

Entering the Boys' Club: An Analysis of Female Representation in Game Industry and Design



Team G.A.M.E.R.S.

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Problem and Research Question

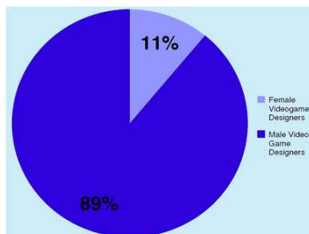
- Problem: The gaming industry often excludes, degrades, and discourages women from actively participating and contributing to game experience and design.
- Research Questions: How can we break the hegemonic cycle of character design in video games? How can we close the gender gap, overcome sexist norms, and create opportunities for women in the gaming industry?



Figure 1. Comparison sketch with sexualized female character design.

Background Information

- The gaming industry is a male dominated field [3,7]



- The American video game industry reported sales of \$25 billion (USD) in 2011 [4] targeting male audiences
- "Video games, like most other popular culture forms, overstress young, buxom, and beautiful women in their content" [1]
- Findings have indicated that male characters are portrayed muscular and powerful, while the majority of females are portrayed as sexy and weak [2,6]
 - 70% of female characters in mature-rated games display abundant cleavage in contrast to 46% in teen-rated games
 - 86% of female characters were portrayed wearing clothing with low/revealing necklines and 48% of females had outfits with no sleeves
 - 22% of male characters represented in clothing with no sleeves and 14% of male characters wear clothing exposing the chest

¹Beasley, B. & Standley, T. C. (2002). Shirts vs. skins: Clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games. *Mass Communication and Society*, 5, 279-293.
²Rohm-Morawetz, E., & Masrro, O. (2009). The effects of the sexualization of female video game characters on gender stereotyping and female self-concept. *Sex Roles*, 61(1), 809-823.
³Quares, L. (2013). Women remain outsiders in video game industry. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved on February 9, 2013 http://www.boston.com/business/2013/02/09/women-remain-outside-video-game-industry/275_RqyJfY7T77gPmC9K9rHistory.html
⁴Essential Facts about the Video Game Industry (2012). Entertainment Software Association. Retrieved on February 9, 2013 from http://www.thesoft.com/facts09to12USA_EF_2012.pdf
⁵Katla, V. B., Heeter, C., Danner, J., & Sun, J. Y. (Eds.). (2008). *Beyond Barbie & Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
⁶Nelle, M. K., & Summers, A. (2007). Gender differences in video game character roles, appearances, and attire as portrayed in video game magazines. *Sex Roles*, 57(7), 733-742.
⁷Ray, S. G. (2004). *Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market* (1st ed.). Hingham, Massachusetts: Charles River Media.

Methodology

Research

- Focused only on console and "hardcore" games on Xbox and Playstation systems
- Analyzed and critiqued scholarly literature and pop-culture resources (blogs, websites, magazines)

Visualized Character Analysis

- Character Stack: series of twenty-eight images of characters in console games chosen from a list of best selling games on *GameInformer*

Evolution of Character Design

- Timeline of characters in games throughout game life span



Figure 2 and 3. Character Stack Notice how the female character stack displays significantly more skin exposure than the male character stack.



Figure 4. Character Evolution Timelines Notice the most prominent changes between male and female characters as time progresses.

Conclusions

- The gaming industry is a hostile environment for the professional growth of women
- Female video game characters are under-represented and over sexualized in comparison to male characters and often exhibit a standardized body shape



Figure 2. A series of sketches following the standardized body type in games: large breasts, small waist, and thin legs.

- Female gamers and women in the gaming industry are often a minority and experience sexual harassment
- The video game industry is a large profit by ignoring the female market

Recommendations

- Create open and encouraging working environments for women in the gaming industry
 - Reducing sexism and gendered stereotypes through seminars and/or conferences
 - Allow opportunity for high management positions
- Encourage more women to seek degrees in STEM related fields, therefore leading to interest in the gaming industry to close gender gap
 - Expose, teach, and equip women in STEM at early education stages
- Change the portrayal of female characters
 - Diversifying character design
 - Creating primary/leading roles in game design
- Market towards female audiences through gender friendly game advertisements for an increase in sales and interest in game experience

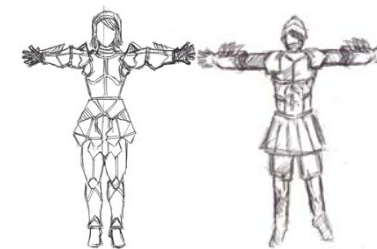


Figure 4. Comparison sketch with non-sexualized female character design.