

Factsheet



Gaming and gender: Towards sustainable gaming cultures



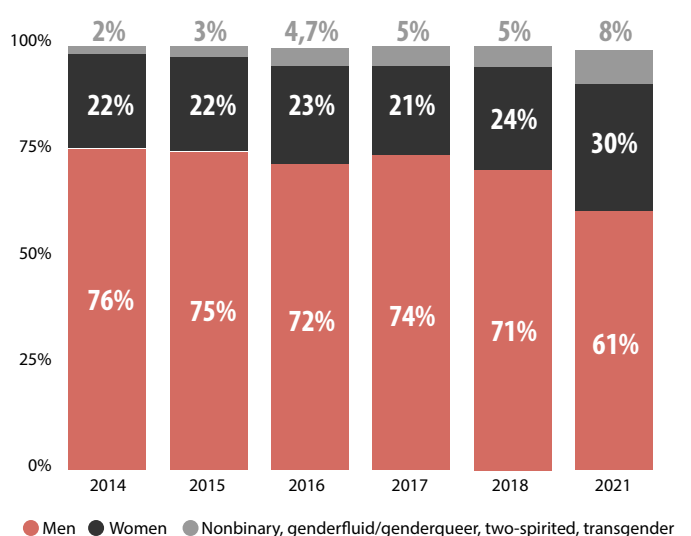
- The discussion of gender equality in video game culture is not a simple one, as it relates to several levels.
- ▶ **Gender representation in game content:** how are different genders portrayed in the games themselves, and what kind of example are these portrayals setting?
- ▶ **Player's communities:** How do player communities and influencers address gender issues? Who is welcome and accepted, what kind of communities are formed, who gets to be a gamer?
- ▶ **Representation in the industry:** who are the people making games, and how do their views and experiences influence game culture?

Understanding how representation is constructed and its effect on the players, ensuring diversity in the industry (working on the production of these video games) as well as in the titles themselves, are all key steps in achieving gender equality, in games and outside.

Diversity does not “only” offer opportunities for players to experience different stories with characters of all genders, all sexual orientations, and all types of bodies, but also gives the possibility to all people to feel welcome and thrive in the gaming culture, whether in player communities or the industry.

Despite its diversity, the gaming world is still very male dominated (see graph), and many gamers do not seem to perceive problems that are almost omnipresent, such as racism and discrimination, threats and harassment of female gamers. In large communities the bystander phenomenon also applies - people see discrimination, but do not step in to challenge it, allowing it to continue.

Distribution of game developers worldwide from 2014 to 2021, by gender



Source : IGDA © Statista 2023

*Even just saying “this is not OK with me”
is important!*

A small reaction like this can contribute to making online gaming environments more inclusive and welcoming, as well as safer.

THERE ARE PROBLEMS, BUT ALSO HOPE

The current lack of gender representation both in gaming narratives and in the industry is a known problem, and the same is true for discrimination and harassment, but ... there is hope! **Attention to the topic is growing**, and the gaming industry, academia, and the public are more attentive and sensitive to the topic than before.

To take steps forward, both the public and the game development world need to be educated on how to deal with gender issues, how to communicate in a more inclusive way, and how to build online environments that are safer and more respectful of diversity. In other words, how to better exercise and promote digital citizenship.

A digital citizen can be described as an individual able to use digital tools to create, consume, communicate and engage positively and responsibly with others: someone that understands and respects human rights, embraces diversity, and becomes a lifelong learner in order to keep step with evolutions in society (ref. to <https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/the-concept>).

CHANGES HAPPEN IN CYCLES

Change in gaming culture does not progress in a straight line; instead, there are cycles. In some moments, a capitalist drive dictated by the logic of profit prevails, and in others a more ethical, fair, and social justice-oriented vision emerges. We may be living in a time of contraction today, but the outlines of redemption movements can already be discerned, and change is happening.

Video games are produced within contexts in given times. Times are changing because people in the industry are changing: there are more women and gender minorities, more LGBTQ+ individuals, and consequently a culture of attention to diversity issues is building.

However, because of the cyclical nature of change we **must always question ourselves on these issues**. The moment we stop thinking about them we risk taking steps backwards.

ADDRESSING PROBLEMS

As representation problems are present on many levels, we also need different solutions.

For the industry, it is important to acknowledge and address questions of **diversity in company conduct**. For example, by ensuring the gaming industry is a safe place for all to work in. Companies should also **take more responsibility** when building both games and online communities around them. For example, by ensuring that **online spaces are monitored and moderated**, designing for pro-social behaviour, and questioning how gender is represented.

As the use of technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) will likely increase in game development, developers need to be aware of how this may influence gender representation and whether AI will incorporate existing bias.

Education can play a key role in addressing gaming culture problems, including gender equality. **Players** need to be educated to help them understand that games are a medium: they should be able to deconstruct the messages of games, understand game production and the role of game mechanics, and how these tie into the gaming culture. **Developers** need training on how to deal with controversial and sensitive issues in a respectful and inclusive manner in the games they are creating. **Parents and teachers** need to understand that gaming is an integral, real part of the life of many young people, and because of this, gaming matters.

Education here is not the responsibility of any single actor. Developing opportunities to educate on digital citizenship is one of the surest ways to approach these issues with serenity and a perspective of positive change. There is a need to promote dialogue between industry, research, education, and players themselves: big challenges need to be addressed in a joint effort. Working together not only to tackle gaming culture's problems, but also to promote a sustainable video game culture that enhances and communicates the medium's cultural and educational potential to the outside world. The efficacy of this collaboration will determine whether video games and the gaming culture of tomorrow will provide all gamers with welcoming, meaningful, and life enriching experiences.