

# A Study on Gender Difference in the Use of Digital Games

## Focused on Self-Realization of Game Players

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**Abstract:** This study comparatively analyzes gender difference in digital gaming from a relatively new perspective of mental analysis and analytical psychology, not relying on conventional gender values, and discusses a new approach to interpret the self-identity of male and female game players and the psychological meaning of their gaming activities.

In order to focus on the unconscious and instincts of human beings in a virtual reality, this study employs Freud theories and C.G. Jung's theory of collective unconscious to conduct this research as follows: first, to discuss a new theological approach to the self-identity of male and female game players as well as the psychological meaning of each of their gaming activities; second, to discuss the difference between male and female game players in expressing and satisfying desire and experience of fun in digital gaming; and finally, to discuss the psychological reason behind a certain tendency that male gamers enjoy games for female and vice versa, which is quite distinctive from gender swapping online in which players merely hide their gender and play the opposite sex. The reason that this study takes a 'psychological analysis' approach in digital games instead of other various forms of visual culture is that they are a type of media forms in which the conscious of male and female subjects in reality is fully expressed so that the self-identity of the human self is emphasized more than any other form of media.

**Key words:** *Digital Games, Gender Difference, Desire, Pleasure, Self-Realization, Carl C. G. Jung's Analytical Psychology, Sigmund Freud's instinct theory*

### 1. Subject of Digital Gaming: Male and Female

In reality, men prefer fantasy or martial arts novels, whereas women prefer romance novels. This penchant indicates that anyone has a desire to become a main character of a certain story. While reading a fantasy novel, men project themselves onto the main character with undaunted physical power and spirit. In the meantime, women reflect their ideal type onto a prince of their romance novel.

Then what kind of difference will men and women show in their real life and online games? In fact, men and women show a certain degree of difference in their preference when it comes to games. For men, when they play digital games, the game becomes a subject that they have to conquer. On the other hand, when women play games, they are different. The reason that women play games is that they just like doing it, not to win it. In an action game, unlike their male counterparts, female players do the game well and enjoy it very much even though they do not know much about the game.

In this regard, this study discusses issues of gender difference in digital gaming, as shown below, considering gender difference in reality. First, why do male digital game players prefer more violent type of content such as war games? And for what psychological reasons do a certain group of men prefer casual and fun games with cute characters instead of war games? Second, why do female digital game players prefer cute and easy games? And for what psychological reasons do a certain group of women love to play violent and action-prone games that incite aggressive actions as well as complex games?.

## **2. Psychological Approach to Digital Gaming**

People of today release their stress in various ways; playing sport games or watching others play either at a sporting event or on TV. Among various forms of entertainment, digital games enable their participants to actively participate at any time and any place they want without any restriction, inject their reality into the game space and therefore satisfy their desires on their own. In this manner, male and female game players can resolve their stresses, experience pleasure and get satisfied their numerous instincts residing in the unconscious.

Freud saw that human beings have Eros, an instinct of sex and self-preservation which drives them to achieve their need of self-preservation and fall for the opposite sex. He also saw that another destructive instinct of death exist in human beings, leading to aggressive drive that make them to hurt themselves or others. He called such aggressive attribute Thanatos. These instincts in digital gaming show much difference from those found in other forms of media.

It is general in reality that men and women are reluctant to express their anima (the female-self of men) or animus (the male-self of women) or hide them. However, when people are placed in a space that fully protects their anonymity and security as a digital game does, all of them want to keep alive their instincts of destruction and self-preservation. For this reason, digital games serve as a perfect media form allowing them to reveal their destructive urge Thanatos as well as suppressed Shadow without any restriction.

The Shadow, which is a dark aspect of the personality, is suppressed by the ego in ordinary times out of concern that the inferior side will be revealed so that it is not noticed very often. Notwithstanding the suppression, the restrained shadow self is released at certain moments. The case in point is human relations or dreams. For example, a person who exercises moderation in a daily life often has a dream in which he or she conducts excessive or extreme behaviors or encounter such scenes. As indicated before, the dark and suppressed inferior Shadow self of a person gets bigger when the person lives according to persona and finally gets released and satisfied in a virtual reality which guarantees anonymity and security.

In this sense, all activities conducted by game players in digital gaming can be interpreted as an act of resolving the suppressed Shadow side of their ego. According to Jung, humans show themselves to the outside world with the persona mask on their face. Persona is “a set of ideas or values infused collectively, but the person sees it as his or her ideas and values.” Gender identity is also created by the personal self. The distinction between men and women has been given by our society and has characterized an individual’s identity. Persona is “a set of code of conducts demanded of certain members of a social group and is similar to a uniform.”

Persona in this study also refers to the outward and social face of the psyche of men and women. For instance, if a male game player who acts more like a woman in digital gaming does so in reality, he might not be able to form a relationship with others as normal men would do. Such feminine characteristics of the male game player are restrained in ordinary times and suppressed as the Shadow, which is a dark and inferior side.

Although the Anima and Animus of Jung originally deal with the existence of a suppressed self pushed down to the unconscious, which discretionarily links the true self and ego, the theory in fact shows how different a task is needed for men and women in order to achieve self-realization.

The critical feature of Anima and Animus is represented as discretion in digital gaming, which refers to psychological complexes that reside within the unconscious of men and women.

Likewise, as self-realization in digital gaming begins from recognition of the Shadow self by Persona and involves the awareness of Anima and Animus and then the awareness of numerous psychological distresses residing within the unconscious, the Shadow, Anima and Animus are all associated with self-realization.

### **3. Male and Female's Desire and Pleasure in Digital Gaming**

The images shown in digital games offer an infinite difference that game players never get to. Even though men and women share so many things in common as human being, the differences between men and women lead them to fall for the opposite sex out of strong curiosity and desires.

The more desires are suppressed in reality, the more likely a game player is to pursue fantasy of digital gaming, thereby driving himself or herself further to strive to become much stronger, obtain a better item than the other gamers have, and get revenge on his or her attacker. These intensified desires become the same as desires in real life. Desires in this study do not get satisfied by mere viewing as in other media forms. Digital gaming is rather an active expression of getting desires satisfied. Game players experience pleasure by getting desires satisfied, and subjects of digital games over-identify themselves with the main character of the game they play, projecting their desires in real life onto the digital game character.

In other words, male and female digital game players project themselves onto images shown in the games, as follows. In case a man plays a digital game, he prefers more masculine games because his Thanatos instinct suppressed in his unconscious gets released. In the meantime, the reason why a certain group of male digital game players prefer feminine games is that they are attracted by gorgeous looks of various female game characters and that they can choose pretty clothes with these characters as much as they want compared with male characters, which means they can realize their suppressed female features through playing a female role in a digital game. Likewise, a certain group of female game players prefer war games or more masculine games, thereby revealing their masculine aspect which has been pushed down to their unconscious or revealing their true sex and attracting the opposite sex players in order to achieve their self-realization. In this case, their desire to confirm their sexual orientation is strongly expressed. In this regard, when a game is not interesting any longer or its main character dies so that their subject of desire disappears, their desires and interest decrease accordingly.

### **4. Conclusions**

The purpose of this study is to understand gender difference based on human instincts and discuss digital games from a more extended point of view that can appeal to both sexes.

The study shows that what drives men and women to play games is a desire to fill the gap between their real life and a virtual reality game, and that they spend so much time and effort on digital gaming for pleasure they earn from playing games. In other words, unlike in reality, men and women realize their existence during the process of identifying their identity in digital games.

C.G. Jung saw such self-realization in two phases: first removing persona that covers up a true ego; and second rescuing the ego using suggestive power lying within the unconscious mind. To sum up, self-realization is possible when the unconscious is made conscious.

In reality, a person lives with a social face largely defined by persona and therefore he or she suffers from a lack of self-identity. As a result, the person's shadow grows bigger.

Therefore, the person hides his or her gender and plays games under the strong influence of his animus or anima unreleased by suppressed instincts in his or her unconscious.

Finally, there is a need to discuss experience patterns from a more extended perspective, which can appeal to the interest of both male and female gamers based on deep understanding of gender differences. It is expected that more women will want to play digital games if various games are created to meet their specific needs. To this end, efforts of game developers who are well aware of male and female psychology should be the top priority.

In digital games, there exists a delicate balance between collective desires and individual desires so that it will be worthwhile to study on what role an individual characteristics of men and women and their collective desires play in digital gaming and for what meaning they play and enjoy games, thereby using them for media psychology study.

There is also a need to analyze, through in-depth interviews with male and female gamers, their experience patterns in the use of digital games, such as how fun experience and pleasure are created in various digital games and how desire is expressed, thereby seeking an opportunity for them to realize their self-identity through a virtual reality of digital games and advance it in more diversified forms.

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