dominance of the overall workforce, women and non-binary individuals contribute to all sectors of the game industry, from animation and sound engineering to motion capture and advertising—or in the case of Mercedes Recinos of El Salvador, costume design for the independent horror-themed adventure game *Enola* (Recinos 2017). Other women from Latin America have carved a career path by working in the game industry abroad—an example is Liliana Pantoja, IT project manager for a British online casino gaming company with a presence in more than 30 countries, who explains that she has had to work hard to be successful in “a male-dominated sector, both in IT and in sports betting; coming into an organization with those characteristics, as a foreign woman from a ‘developing’ country, and making changes to a business with a 100% British legacy, where many employees have been working for decades, has been my greatest professional challenge up to now” (Oroz 2016). Today, the sub-sectors and segments of the game industry are ever-multiplying, creating new interactions between games and other aspects of social and cultural life. Take for example the phenomenon of eSports, which is creating lucrative opportunities as it entertains millions of spectators—Maricarmen Vargas, cofounder of Electronic Sports Puerto Rico (ESPR), organizes events that have attracted more than half a million remote viewers as well as thousands of live spectators (Román 2016). Clearly, “game development” consists of an ever-increasing variety of components, opening up new possibilities for future trajectories.

Game art—the creation of games as art objects, and the promotion and exhibition of games by art institutions—is another important point of intersection between games and the broader realm of culture. More institutions are embracing video games as at least part of their focus, and many have curated exhibitions and events centered entirely on games and gaming. The Argentine exhibition *Game On! El arte en juego*, curated by María Luján Oulton, is preparing to launch its fourth installation since 2009, during which time it has been warmly received by audiences in a number of cultural institutions and galleries in Buenos Aires, where Luján Oulton has combined a traditional museum exhibit with interactive presentations, artists’ performances and group events (Bittanti 2013). For their part, a number of Latinx artists have created games that reconfigure the conventions of well-known analog and digital games in order to produce artistic statements. Some of these pieces are relatively ambiguous or oblique—Argentine media artist Mónica Jacobo’s *00:04:44* (2005) modifies the first-person shooter *Half Life 2* (2004) into a scenario in which the player walks across the bridge in the shoes of an avatar and finds a virtual red folding chair exactly like the real one offered to players/interactors in the gallery (Jacobo 2012).

Other Latinx game artists make works that more explicitly “play” with gender and intersectional identity. For example, Coco Fusco and Ricardo Dominguez’s *Turista Fronterizo*, a digitized version of *Monopoly* framed within the socio-cultural dynamics of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, offers the player a chance to explore border life from the perspective of four characters—two

from Mexico, two from the United States; two women and two men—in a way that combines Fusco's focus on "the representations of otherness, the classification of troubling bodies, and the treatment of (formerly) colonized peoples" with Dominguez's "overt concern for the structural inequalities facing Mexicans and undocumented immigrants, coupled with a tactics of using digital technologies against the grain" (Taylor 2014: 124). Likewise, Brazilian drag queen Amanda Sparks has produced games such as *Flappy DragQueen* (2015), a trans-themed knockoff of *Flappy Bird* (2013), and *The Shade Forest* (2016), which follows the main character of Amanda herself through a *Mega Man*-style adventure (Duarte 2015).

Transgender Latina game artist Micha Cárdenas tackles some similar issues in *Becoming Dragon*, "a mixed-reality performance that questions the one-year requirement of 'Real Life Experience' that transgender people must fulfill in order to receive Gender Confirmation Surgery, and asks if this could be replaced by one year of 'Second Life Experience' to lead to Surgery, and asks if this could be replaced by one year of 'Second Life Experience' to lead to Species Reassignment Surgery" (Cárdenas 2010). To create the performance piece, Cárdenas undertook a year of research and development that ran concurrent to her real-life hormone replacement therapy, then "lived for 365 hours immersed in the online 3D environment of *Second Life* with a head mounted display, only seeing the physical world through a video-feed, and used a motion-capture system to map [her] movements into *Second Life*," projecting the performance stereoscopically for the audience (Cárdenas 2010). As Claudia Costa Pederson has argued, artists like Cárdenas, Sparks, Fusco and Dominguez "engage in the appropriation, infiltration, and re-articulation of mass-produced games and videogames as a way to challenge, teach about, or otherwise speak back to power" (2016).

In light of these examples from the worlds of eSports, game art and behind-the-scenes development work, the definition of what constitutes "game development" or the "game industry" is in a process of rapid transformation, in Latin America and across the globe. At the same time, the dynamics of play have shifted rapidly with the advent of interactive online games, generating new issues for understanding how gender impacts the contemporary experience of gameplay, which is the subject of this chapter's final section.

### Gender and gameplay in 21st-century Latin America

The first two decades of the 21st century have seen major shifts in the gaming landscape, including a boom in the popularity of "casual" games played on mobile devices and social media platforms (along with subsequent expansions, on one hand, of access to games, and on the other hand, of the possibilities for small, local game producers to reach the global games market), the advent of eSports as a major sub-industry unto itself, the appearance of the first major augmented reality and virtual reality games, the massive expansion of multiplayer online gaming and an increase in crossover between gaming and other spheres of creative production such as literature, music and the visual arts. The overall growth and diversification of the gaming population during this period of time has meant an ever-greater number of female-identifying and non-binary players, even if the industry has in many ways seemed slow to adapt to changing audiences and perspectives. The gender divide in the gaming populace has nearly closed, at least according to the statistics available—women made up 48% of the gaming population in the United States in 2014 (Grundberg and Hansegard 2014), the same year in which female gamers came to outnumber males in the United Kingdom (Stuart 2014). As video games become a part of everyday life in Latin America and worldwide, melding with other aspects of our social and cultural lives, they impact and intertwine with an ever-greater number of individuals, all of whom approach games and game culture from distinct intersections of sexual, socio-economic, racial, ethnic and political identity.

The representation and performance of gender online is a significant aspect of the contemporary gaming experience. While online interactions were never truly anonymous and "the raced, gendered, classed body" has always been "outed" in cyberspace just as soon as commerce and discourse come into play" (Nakamura 2002: 11), this revealing of gender and other aspects of identity has taken on new dimensions with the expansion in massive multiplayer online gaming and the ability to communicate via text, voice and even video chat with other players in real time. For many gamers who identify as female, this can often mean confronting a great deal of hostility. Research on player responses to gender cues found that, under controlled conditions, a female voice received an average of three times as many negative comments as a male voice, many of them hostile, even when both voices were communicating the same message (Kuznekoff and Rose 2013: 551–554). This level of hostility toward female gamers can have a negative impact on both individual experiences of gaming and overall attitudes toward gaming among male and female audiences alike. Research by Jesse Fox and Wai Yen Tang shows that female gamers respond to gender-based harassment in online gaming in a variety of manners, including rumination, organizational responsiveness, withdrawal and the use of coping strategies such as avoidance, denial, self-blame, gender masking and seeking help (2016: 9–11). Fox and Tang also argue that "game companies should be concerned with players' perceptions of organizational response to sexual harassment, as this predicted women's withdrawal from games," and that by "remaining passive and not addressing sexual harassment, gaming companies are sending the implicit message to players that it is acceptable" (14). For this and other reasons, it is urgent that game producers and players focus their efforts on ending harassment and exclusive behaviors in order to create a more welcoming gaming environment for all players.

Online interactions through social media can also have a significant impact on the ways video games intertwine with contemporary culture in Latin America, revealing the role gender plays in the circuits through which games' meaning is created and circulated. Take the case of Mariana Villanueva, alias Haku, a successful Mexican illustrator and visual artist who was enjoying a successful career abroad working with Microsoft until October 2016, when she became the target of public attacks via social media after it was revealed that she had plagiarized the work of another illustrator in her work for *Gears of War 4* (2016). While Villanueva accepted responsibility for her "reinterpretation" of this "reference," she rapidly found herself under attack from social media users who dubbed her #LadyPlagio (#MissPlagiarism) and deployed the type of personal, vindictive and at times violently misogynist discourse associated with the anti-feminist phenomenon known as #GamerGate in the United States (Castillo Cabrera 2016). This type of gender-based harassment and mistreatment of women by the gaming community at large is significant, as many female gamers "perceive the game culture rather than the game mechanics to be the primary deterrent" to participation in gaming (Yee 2008: 84), meaning change will have to take place at the community level in order for gaming to truly become more gender inclusive.

Indeed, grassroots community development is one of the brighter sides of gender's impact on contemporary gaming. Today, new communities constructed around gaming and gender or sexual identity are booming, aimed at nurturing an inclusive environment sensitive to the needs and desires of gamers from different backgrounds. LGBTQ groups such as Gaymers México and Gaymers Brasil, each with over 1,000 members, share social media content related to gaming as well as queer issues. Brazil's female gaming group Garotas Gamers boasts more than 50,000 regular users, while several smaller female gaming groups in Brazil and various Chicas Gamers groups out of Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and other Latin American countries have membership numbers in the thousands on social media. Although the advent of social gaming and an increased capacity for interpersonal communication in real time has brought challenges for gamers of different gender backgrounds, it has also created new opportunities to establish

communities based on shared interests, affinities and experiences, making gaming an experience that is approachable to, and shared by, an ever more diverse population of players.

### Gaming, gender and intersectionality in contemporary Latin America

Video games and their meaning are impacted by issues related to gender from their production to their reception—and indeed beyond, into their recirculation, reinterpretation and reconfiguration by contemporary *prosumer* audiences. The male dominance among playable characters in mainstream video games is compounded by a lack of Latinx characters, as well as a general lack of well-rounded characters from different socioeconomic classes, racial, ethnic, linguistic and LGBTQ backgrounds. However, intersectional analyses of games and game culture have helped shift our attention beyond representation and facile assumptions about player identification with game characters, pointing out the ways analytical frameworks frequently rest on the same binaries and assumptions that they aim to critique, and reframing our discussions of games' meaning around the real-life practices and experiences of players. A phenomenological shift toward lived experiences allows us to examine the impact of gender beyond the surface level of in-game representation, for example noting the makeup of the real-world game industry's workforce, which is also heavily dominated by young white heterosexual males and their perspectives, due in part to longstanding industry values and expectations (i.e., crunch time, youth and passion over maturity and experience) that conflict with recent efforts to attract more female and non-binary employees. Nevertheless, there are many important examples of women, people of color and LGBTQ individuals producing impactful work in the game industry, past and present. Player demographics are also in a process of rapid diversification, impacted in part by innovations like casual games and social media games, as well as expanded availability of internet-enabled smartphones throughout Latin America and the globe. And while the game industry has been relatively slow on the uptake in terms of producing real changes to the toxic masculinity of online gaming culture and the hyper-gendered stereotypical representations of men and especially women in games, new communities of gamers, modders and developers from diverse backgrounds are paving the way toward a Latin American game industry that more accurately reflects the diverse intersections of gender, race, class and sexual identity of the region and its people.

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