



What people think,
feel and do

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Opinium

Women in Gaming - UK



Key findings

7 February 2021

Project details

PROJECT NUMBER	DIVERSITY IN GAMING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
PROJECT NAME	Women in Gaming - UK
CLIENT COMPANY NAME	Opinium
SAMPLE	1,361 UK gamers aged +18
FIELDWORK DATES	1 st – 17 th October 2021

Introduction

There is an unfortunate stereotype in the gaming world that it is solely a ‘guy-thing,’ and that it’s not meant for women. We know this is not the case: women game too, and they play and engage with the community nearly just as often as men. Despite this, the gaming industry has a long way to come to champion a culture of inclusivity and equality.

In August 2021, the state of California sued Activision Blizzard, one of the largest gaming companies in the world, for gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and unequal pay. The sexism and discrimination of the gaming world, while long-known, came to the forefront. If female employees are subject to harassment and discrimination at one of the largest video game companies, does this happen to the millions of female gamers who play everyday too?

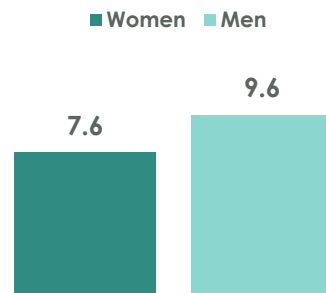
This report delves deeper into the female gaming experience, the good and the bad. While there is a community of female gamers that support each other, they’re inadequately represented and mistreated. Our research found that the gaming industry inadequately represents women on-screen, it’s not uncommon for female gamers to experience harassment while gaming, and the industry needs to do more to champion gender equality.

Results

Women spend 8 hours a week playing video games, just 2 hours less than their male counterparts

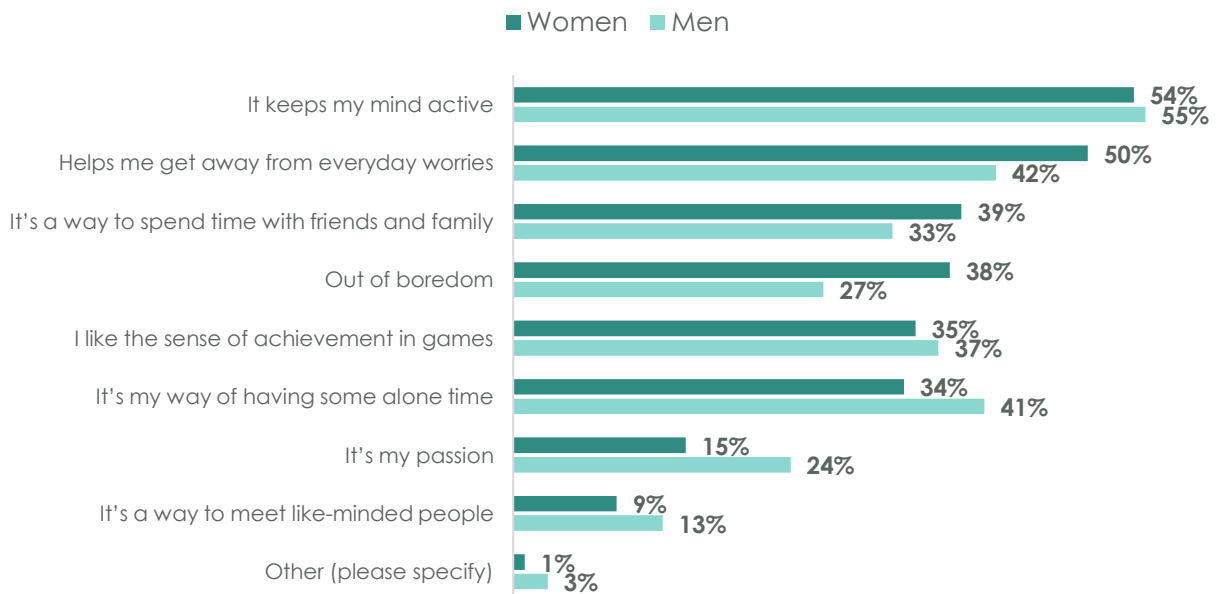
Female gamers engage with the gaming world nearly just as often as male gamers. On average, female gamers spend 8 hours playing video games during a typical week, just two hours less than men. Female gamers spend an average of £19 per month on video games and associated content, compared to £24 for men.

Average hours spent gaming during a typical week



Female gamers in the UK enjoy playing puzzle (60%), adventure (44%) and simulation (35%) games most – genres that help over half (54%) of female gamers to keep their mind active, which is the biggest motivation for gaming among female gamers. Other top reasons include escaping everyday worries (50%) and a way to spend time with friends and family (39%). Regardless of gender, the top reasons to play video games are largely the same.

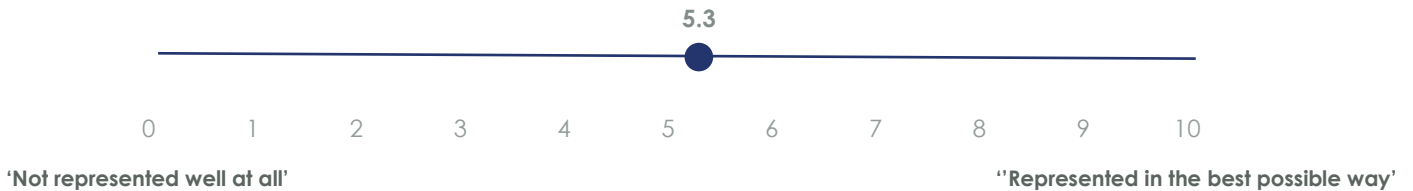
What are the reasons you play video games?



Female representation in video games

Women's representation in video games leaves much to be desired

Our research found that video games inadequately represent and give due diligence to female characters on screen. On average, gamers ranked the representation of female characters on screen as a 5.3, with '0' being 'Not represented well at all' and '10' being 'Represented in the best possible way.' Male gamers gave a slightly higher ranking (5.6) compared to female gamers (4.9).



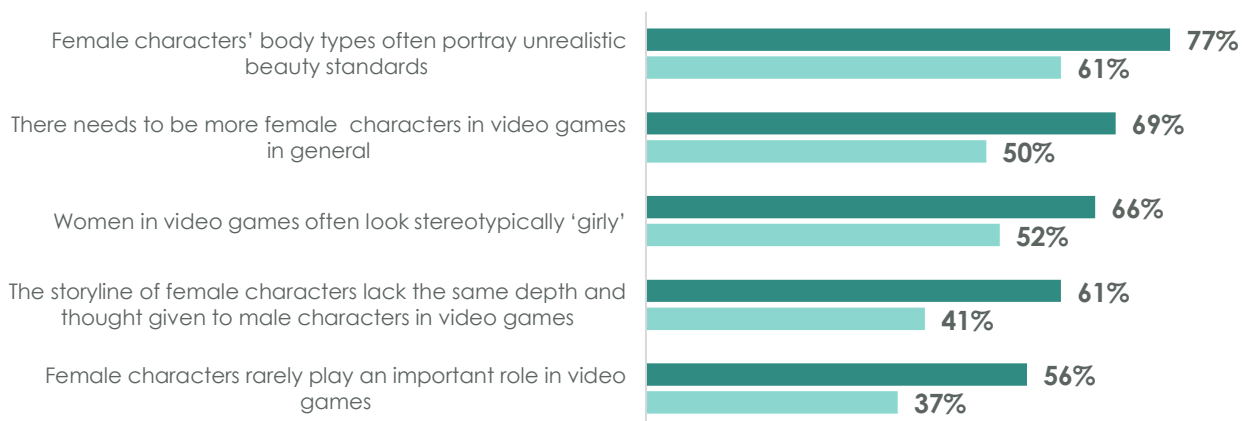
Three quarters of female gamers feel female characters' body types portray unrealistic beauty standards

The shortcomings of female representation are clear. Over two thirds (68%) of gamers feel that female characters' body types often portray unrealistic beauty standards, and 58% find female characters' appearances are often stereotypically 'girly.' Unfortunately, male gamers are less cognisant of where female representation on-screen falls short, as indicated by the chart below

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

% Agree

■ Women ■ Men



Beyond physical appearance, female characters’ storyline often pales in comparison to the storyline of male characters. Three in five (61%) female gamers find that the storyline given to female characters often lacks the same depth and thought given to male characters and over half (56%) feel female characters rarely play an important role.

To address the portrayal of female characters on screen, gaming companies could start by incorporating more female characters into their games in the first place. Three in five (58%) of gamers agree that there needs to be more female characters on screen in general.

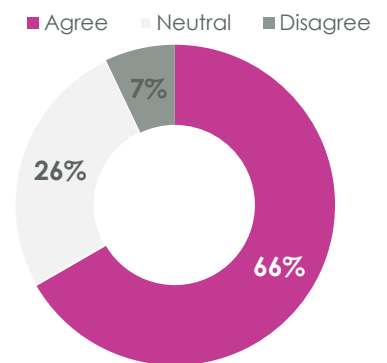
Addressing a male-dominated culture

Two in five female gamers have been ‘mansplained’ to or been told inappropriate things

Male and female gamers agree the gaming world has a male dominated culture (61% and 73%, respectively) and that it is often toxic (42% and 46%, respectively). Unfortunately, female gamers have experienced the negative repercussions of a male-dominated culture off-screen and it’s not uncommon for female gamers to be mistreated by male gamers.

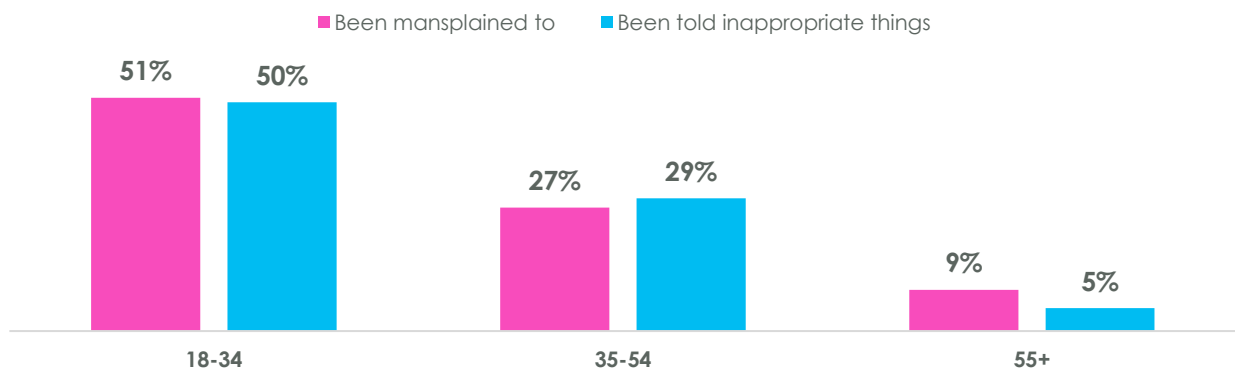
Over a third (36%) of female gamers have been ‘mansplained’ to while playing video games, and the same proportion (36%) have had men say inappropriate things to them while playing. This disproportionately affects young women aged 18-34, of whom half have experienced this.

Is there a male-dominate culture in the gaming world?



Percentage of female gamers who have been mansplained to or told inappropriate things while gaming

By age group, % Agree



Female gamers share their experiences being discriminated against in the gaming world

“I watched a video on YouTube of **multiple male players harassing** the female. This discouraged me from playing online and when I play online on my VR headset, **I choose a male character so people will leave me alone and I switch the mic off.**”

Unfortunately, experiences with prejudice or harassment have discouraged some female gamers from using their mic or joining chat groups, which helps keep their gender a secret.

Some female gamers are so accustomed to the slurs or inappropriate language from male players that they view it as just a ‘fact of life’ when gaming with the mic on.

“People can be sexist or try to **tell me I don't know what I'm doing because I'm a girl** and assume I need everything explaining when I don't. Happens all the time. I'd give my opinion on something in the game, and I'd just hear **“you're a woman”** as a form of disagreement.”

“When playing games with my friend, being jeered at losses and called a fluke player at any wins. Mansplaining why women are not good at games and should let the 'big boys play. Is why **I tend to play offline and by myself.**”

This has caused some gamers to change their behavior to avoid harassment. Like this gamer, who only plays with her friend or on her own.

Taking action

Video game companies have the agency to improve female gamers' experience

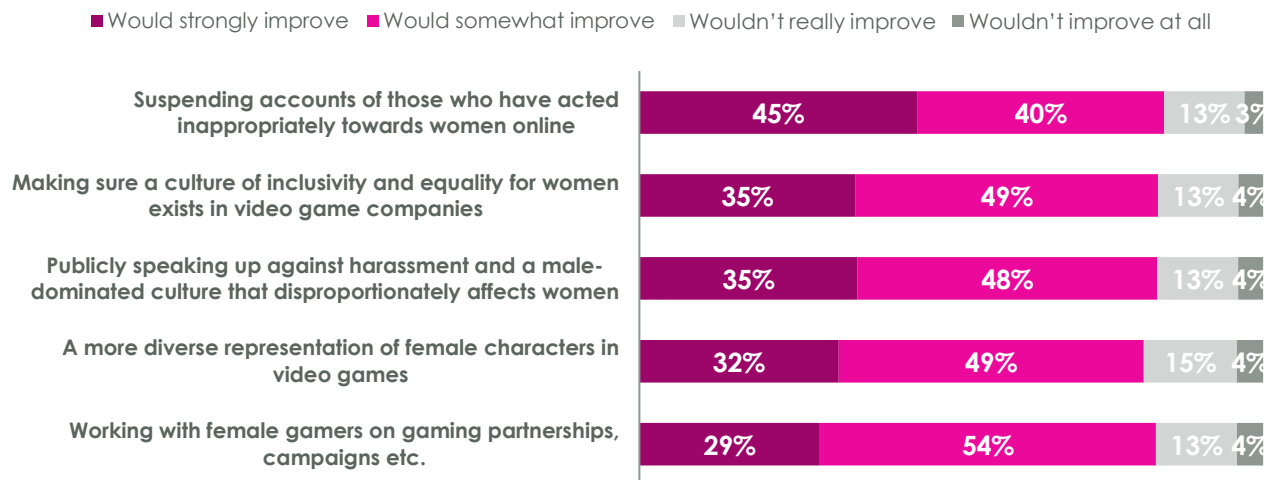
The gaming industry has an opportunity to address gender discrimination in the industry. We asked gamers which initiatives they feel would most improve the industry's representation of and relationship with women—initiatives with the greatest potential to amplify female voices.

84% of gamers feel that working with female gamers on campaigns and partnerships would have a positive impact, 80% feel hiring more women in leadership positions would, and 78% feel promoting female streamers would as well. A third (31%) feel that hiring more women for leadership positions would *strongly* improve the industry's relationship with women.

UK gamers would also like to see the industry take action as 84% feel that suspending accounts of gamer who have acted appropriately towards women would have a positive impact. Nearly half (45%) feel this would *strongly* improve the industry's relationship with and representation of women.

To what extent would the following solutions improve the gaming industry's relationship with/representation of women?

Top 5



Gamers call on companies to take ownership

For the gaming world to become a safer space for females, video game companies need to look inward.

- “Representation is everything and **girls needs to see all shapes and colours of girls in their games** doing exciting things not just playing house or looking after animals but going on adventures and exploring.”

- *“A bigger presence of female representation on social media when marketing games, having **more female options without being stereotypical towards women.**”*
- *“Women **need to be in leadership positions in the gaming industry,** so that they can allow better representation and normalise women in gaming without it looking like tokenism”.*

Female gamers often don't have control over the characters available to them on-screen, the storylines video game companies write, or who is hired in the industry. It's up to industry leaders to implement change.

*“More types of women need to be represented. more outfits, which are modest and also look beautiful. **Muslim women often don't feel comfortable playing characters which don't resemble them in real life, for instance.**”*

*“It is essential that more **trans, non-binary and gender fluid people are promoted to top positions to accurately reflect our diverse culture and make improvements to hiring.**”*

*“I think we need to have **more women in games that are treated as strong and as important as men.** I feel women need to be more involved in the creation of games.”*

Summary

It's clear that male and female gamers don't have an equal gaming experience. When it comes to the characters on screen, female characters' physical appearances are often unrealistic and their storylines pale in comparison male characters. And there aren't enough or nearly as many diverse characters as there should be in games available today.

Off the screen, it's not uncommon for female gamers to experience prejudice and harassment while gaming, with over a third of female gamers having been mansplained to or told inappropriate things while playing. Some female gamers have changed their behavior and stopped using a mic or only game with friends or family, to avoid harassment by male gamers. Male and female gamers acknowledge that the gaming industry is male dominated, which contributes to the discrimination female gamers experience.

Our research suggests that the gaming industry needs to prioritize inclusivity, representation, and collaboration to truly make an impact and improve its representation of and relationship with women. By partnering with more female gamers on campaigns, ensuring a culture of inclusivity and equality for women exists at video game companies, and diversifying female representation on screen, video game companies can drive positive change. It is notable that the most effective solutions are from the top; for the gaming world to truly support female gamers, the industry may need to look inward first.



About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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