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Midterm
Pitch: Reegan Wallander

Female gamers frequently face harassment and discrimination in the male-dominated gaming industry, former Oshkosh Gaming Society Vice President and Treasurer Tony Bushner said.

Bushner, along with three other guest speakers, participated in the Panel on Popular Culture: Gender in Gaming and Nerd Culture in Reeve Memorial on Monday.

The event gave students the opportunity to connect with industry experts and discuss topics such as GamerGate, cultural inclusion and female hypersexualization.

“All of my fellow panelists were well-prepared, and had very interesting ideas about various topics as they relate to gaming and geek culture,” UW Oshkosh communications student Alexis Szewczuga said.

Szewczuga and Bushner joined House of Heroes Comics and Games owner Scott Dercks and Aurora Cruz Torres, the founder of Ladies Geeking Out, on the event panel.

“Everyone had such wonderfully interesting things to say, and the audience had some really killer questions for us,” Bushner said. “It's really refreshing to see so many people so actively engaged with geek culture.”

Torres said that open discussions and events like the popular culture panel are the only way to promote awareness and move forward.

“Usually people focus on the negative stuff because that's what we see most often discussed,” Torres said. “But I think it is also important to show the positive side of nerd culture and highlight creators, new media and characters that are changing the ways women and other minorities are represented in the media.”

Attendee Ross Gordon, gamer and UW Oshkosh history student, said he found it thought-provoking to learn more about gender-based discrimination.

“One very interesting concept put forth that I had not previously considered was how masculinity plays a role in this culture,” Gordon said. “Men within the nerd subculture have created a brand of masculinity, a means of creating ‘nerd capital,’ that is at odds with societal norms.”

Szewczuga said she had multiple experiences with masculine dominance and gender discrimination as a female working for a major video game retailer.

“Some customers and managers treated me as if I was the equivalent of a booth babe like you would see at conventions, there as a sort of advertisement rather than being knowledgeable about my job,” Szewczuga said. “Even then, I was often under greater scrutiny than my male co-workers.”

Bushner, who is currently working on his master’s thesis concerning difficulty and failure in video games, said that prestige in gaming communities is built on different levels of industry knowledge.

“I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve seen a guy ask a woman about some obscure piece of gaming knowledge...and then proclaim that she’s not a real gamer when she can’t answer that singular question,” Bushner said.

Torres said that one of the strategies she uses to stand up to discrimination is leading by example and displaying kindness to others.

“When people try to discourage you or judge you, they are looking for a specific negative reaction out of you,” Torres said. “Kindness is the best way to show them that you are not allowing anybody to take away your happiness.”

As a manager of a Ladies Geeking Out group in Lafayette, Indiana, Torres said that finding or creating an open-minded and inclusive gaming community can be a great way to game freely without fear of discrimination.

“We all support each other in our individual goals and have fun geeking out without any type of judgement or drama,” Torres said.

Despite the industry being mostly male-dominated, Bushner said that individuals should confidently embrace their inner gamer regardless of gender.

“Don't let the bastards grind you down,” Bushner said. “If you play games, be it Candy Crush Saga or League of Legends, you're a gamer.”

Sources

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