

For women, more time in the spotlight at E3

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"Star Wars: Battlefront" senior producer Sigurlina Ingvarsdottir of DICE presents upcoming "Star Wars" themed games during the Electronic Entertainment Expo at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, Monday, June 15, 2015. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

It seems the Electronic Entertainment Expo is no longer a man's world.

During this year's video game extravaganza, a variety of women—virtual and otherwise—have been featured more prominently than in past years of the annual trade show where game makers highlight their forthcoming creations. In presentations and on the expo floor, a sizeable number of women have appeared on stages, within games and in crowds.

Microsoft, for instance, kicked off its E3 presentation with 343 Industries head Bonnie Ross introducing a "Halo 5: Guardians" cooperative gameplay demo that featured [men and women](#) playing together as male and female members of Spartan Locke's squad. The company later hyped "ReCore" and "Rise of the Tomb Raider," which both feature female heroines.

"We're about everybody [playing games](#), and we want to represent that in the content that we put on screen," said Phil Spencer, Microsoft's head of Xbox. "We opened the show with Bonnie. She's got such authenticity as someone who has been with Xbox a long time, running our biggest franchise and being a spokesperson for the platform, the industry and 'Halo.'"

Ubisoft, which came under fire at last year's E3 for revealing that female avatars wouldn't be an option in "Assassin's Creed: Unity," reversed course Monday by focusing on female "Assassin's Creed: Syndicate" co-star Evie. The publisher also brought Angela Bassett on stage to announce she was portraying the first-ever female boss in "Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege."

Others introduced all-new female protagonists, including bow-wielding huntress Aloy of "Horizon Zero Dawn" and 10-year-old blind girl Rae of "Beyond Eyes." Bethesda Softworks announced Sunday that stealth sequel "Dishonored 2" would feature a female co-star and post-apocalyptic "Fallout 4" would allow players to create male or female avatars of different races.



Phil Spencer, head of Microsoft's Xbox division and Microsoft Studios, speaks at the Xbox E3 2015 briefing ahead of the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) at the University of Southern California's Galen Center on Monday, June 15, 2015 in Los Angeles. Microsoft is promoting the next installment in its popular sci-fi franchise, "Halo 5: Guardians," at E3. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

"We've always believed that this is not a boys' club and should never be a boys' club," said Reggie Fils-Aime, CEO of Nintendo of America, who is Haitian-American. "That mentality permeates our games and our corporate environment. We believe in a full range of diversity. I mean, look at me in terms of representing a diverse point of view for our company."

The boost in visibility for women at E3 was just as noticeable in the real world as it was in the virtual world with such developers as "Star Wars: Battlefront" senior producer Sigurlina Ingvarsdottir and "Mirror's Edge: Catalyst" senior producer Sara Jansson on stage at Electronic Arts'

briefing to present their titles.

"It creates a different dynamic," said Patrick Soderlund, executive vice president at EA Studios. "I've always tried to have a good balance of men and women on the teams I lead. I think the balance is the right one. The important part is that if you're a man or woman, it doesn't really matter, as long as you're the right person for the job."

In recent years, the industry has rallied in support of gender diversity, especially over the last year when an online campaign began targeting women and others in gaming for criticizing the lack of diversity and how women are portrayed. For game makes, diversity must start in studios before it can extend into living rooms.

"Creatively, it's far more inspiring to have a diverse group of viewpoints to incorporate into your storytelling and experiences," said Shannon Loftis, head of publishing at Microsoft Game Studios. "The more diverse people that we can get behind and into game development, the more diverse characters we see represented in game development."

While the change has been remarkably noticeable at this year's E3, there are still several games that feature provocative imagery of women and a few female models—so-called "booth babes"—who are hired to attract attention and lure attendees into E3 booths within the cavernous Los Angeles Convention Center.



Samantha Ryan, SVP and Group GM, EA Mobile presents "Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, Monday, June 15, 2015. The video game publisher heavily focused on its forthcoming "Star Wars" games during a Monday briefing at the Electronic Entertainment Expo. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

"If you look at the number of industry talks at this past D.I.C.E. (Design, Innovate, Communicate, Entertain) Summit, Game Developers Conference and South by Southwest, it's a primary topic among developers," said Michael Gallagher, president of the Entertainment Software Association. "I think the outcome of such discussions is something like 'FIFA' now including women's teams. We'll see more of it."



Lydia Winters, at podium, shows off Microsoft's "Minecraft" built specifically for HoloLens during a live demo at the Xbox E3 2015 briefing ahead of the Electronic Entertainment Expo at the University of Southern California's Galen Center on Monday, June 15, 2015 in Los Angeles. Microsoft is promoting the next installment in its popular sci-fi franchise, "Halo 5: Guardians," at the Electronic Entertainment Expo. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

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