

A Thesis Presented to
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The Portrayal of Gender in Video Games: A Skimpy Representation

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on how gender is portrayed in popular video games, and aims to determine whether or not there is a friendly atmosphere for both genders in the gaming world. A mixed-mode approach was used, including auto-ethnographic research and a content analysis of three video games. By entering the gaming community, research could be done on Dragon Age Inquisition, Mortal Kombat X, and FIFA 16. The results show that video games reproduce a sexist environment by creating an under-representation and sexualization of female characters, and by not placing value in feminine traits.

Preface

As a part of an auto-ethnography, I immersed myself into a local community of video gamers, and into the video gaming world itself. My mission was to see how gender plays a role in video games. Both boys and girls, as well as men and women play video games in today's society (Fattah & Paul, 2002: 39). I wanted to discover whether video games include and welcome both genders into the gaming world. I do not have very much experience with playing video games, so my own experience could not tell me whether or not this is true. When I was a kid the only people I knew who played video games regularly were boys, and I was often shunned from their group on the basis of being a girl. I was allowed to watch them play, but they would rarely give me the controller to play myself. On this rare occasion, it was usually because a parent forced them to give me a turn or because they had reached a point in the game where I would not have been able to mess their progress up too badly. Now, as an adult, I have decided to give video games a shot. I wanted to figure out if my experience was just an isolated incident of boys being mean, or if it had stemmed from the sexist belief that girls should not be playing video games. I wanted to know if women and girls generally feel as excluded as I had. With so many women and girls currently involved in the gaming world, I had hope that the industry was doing something right.

I first became interested in the study of gender while at college. It is hard not to be when Alfred University is full of history surrounding women's rights. We are considered one of the first co-educational institutions in the United States, allowing men and women to receive the same education. This campus has had guest speakers like Susan B. Anthony and Hillary Clinton,

proving that this small town has always had an interest in empowering women. My experience at Alfred University has taught me how to recognize gender equality, and how to advocate on its behalf. I am also a part of the Women's Leadership Academy, and as a requirement, I have gone to presentations, workshops, and guest speakers, all discussing issues surrounding gender.

As a first year student, I enrolled in a class called Women in Religion. There were only eight women in the class, and so we had to work together to create a project involving social change. We decided to create a blog page called Who Needs Equality on the social media site Tumblr. We modeled our project after the Who Needs Feminism movement. We set up our stands in Powell and on Main Street during Hot Dog Day, asking people to write why they need equality, then we took a picture of them with their hand written statement, and posted it to our Tumblr page. We ended up getting hundreds of volunteers. While one student wrote, "I need equality because with a name like Muhammad, I could really use it!", another student wrote, "I need equality because the world needs more women engineers". Our participants varied by race, gender, sexual orientation, and yet they all had one thing in common: every one of them felt like society would be better off with more equal opportunity.

More recently, I have taken a class within the Honors Program called Messages in the Media. We examined how sources like movies, magazines, billboards, and the internet tend to propagate sexist beliefs and attitudes. Although it may not be intentional, some often encourage rape culture. When people constantly see women being portrayed as sex objects, certain cultural attitudes develop. The media initiates expectations for how women should look and behave, as

well as encourage how people should view women. My class looked at how something as simple as a toy magazine will influence boys and girls from an early age, encouraging them to adhere to gender norms. In one example that my class found there was an advertisement for toy jeeps. The boys' jeep was dark colored, pictured going through mud, and presented a care free lifestyle. The girls' jeep was colored pink and driving down a road. What really stood out to me was that the girl wasn't even driving her jeep. She was in the passenger seat holding her purse, while a puppy drove the toy car. This sends a subtle message, telling boys that they can have the freedom to drive wherever they want. They should be rough and tough, not worrying about whether they get muddy. The girls receive a message saying that they are not in charge; girls can be just as happy being driven around. This also made me wonder if the advertisers were perpetuating the stereotype that girls can't drive.

As a sociology major, I have taken many classes that deal with social inequalities. In the fall of 2015, I participated in a class called The Sociology of Sex and Gender. We discussed the social constructs of gender and gender roles, the fluidity of gender, the role of social institutions, and how gender and gender identity affect opportunity for individuals. Not only did this class teach me the basic concepts of what my future thesis would involve, it also gave me an opportunity to conduct small scale research. Through an online survey, my partners and I did a study on sexual harassment. Our results showed that women get harassed more often than men do, and that men do most of the harassing. Although I had predicted this, it was interesting to see concrete proof. Conducting this study increased my passion for gender equality.

Although there are many different types of inequality circulating the world, I can best recognize gender inequality in my life, and so I am more passionate about it. These brief examples of what I have studied and have been a part of on campus highlight only some of my inspiration, leading me to study gender in my thesis. Whether I look at this subject through the lens of a feminist, as a woman, or as a human being, I can clearly see that there are some issues with our society that need to be fixed. I learned so much about sociology and gender inequality, that it is now impossible for me to look at something, and not consider its social implications.

My interest in studying video games first started when I was constantly watching my boyfriend and his friends play them. One game in particular has never left my mind because of its blatant violence and sexism. This game is called *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)*, and it is highly popular. In fact it is the most successful video game series in existence, raking in \$310 million within the first 24 hours of being released (Kimmel, 2011: 305). From the scenes that I witnessed it appears that the main objective of the game is to drive through the city and kill everybody in sight, including innocent pedestrians. According to the website Moby Games, “*Grand Theft Auto* (usually abbreviated *GTA*) is a series of games that incorporate driving and action gameplay styles... *GTA* games are set in vast, predominantly urban ‘sandbox’ environments, and feature protagonists involved in organized crime. The distinguishing feature of the games is the possibility to hijack and drive most vehicles encountered in the game world” (Moby Games, 2016).

What upset me the most was when I saw that the gamer can direct the main character (a male) into a female strip club. The gamer can then control everything that happens within the strip club. This includes how the main character gets touched by the strippers, as well as whether or not he goes into a private room with a stripper. Within the private room, the gamer gets to decide what sexual activities are performed, how many female characters are included, and what the female characters look like. And before the character leaves the strip club, he can decide whether or not to kill the stripper. As a woman, I certainly felt uncomfortable watching this game and I never care to see it again. It is possible that I am the exception, and that most men and women are comfortable enjoying a game like this. However, it is my opinion that the creators of *GTA* are not concerned with how welcoming their environment is for all its gamers, and instead choose to make a hostile one for women in particular. From the scenes I witnessed, female characters do not have any control over what happens in the game, or even what happens to their own bodies. This made me very uncomfortable, to the point where I had to leave my friends and go home.

The entire virtual world of *GTA* disgusted me. The amount of violence made me very uncomfortable, but also there was a very limited number of female characters. The female characters that I did see were either represented as a mistreated stripper or a pedestrian without a name. The virtual world and the real world are obviously different and it is the hope that people can distinguish between the two. As a society, we would like to think that it is possible to leave the virtual world unaffected, and be ready to follow the norms of the real world. But I wonder how often these lines become blurred. When the virtual world says that it is acceptable to

degrade women, I believe that those thoughts and actions can easily be carried out into the real world. This is especially important because people often look at video game characters as role models. Both men and women deserve qualified characters who can be appreciated for their positive attributes.

My experiences and education regarding gender issues have led me to the proposal of my Honors Thesis. I do not want to judge the entire gaming industry off of what I saw in *GTA*. Therefore, I have taken a look at three different video games, using those that are available through my friend, and analyzed whether or not I gain a sense of gender inclusivity. By that I mean, represent both men and women in a positive and equal way, while creating a virtual atmosphere that is friendly towards each gender.

Introduction

I immersed myself into a local video gaming community, and intentionally consumed the messages that are sent through this form of media. Video games are an interesting topic to study because they create a virtual world, where aspects of reality and fantasy combine. There is a wide range of content within the games that may socialize people in either a positive or negative way. Video games have been around since 1972, when computer-generated Ping Pong and Centipede were created, and the industry has not slowed down since (Kimmel, 2011: 306). It is the fastest growing form of entertainment, with over 300 million people playing across the world (Kimmel, 2011: 306). The way video games can be played has changed over the decades. The different forms include arcade games, hand-held devices, computer-based games that are either downloaded or played online, and also through console boxes hooked up to the television (Kimmel, 2011:306). With a wide demographic of users, it is easy to see how one-third of Americans rank video games as the best form of family entertainment (Kimmel, 2011: 306).

In this study I used a mixed mode approach combining two research techniques to examine the gendered nature of video gaming. One research technique is auto-ethnography, which is defined by Berg (2007: 180) as “strategies that listen more and talk less, that humanize the research process, and that insist that the ethnographic researcher become both involved with his or her subjects and reflexive about his or her own thoughts”. The second technique is a content analysis of a small sample of current video games on the market.

Because of my personal experiences with the gaming world and because of my background in sociology, I was inspired to explore the concepts of gender and sexism in video games. It is difficult for me to look at a form of media and not think about the sociological impact it might have. When I saw my friends play *GTA*, I was personally hurt by the sexist content. As a woman, I felt degraded by the way the female characters were being represented. Once I started my research and began looking at other video games, my impression stayed relatively the same. By studying other literature, I found that there is a lot of sexual harassment and sexist language used within the industry (Fox & Tang, 2014: 315). Not only is there is an underrepresentation of women characters, but when they are included, female characters are much more likely to hypersexualized than are male characters (Zorrilla, 2016: 2). The results from my own study proved these points as well.

Literature Review

Although Kimmel argues that men and women are more alike than they are different, gender and sexism play a large role in many societies (Kimmel, 2013). Gender refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women, whereas sex refers to the biological differences between males and females (Kimmel, 2013). Sexism is described as the prejudice or discrimination of a person or group, based solely on either their sex or gender (Kimmel, 2013). In my opinion, video games do not show men and women as being more alike than different. Rather, they portray men as being hyper-masculinized, and women as being over-sexualized (Giulio, p.4).

Like all forms of media, video games are a gendered institution in American society (Kimmel, 2013: 318). The role of a gendered institution is to first reflect already existing gender differences and inequalities (2013: 318). Then it constructs and reproduces those differences and inequalities by making them seem natural, rather than socially produced (2013: 318). Gender socialization teaches girls and women, as well as boy and men what is appropriate for them based on their gender, including how they should look, behave, and think (2013: 318). Originally, sociologists considered only three types of socializing institutions, which included the family unit, religious organizations, and the education system (2013: 320). However, as more technology has developed, the media became a primary institution of socialization (2013: 320). Just like Kimmel, I believe that gender inequality is caused by a never-ending cycle between the media and its consumers. Social institutions, like video games, reflect what a society already

thinks. However, the media tends to overkill its messages to make sure the point is getting across, which then perpetuates the sexism (2013: 320). In other words, the media can not be entirely blamed for inequality within a society, but it is responsible for reproducing and encouraging it. Media does this specifically by creating a “his” and “hers” media, where men and women are presented with different messages (2013: 320). Video games are no exception to this rule (Kimmel, 2011: 306).

Video games have proven to be extremely popular. About 70% of young people in America have access to at least one gaming console in their home (Miller & Summers, 2007: 741). Video game usage often exceeds television use (Martins, Williams, Harrison & Ratan, 2009: 825). Because so many people enjoy playing video games, it is considered a significant agent of socialization (Kimmel, 2013: 320). Research has shown that youth consider fictional characters to be role models (Miller & Summers, 2007: 733). Players learn from and adapt to the society within the games, and then these ideas translate into real life. All forms of media, including video games, teach gender roles, or what is and is not appropriate behavior for a person based on their gender (Giulio, p. 3). The issue comes when the video games send unrealistic and sexist messages, that are restrictive or repressive (Giulio, p.3). This can be detrimental for both men and women, as well as the society altogether. Video games have the ability to influence a person’s body image and self-esteem, as well as set up expectations for the opposite gender (Miller & Summers, 2007: 734). However, it becomes even more worrisome when the research that shows that men who play sexually explicit video games have a greater tendency to harm than those not playing such video games (Giulio, p.7). Another study concluded that men who were exposed to sexually

explicit images of women are then more likely to see women as sexual objects, and to make unwanted sexual advances in the future (Giulio, p.7).

It is so often assumed that video games are an activity only for boys and men. However, women make up 40% of the video gaming population, and 80% of girls report playing video games (Giulio, p.7). With that being said, based on numbers alone, it is clear that men and women enjoy different types of video games. During a past World Cyber Games competition, it was recorded that seven hundred men and boys participated, while only one woman joined the competition (Kimmel, 2011: 306). Sport and adventure games are mostly played by men, and strategy games hold a large percentage of women users. By studying the gaming world, society can better understand whether preferences stem more from the nature or nurture of gender. Do men naturally like violent, fighting games, or are they conditioned through gender roles to enjoy them? Do women naturally like nurturing games, or are they socialized to enjoy them? I do not answer these question in my research, but is something to consider and for others to discover.

Equal access to video games does not mean equal opportunity for both genders (Blumburg & Sokol, 2004: 151). This is unfortunate because there are many benefits in playing video games. Video games for young children can be used to teach math and reading skills, as well as information processing skills (2004: 151). Video games also serve as an opportunity for learning computer skills, which can lead to future careers in science and technology fields (Cohen, 2009: 10). This is significant because there is a lot of money to be made in fields oriented toward science and technology. Additionally, as technology becomes more advanced, video games can

be used as a way to connect with people from around the world. Even gaming consoles that plug into the television allow players to compete online. Players are able to communicate through microphones and instant messaging. The online gaming world gives people a chance to make friends with those who share a similar interest in video games.

There are often negative implications aimed at girls and women who enter into the world of video games. There is a perception that associates video games with being masculine territory (Lehdonvirta, Ratan, Kennedy & Williams, 2014: 248). Because of this, it is often seen as encroachment when women are allowed to play (2014: 248). There is a “boys club” attitude that makes women feel unwelcome (2014: 248), which can be true while playing in the virtual world or the real world. When playing alongside real people, men have reported a preference for playing either alone or with other men, rather than with women (Giulio, p.8). Video games are seen as a masculine bonding experience, so players who represent the minority (women and girls) tend to be isolated (Fox & Tang, 2014: 315).

There is also the idea of low expectations for players who are women. When online, women and girl gamers sometimes have their gender questioned by other players (Fattah & Paul, 2002: 39). Comments are made, suggesting that the gamer plays too well to be a woman, because only men can possess good playing abilities (Fattah & Paul, 2002: 39). However, sometimes women feel forced to use male avatars when playing online for the purpose of warding off unwanted sexual advances from other players (Lehdonvirta, Ratan, Kennedy & Williams, 2014: 248). There is a lot of sexual harassment that occurs in online gaming, which can include asking women players

to send nude images or to perform sexual favors (Fox & Tang, 2014: 315). Masculine norms are perpetuated within the online gaming world, by using sexist language (2014: 315). It has been reported that women users receive three times the amount of negative comments while playing (2014: 315). Another study shows that women report negative psychological effects in misogynistic environments, even when they themselves do not experience the harassment (2014: 318). It is no wonder that women and girls may not feel included when participating in video games.

The way that most video games have been created show how men's needs are represented more often than are women's. To start, games often reward masculine activities, rather than feminine ones (Lehdonvirta, Ratan, Kennedy & Williams, 2014: 247). Gender roles teach men to be more achievement oriented, while women are taught to care more about socializing and nurturing others. However, there are usually fewer rewards for socializing and nurturing in a virtual world, as it is more focused on competition and performance (2014: 247). Additionally, a lot of mainstream games are based off of masculine activities, like sports. It is shown that in sports related video games, 98% of users are men, with 93.3% of them already being a sports fan (Concordia University, 2013: 176). However, I would argue that sports are already an inherently sexist environment that lead to hostility toward women. There is also a lot less women being represented in sports video games. For these reasons, a lot of women and girls choose not to play sports video games (Fox & Tang, 2014: 315).

There is a an underrepresentation of female characters in video games across the board. One study showed that for every one female character in a video game, there are 5.3 male characters (Zorrilla, 2016: 1). There are also many more playable male characters than there are playable female characters (2016: 1). This refers to a character with high function, verses a non-playable characters who does not have any clear cut contribution to the game (2016: 1). One study discovered that men are five times more likely than women to be shown as a primary character (2016: 1). And 58.1% of the time, heroes are represented as men, while only 34.6% of heroes are women (2016: 1). In games where women are the primary character, they are likely to share their status with a primary male character (Giulio, p.5). This is not as often seen when a man is the main character. An analysis of video game boxes show that 42% of game covers display only male characters, about 25% of game covers display male and female characters together, and about 25% of game covers display only non-human characters (Near, 2013: 259). Only 7% of game covers portray female characters exclusively (2013: 259).

Video game characters are often shown in highly sexualized and exaggerated ways. This is especially true for female characters, who are more likely to be naked or be shown with amplified sexual organs. Female characters are often created wearing tight or revealing clothing, with large breasts, who pose in seductive ways (Giulio, p.4). Although male characters can also be portrayed with unrealistic standards and hyper-masculinity, female characters are more often objectified. Female characters with large breasts are found more often than male characters with extremely large muscles (Giulio, p.4). An analysis of characters show that of those coded as naked, 88% were female characters (Zorrilla, 2016: 2). Even non-human female characters are

sexualized. A specific example displayed squirrels on a video game box cover, where the female squirrel is suggestively stroking the male squirrel's cannon (2016: 2). This explicitly shows the hyper-sexualization of female characters, even when they are rodents (2016: 2). Female bodies are two times more likely to be partitioned in ways that only show the butt, the breasts, or the legs for example (Giulio, p.6). This sexual portrayal of women in video games has caused both genders to view female characters as less favorable, assuming their cognitive abilities aren't as good as the male characters (Giulio, p.5). Female characters are not being taken seriously because of the way they are created to look. It is dangerous when this attitude translates into real life. Women's thoughts and ideas deserve respect. However, I do not think it will be given until the media decides to portray women in a positive and realistic manner.

The way characters are represented have a profound effect on body image within a society. I have learned in my Messages in the Media class that humans are extremely preceptive to what the media values. Video games are no exception when it comes to advertising unrealistic body standards. This relates to both men and women. Boys and men who have viewed masculine characters with the "ideal" muscular body type go on to report negative feelings towards their own body, causing some to use steroids and purposely gain weight (Miller & Summers 2007: 734). This is similar for girls who have been exposed to video games with overly-sexualized female characters, causing feelings of low self-esteem (Giulio, p.4). This can be damaging because 40% to 60% of girls and women already feel dissatisfaction with their body (Martins, Williams, Harrison & Ratan, 2009: 824). The "ideal" feminine body type represents only 5% of the population, leaving most Americans striving for an unattainable goal, and thus causing eating

disorders (2009: 824). It has been proven that video games leave people, particularly women, with feelings of low self-worth.

The literature argues that in general, video games do not create a welcome environment for women. The gaming world is full of sexism, sexualized and unrealistic images of women, harassment towards women, a low representation of female characters, and an atmosphere that perpetuates negative body image for women and girls. However, one can question whether it is the sole fault of the gaming industry. The social issues involved may only be a representation of the existing society. Even when video games try to include female characters, it is shown that sales decrease. When only female characters are represented on the cover of a video game case, sales drop significantly (Near, 2013: 260). In fact, video game sales did better when the cover featured only non-human characters than it did featuring only female characters (2013: 260). In other words, non-humans are considered better than women. Either way, it seems clear that sexism and misogynistic values are a part of society, and are only worsened by mainstream video games.

Method

Sample

My sample of video games was chosen out of convenience and accessibility. Because I do not own any games myself, I used a judgement sampling technique in order to gain access to some video games. I asked an expert, who in this case was a friend and an avid gamer, to help me decide which games would be in my sample. The video games I used were made for gaming

consoles that plug into the television. Although some of the games have access to online gaming, for the purpose of my study, we stayed offline. My sample is not random. Rather, I told my friend to choose the games, and he decided on three different video games from his personal collection. Although three video games do not necessarily represent an entire population, I chose that number due to time constraints. With three video games in my sample, I was better able to observe, play, and fully analyze many aspects of the game.

The chosen games include Dragon Age Inquisition, Mortal Kombat X, and FIFA 16. Within those games, I analyzed 34 specific characters. Four of those characters are from Dragon Age Inquisition. I chose four from that particular game because only four main characters play in each scene, and I felt like it did a good job of representing all the characters within the game. Twenty-three of the characters in my sample are from Mortal Kombat X. There are a total of 30 characters in the game, but only 23 were loading easily when I played, so I chose them. The last six characters are from FIFA 16. There are hundreds of teams, and thousands of characters in this game. In order to choose a reasonable sample, I randomly selected six teams (three men's teams and three women's teams). There is a feature in the game that allowed me to randomly select the teams. Then to get the six representative characters, I chose the captain from each of those teams. From these video games and characters, I found both qualitative and quantitative data.

Auto-Ethnography

I decided to do a mixed-mode approach involving auto-ethnographic research and a content analysis of mainstream video games. The practice of auto-ethnography refers to immersing oneself into the field, and collecting qualitative data by studying the subject through a personal lens (Berg, 2007: 180). I wanted to better understand whether or not video games exclude women, and so auto-ethnographic research has helped me to find the qualitative data necessary for my study. By maintaining a personal and cultural point of view, I was able to study an aspect of my own culture in a sociological way. As a researcher, I have found that a strength associated with auto-ethnography is the amount of freedom involved. There are less rules on how to go about the research, and I enjoyed the aspect of storytelling that it involves.

The role I played in the field was myself. I decided that it would be easiest to observe and analyze the games while my friend played. I kept a journal detailing everything I could about the 34 characters, the game objectives, the storyline of the games, as well as the factual details I learned through my friend about the game. This journal served as my field notes, which can be found in section A of the Appendix. I took extra time to highlight the personal attributes of each character. I wanted to look specifically at how gender is portrayed within the games. I noted things like gender, appearance, clothing, skills and weapons, background, relationship to other characters, age, race, ethnicity, whether or not they are human, and whether or not they are a hero or villain.

The friend who allowed me to play his video games was very helpful, but again, I felt like an outsider to the gaming community. Initially, my friend was excited to hear about my interest in video games, but as we started to play, I could feel the frustration as I slowly learned the necessary skills. I'll admit that I was frustrated as well. I think if I had more opportunity to play when I was growing up, I would have been more prepared as a researcher. Teaching me wasn't quite as fun as we had hoped, so I ended up just observing the games while he played.

Although I enjoyed looking at the video games in a sociological way, I do not think I will continue playing them for entertainment purposes. Besides being sexist, in my opinion, most of the video games I have observed just seem kind of stupid. A lot of them are filled with violence or fantasy, which I do not find very interesting in general. More importantly, I do not want to devote the necessary amount of time needed to learn the skills for gaming. I wonder if my preferences stem from the gender roles I have been taught. This is not to say that people shouldn't play video games because it is obvious that many others find it entertaining. However, I do think all gamers should be aware of the messages they are absorbing, and choose to only support games that represent their personal values.

Content Analysis

I then created a content analysis to help me find the quantitative data. According to Babbie, "content analysis is the study of recorded human communications" (2016: 323). I first organized my field notes by transferring them onto an excel file sheet. This allowed me to visualize categories in which to place my data. I created a codebook by turning the different categories

into a numerical ranking, which can be found in section B of the Appendix. Babbie describes coding as, “the process of transforming raw data into a standardized form” (2016: 328). Because an auto-ethnography allows for more personal discretion, I created codes based on my own interpretation. For example, I used a code to describe the amount of clothing worn by a character. In this case, the ranking was obvious to me; a character was either naked, wore very little clothing, was mostly clothed, or was fully clothed. For this example, Naked=0, Very Little=1, Mostly Clothed=2, and Fully Clothed=3. In other types of research methods, coding may involve more than one researcher to help create a reliable data set. But in this auto-ethnographic study, I am highlighting my own interpretation of the video games. After creating a numerical system for my data, I used SPSS to help me see what correlations could be found. My results from SPSS proved to be very interesting.

A strength of content analysis is that I was allowed to revisit my subject if I needed more information (Babbie, 2016: 334). It would be much harder to go back and find additional information when using surveys, fieldwork with humans, or interviews. Content Analysis also takes up less time and money (Babbie, 2016: 334). As a college student with limited resources, both of those were necessary aspects of my research.

Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

My qualitative data mostly reflects the sexist nature of video games. I have provided images showing sample characters from each game, which can be found in section C of the Appendix. Dragon Age Inquisition was the only game out of the three to have a high representation of female characters, even surpassing the amount of male characters. Throughout my entire study, there was only one male character ranked as having some form of femininity, and he was a character from this game. This shows that there is a bit more gender fluidity allowed to the characters in Dragon Age Inquisition. However, the female characters involved were still given attributes such as big eyes, big lips, big breasts, and curves.

By looking at the characters in Mortal Kombat X, it was obvious to see that the female characters were dressed much more scantily and sexy than the males, half of them wearing underwear as their outfit. Even the female characters who were fully clothed had tight suits that embellished their curves and large breasts. The content of this game is extremely violent, almost to the point where I had to look away because there was so much blood and visuals of bones being cracked in half. In fact, Mortal Kombat was the first video game to get any type of rating, due to its mature content. Each character has been given a skill or weapon for fighting. One female character had the ability to punch her male opposition in the crotch so hard that his testicles explode. This female character happens to be more masculine and military based. I wonder if this equates to the negative stereotype of the female “ball busting bitch”. Violent video games can be enjoyed by both genders, but when looking solely at the gender roles in our society, violence is supposed

to be appreciated by only men. By over-sexualizing the female characters, and by incorporating such extreme violence, my impression is that this game is marketed to men and boys.

At first, it felt like FIFA 16 was relatively gender neutral, but as I observed and learned more about the game, I saw that it is not as innocent as it seems. The female characters have not been sexualized, mostly because they have been created to look like real soccer players. This includes wearing the uniform of a real soccer player. Each player has been given stats, based on their soccer skills. However, it is hard to tell how male and female players rank up against each other because they are not compared to each other. When creating the stats, males are compared to males, and females are compared to females. I did notice, however, that when playing with the female characters, the speed of movement seemed noticeably slower than when playing a game with the males. I thought that maybe it was my imagination telling me this, so I asked my friend who owned the games, and after consideration, he agreed. The most obvious gender disparity is in number of female characters. When there are 638 male teams present in the game, there should be way more than just 12 female teams. There are also huge limitations that come with using female characters. The women's teams cannot play in career mode, meaning a player cannot make virtual money when they win games. Additionally, female characters are only allowed to play other females, which might become boring for the gamer, since there are only 12 teams to choose from.

Quantitative Analysis

When doing my auto-ethnographic research and content analysis, my only intention was to learn more about gender in the video gaming world. Although the scholarly journals that I have read

on the subject all seem to point in a particular direction, I wanted to figure out for myself whether or not video games create a friendly and inclusive atmosphere for both men and women players. In the end, my results support the findings of the articles I have read, suggesting that video games create a hostile and sexist environment for women. Charts and graphs displaying some of my data can be found in section D of the Appendix.

When looking at character representation, women are highly underrepresented in two out of the three games. In Mortal Kombat X, 8 out of the 30 characters are female. In FIFA 16, there are 638 male teams and only 12 female teams. The FIFA series just recently added females to the game this year. Previous to that, no women were ever represented. The creators of the game chose the twelve female teams based off of who made it to the real life FIFA Women's World Cup in 2015. This goes to show that women have to work a lot harder just to gain representation. FIFA chose the top twelve female teams to represent, but allowed every male national and club team to be shown in the game. Dragon Age Inquisition was the only game that had a significant amount of female characters. 7 out of the 13 main characters are female.

When looking at the clothing worn by the characters, my results show that by far female characters wear less clothing than do male. 33.3% of female characters wore very little clothing, while only 4.5% of male characters wore very little clothing. Within that, 100% of the highly feminine characters wore very little clothing. This suggests that in order to be deemed feminine, one must show a lot of skin and look sexy. Additionally, of those who wore very little clothing, 100% of them happen to be non-human. All of the human characters were either mostly clothed

or fully clothed. This points out the de-humanization that happens when characters are sexualized.

When I considered ultra-femininity and hyper-masculinity, I discovered that the female characters had a wider range of where they could fall on these scales. Male characters on the other hand were basically all hyper-masculine. 95.5% of the male characters showed no sign of femininity, and rather showed medium to high levels of hyper-masculinity. In both the categories, female characters were represented across the board. However, 100% of the females showed some level of masculinity. This data suggests that femininity is less valued, and in order to be accepted as a character in these games, masculinity is necessary.

Overall, my findings of quantitative data point out that women have lower character representation within the games; the female characters wear a lot less clothing; there is a strong correlation between the characters who are non-human and those who wear very little clothing; and masculinity is valued over femininity. Even within these three video games, I have been able to detect cases of sexism through my content analysis.

Summary/ Conclusion

By doing auto-ethnographic research and a content analysis of video games, my sample shows that mainstream, popular video games are inherently geared toward men and boys. My data has shown that sexism towards women exist within the context of video games. However, this is not a new phenomenon; sexism exists in all aspects of our culture. This may explain why women and girls still make up almost half of the video gaming population (Hassan & Paul, 2002: 39). They are used to living in a sexist world, so some do not feel discouraged when they find it in the virtual world as well. However, we can presume that many more would become involved if there was more representation, better portrayals of female characters, and a less misogynistic environment.

Appendix

A. Field Notes:

Game Title	Characters	Gender	Good/Bad/ In Between?
Dragon Age Inquisition	Ellana	F	Good
	Casssandra	F	Good
	Solas	M	Good
	Varric	M	Good
Mortal Kombat XL	Sonya Blade	F	Good
	Mileena	F	Bad
	Kitana	F	Bad
	D'vorah	F	Bad
	Ferra	F	In Between
	Cassie Cage	F	Good
	Jacqui Briggs	F	Good
	Sub Zero	M	In Between
	Liu Kang	M	Good
	Johnny Cage	M	Good
	Kenshi	M	Good
	Erron Black	M	In Between
	Scorpion	M	In Between
	Ermac	M	Bad
	Kotal Khan	M	Bad
	Reptile	M	Bad
	Torr	M	In Between
	Takeda	M	Good
	Jax Briggs	M	Good
	Kung Lao	M	Good
	Kung Jin	M	Good
	Kano	M	Bad
	Quan Chi	M	Bad
	Raiden	M	Good

Special Skills/ Weapons	Basic Background
Only one who can close portal, Bow & Arrow	Hostage
Warrior	Guides Ellana
Able to heal people, Can freeze people	Companion, Elf God, Romantic Option
Quick attacks, Crossbow, Artificer (creates traps)	"Sleezy", But still an ally
Military	Military, Special Force Unit, Married to Johnny Blade
Trident Daggers, Claw teeth	One of the Triplets, Princess, Clone of Kitana

Bladed fan	One of the Triplets, Princess
Flying powers, Poisonous, Pulls larve out of body	One of Triplets, Princess/ Queen of Insects
Aggressive, Smart, Fast speed, Bladed Guantlets	"Rider", Does not actually fight, Rides Torr, "The Brains"
Punch crotch to make a males balls explode	Daughter of Johnny Cage & Sonya Blade
Wears cyborg sleeves	Military, Special Force Unit, Daughter of Jax briggs
Ninja	Head of Ice Ninja Clan
Ninja, Burns people with fire	Main character, Represents heroism
Martial Arts	Martial arts expert in Hollywood movies, Married to Sonya Blade
Samarii, Sword, Telekinesis	Blind samarii
Gun	Cowboy
Fire, Teleportation	Brought back to life, Rivals with Sub Zero (framed for murder)
Master of Souls, Spectral powers (green)	Devil-Like
Super human strength, Draws power from sun	Emperor of another world, God of Sun Blood & War
Spits acid, Invisibility, Teleportation	Reptile villian
Super human strength, Durability	"Mount", Carries Ferra on his back, "The Brawns"
Samarii, Bladed whips, Swords, Telekinesis	Son of Kenshi
Cyborg arms, Military, Clear headed, watchful	Father of Jacqui Briggs, Patriotic, Special Force Unit
Razor rimmed hat, Strength, Agility, Martial arts	Former monk, Martial arts, Father of Kung Jin
Staph, Arrows, Shoots magic	Ties to monkhood, Son of Kung Lao
Raptor knives	International criminal, Direct enemy of Sonya Blade & Jax Briggs
Sorcery, Magic, Create false copies of self	Main bad character
Electrical powers, Teleportation	God of thunder, Mortilized himself to fight

Relative Age	Type of Being
Young Adult	Non-human, Elf
Young Adult	Human
Young Adult	Non-human, Elf
Young Adult	Non-human, Dwarf
Adult	Human
Young Adult	Non-human, Genetic experiment
Young Adult	Non-human, Edenia
Young Adult	Non-human, Kytinn
Young Adult	Non-human, Unidentified symbiotic race
Yound Adult	Human
Young Adult	Human
Young Adult	Non-human, Cryomancer
Young Adult	Non-human, Spirit/Former human
Adult	Non-Human, special powers
Adult	Human
Adult	Human
Adult	Non-Human, Ghost
Adult	Non-Human, Fusion of Souls

Adult	Non-Human, Osh Tekk
Adult	Non-Human, Raptor
Adult	Non-human, Unidentified symbiotic race
Young Adult	Human
Adult	Human
Adult	Human
Young Adult	Human
Adult	Human
Adult	Non-human, demon
Adult	Non-human, god

B. Codebook:

Gender:

Female=0

Male=1

Good/Villain/In-Between:

Good=0

Villain=1

In-Between=2

Clothing:

Naked=0

Very Little=1

Mostly Clothed=2

Fully Clothed=3

Ultra-Femininity:

None=0

Low=1

Medium=2

High=3

Hyper-Masculinity:

None=0

Low=1

Medium=2

High=3

Character Objective:

Sports=0

Fighting=1

Type of Being:

Human=0

Non-Human=1

Age:

Younger=0

Older=1

Race:

Asian=0

Non-Asian=1

Race:

Darker Skin=0

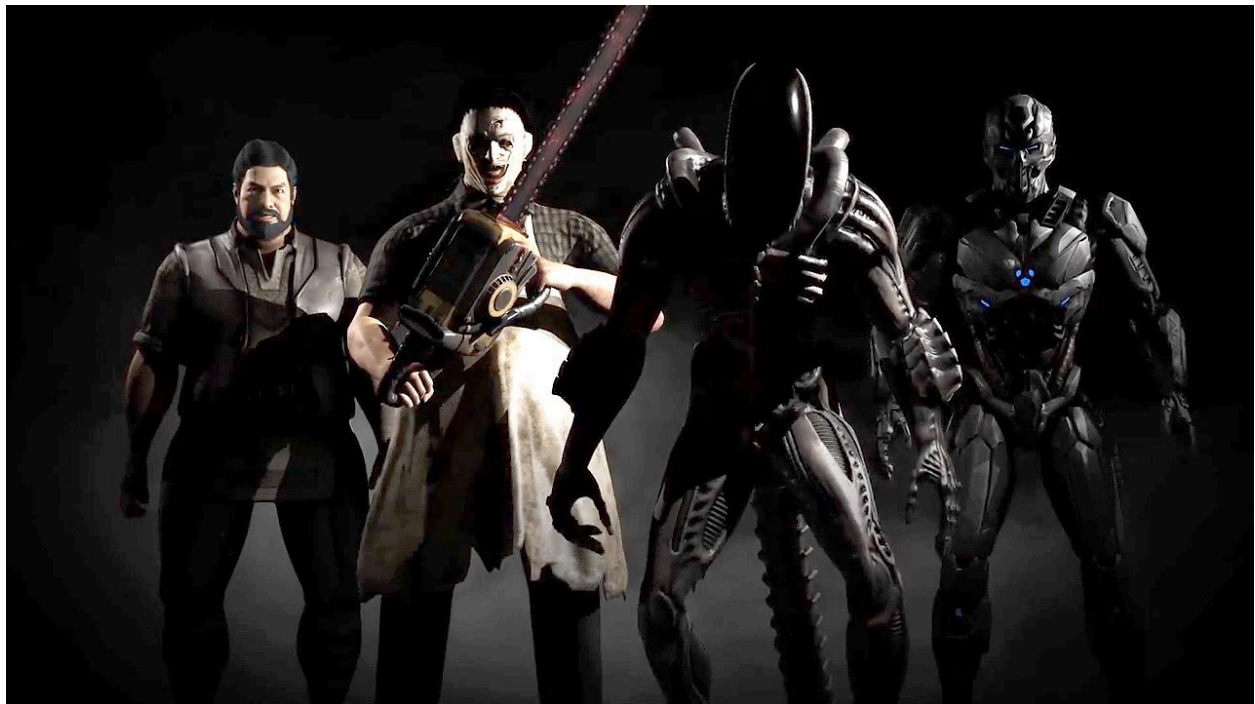
Lighter Skin=1

C. Sample Character Image:

Mortal Kombat X (Images found on the website for BGSU Journalism & Gear Nuke)



Female Characters
VS
Male Characters



Dragon Age Inquisition (Image found the Game Faqs website)



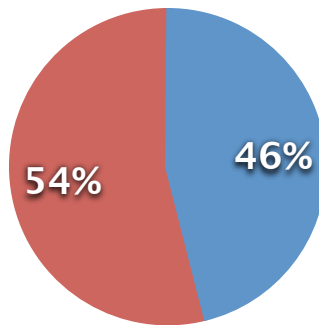
FIFA 16 (Image found on the XBox website)



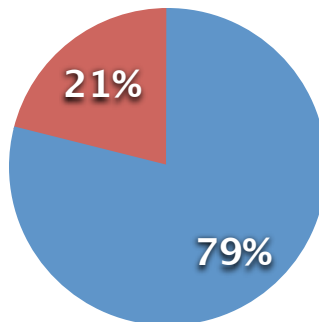
D. Charts & Graphs

Gender Representation in Characters

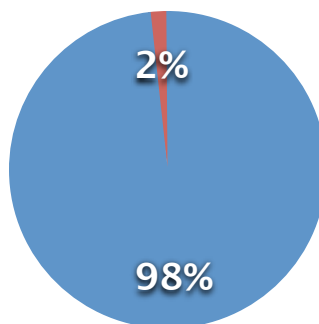
Dragon Age Inquisition



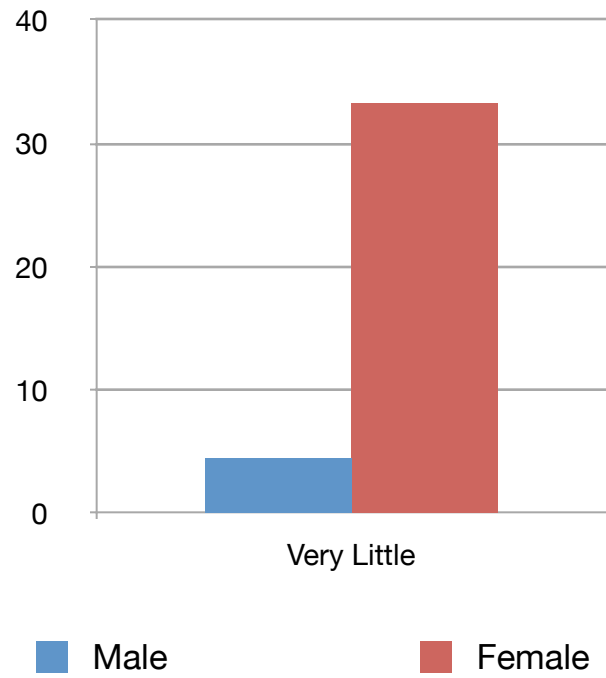
Mortal Kombat X



FIFA 16 (by team)



Percentage of Characters Dressed in Very Little Clothing by Gender



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