Dungeons, Dragons, & Chainmail Bikinis - Tracking and Transforming Women's Experiences with Dungeons & Dragons

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Topics:

- Challenging D&D's history(ies) and the exclusion of women
- Nostalgia and the Resurgence of D&D
- Influence and production of paratexts
- Popular culture, andragogy, and feminism
- Fandom – gatekeeping, toxicity, conspicuous consumption, fanfiction, crafting and production
- Roleplaying – gender, liminality, and rites of passage

Research impact:

- **Highlight and critique the toxic culture** that women face when engaging with popular culture and communities/fandoms
- **Action and support** for marginalised groups in communities and fandoms
- Cultural, audience, and pop culture research that has **gender as a research focus** not just a sidenote or afterthought
- A methodology that uses a **holistic approach** to understanding fans and their relationship with a product and the community around it

Survey Responses

> 49,000 players

> 6,200 non-players

> 145,000 character builds

Quantitative and qualitative data

Why this research matters:

- Vast majority of research into roleplaying focuses on video games, rather than tabletop games, and issues of **gender, intersectionality, and marginalised identities are left unexamined**
- **Novel multidisciplinary approach** dedicated to amplifying women's voices
- **Fandom is massive, current, and evolving**. Research that reflects the new complex interactions between fans and texts are necessary.
- **Innovative combination of research techniques and disciplines**. Existing theories are combined, repurposed, and re(/de)constructed to build novel understandings of how fans interact with and around Dungeons & Dragons, with implications for other areas of fandom.

Women's experiences when playing Dungeons & Dragons:

Players were asked about times they had felt uncomfortable playing D&D, and these were trends from preliminary exploration of women's responses

- Women described their **characters being raped or sexually assaulted by other characters**, or by the Dungeons Master as part of the story.
- **Sexist jokes or comments**
- **Failure to engage in flirtation or show romantic interest led to hostility**, sexual harassment, and/or being kicked out from the group.
- Responses frequently mentioned being the **only woman at the table** unless the group was all women.
- Being treated differently from the men in the group. This could take the form of **unwanted favouritism that caused conflict** with other players, or being **negatively singled out for harassment or attacks**.
- Respondents described frustration with often being **spoken over or interrupted** when trying to play which led to them disengaging from the game.
- **Gatekeeping** – women faced hostility when they wanted to play or were treated as though they were ignorant regardless of experience and competence.

*Women who had not experienced harassment expressed that they were **just lucky.***

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Communicating Impact

INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT