

Dear Readers,

Today, I won't be writing about my weekly game recommendation. Instead, you'll be treated to a good old fashioned venting session! Those who have been following me since I first started my online diary/blog are familiar with my rants. To newcomers, welcome and I hope you'll stick around for my regular content as well! Recently, I came across multiple videos of women who were just trying to play a game, but instead were verbally assaulted and harassed, leading me to furiously type up this post. Unfortunately, these situations are incredibly common online. Without further ado, I'll share some of my experiences while simultaneously critiquing the gaming sphere we all know and love. I encourage you to draw parallels between your online encounters and mine – you may be surprised at the similarities.

I grew up playing a variety of video games ranging from Pokemon and Mario Party to fast paced, shooting games like Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) and Call of Duty. Even now, gaming is an integral part of my life (I hope you can tell...almost all of my posts are about games)! If you've been following my game recommendations, you'll find that most of them are singleplayer, and if they are multiplayer games my friends are always mentioned. I never play multiplayer games alone, and this isn't a coincidence. It's because toxic masculinity runs rampant in many multiplayer games and gender roles are strongly reinforced by almost all players, creating a harmful and negative environment for women and minorities.

Throughout my experiences of playing different multiplayer games, I quickly realized that all the lobbies were predominantly men. This became glaringly obvious when I began playing a first-person shooter game called CS:GO as the vast majority of my interactions were with men. Slurs as well as derogatory language toward women and minorities were constantly used in chat as well as through the in-game voice system. As I'm sure many of you know, your mic plays an integral part of winning each round - you need to call out the enemies' last seen location! Despite knowing that talking in game could be a deciding factor for the outcome of the game, I was afraid to speak. If I spoke while performing poorly, I would be berated by my teammates, told to go back to the kitchen, told that "this is a man's game," or called slurs. Even if I was performing significantly better than my teammates, I would hear comments like "Are you a girl? I can't believe a girl is doing better than us right now" as if existing as a woman meant you were inherently inferior to men. In every game, I was held to a higher standard where I needed to calmly receive my male teammates' attacks (or unwarranted advances), outperform all of them, and continue to kindly communicate with them despite being told rage-filled, sexist remarks.

Toxic masculinity is rife within the gaming sphere, and many men have grown up playing at least one online video game. For men who game consistently, this hateful setting normalizes their behaviour, reinforcing their awful thoughts and behaviour towards women. If in the rare circumstance a man calls another man out, they are insulted, called names, or told they aren't a real man. This further perpetuates an idealized version of a "masculine man" to everyone in the game, where "real masculinity" includes belittling women and minorities as well as staying silent when witnessing harassment. Men also complain about the women in their lives within these insular environments, say misogynistic remarks, and other men reaffirm their beliefs. For example, the topic of women having endless "female privilege" often appears,

followed by references to micro level interactions such as women receiving free drinks at a bar. After hearing that their fellow men have had similar experiences, these instances are inflated to seem like widespread or macro level issues where the man is being mistreated/oppresed. These conversations are normalized and create a vicious cycle of dehumanizing women and minorities while simultaneously painting a picture that men are the ones who are the victims of society.

In reality, “female privilege” and male privilege are two completely different things. In the example of “female privilege” I mentioned above, realistically, these aren’t privileges for women. Often, it’s unwanted attention and/or the man is expecting to be rewarded for his behaviour. Knowing this, there’s always a worry that refusing any man’s advances could result in being assaulted. On the other hand, women and minorities are the ones who are systemically oppressed because male privilege is prevalent in every facet of life; socially, culturally, academically, and politically. It’s embedded in societal structures, and it’s these structures that are strongly disadvantageous for women. It can be as obvious as the gender wage gap where women are paid less for the same amount of work a man does, or as subtle as automatically taking precautions before walking home like pretending you’re on a call with someone or constantly looking over your shoulder to make sure you aren’t being followed. Even as an adult, I still get nervous walking alone.

Dear reader, have you endured these situations before?

If so, I’m sorry that we share these experiences and hope you know that you’re not alone. I’ve created a safe space for you here, and you’re always welcome to join this family!

If you haven’t faced these scenarios before, can you see where I’m coming from? Or do you disagree with my sentiments? Maybe you think it’s strange that I’m passionately stating that women and minorities are heavily mistreated in the gaming community. It may seem like all these comments by men are just words, and that women and minorities should “light up”, or “learn to take a joke”! After all, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me, right? That’s what I used to think, too. I can assure you that, without a doubt, their words will latch onto you and change the way you think about yourself as well as others. Before I knew it, I found that my views on women became incredibly warped through these harmful interactions with men. I had to actively unlearn this toxic mindset that unknowingly grew on me over years, and even now, sometimes I catch my inner voice telling myself negative comments like I used to hear online.

I originally created this blog for a multitude of reasons: to use my voice to shed light on the marginalization of women and minorities online as well as to create a safe space for those who have endured similar experiences. So I implore you, if you even have an inkling that your thought process is becoming remotely similar to the hateful voices in your game - stop, drop, roll into our Discord [here](#), and find a friendly group to play with instead. It’s never too late to change, and I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,
Emily