Wade McIntyre

**Gender and Feminism in Online Games**

In order to bring attention to the aversive social conditions of online gamesJennifer Jenson and Suzanne De Castell analyze the ways in which gender is depicted and presumed in online video games. In their article *Gender and Feminism in Online Games* Jenson and De Castell apply feminist theory to this male dominated culture as they discuss three popular topics of the effects of on-line video games. These topics are: how and what females are playing online, their responses to content within the games, and the harassment women face while playing online games (2014: 1).

They begin by differentiating the types of games women and men normally play; males more often play massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) like World of War Craft and massive online battle arenas (MOBAs) like League of Legends while females tend to play casual games like Angry Birds, and Candy Crush (Jenson and De Castell 2014: 1,2). Moreover, they clarify that casual games are no less demanding of one’s time and concentration, instead the terms ‘casual’ and ‘hardcore’ are tools used to “police gender boundaries among players” (Jenson and De Castell 2014: 2). Jenson and De Castell then go on to explain how representations of hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine characters have been linked to worsened self-images, however they admit that “online games provide more choice of character gender than other games, especially in MMORPGs” (2014:2). The gendered divide is yet still prevalent, and exacerbates the typecast of females as less involved in video games (Jenson and De Castell 2014: 3). Misconceptions of women’s lack of interest even manifest themselves physically as is noted by marketing teams targeting females with pink and purple packaging and games made specifically for the stereotypical uninterested girl (Jenson and De Castell2014:3).

A presumable result of such gendered margins is that females are placed into the role of the other, thus instigating antagonism based on assumptions of the others sex. Hostility toward females has been a notorious blemish on the reputation of video game commerce and play, particularly in regards to women whom criticize games or the state of the industry. Using excerpts of verbal abuse from game chats, and responses to a woman’s review of Grand Theft Auto V as examples, Jenson and De Castell believe that these incidents “illustrate the deep and literal gender war raging in video game culture and development” (2014: 3). Fortunately, as they mention, a number of web-based support groups have started that resist and make public the kind of sexist language used online (Jenson and De Castell 2014: 3).

Jenson and De Castell’s argument for the use of feminist theory in understanding the social nature of online games is that feminism presents a perspective to video game culture that highlights these deeply ingrained social constructions that marginalize women, and recognizes gender as relational transactions that stagnate gender identities (Jenson and De Castell 2014: 4). Their work helps elucidate the various factors effecting gender performance, and the relational mechanics that have led women and girls to be, to a degree, unwelcomed in online games. However, this article is best used for preliminary research of the conditions of the video game industry since no subject is discussed at length nor the theory fully expounded. Supplementary text would be useful for understanding the theory that, at times, is merely mentioned at the end without further explanation of its application. The article also fails to answer the question of ‘What next?’ though this is no critical fault the study lends little direction. Instead, Jenson and De Castell conclude with the benefits of using a feminist perspective, and leave the question of what to do open for the reader.

References

Jenson, Jennifer and Suzanne de Castell. 2015. "Online Games, Gender and Feminism in."in *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society.*"Online Games, Gender and Feminism in."John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi: 10.1002/9781118767771.wbiedcs116.