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<div align="center">Entering the Boys' Club</div>

Since its origin in 1958 by William Higinbotham and popularity in the 1970s by the

Magnavox company (Tretkoff 1), video games have globally provided individuals-mostly men-

the opportunity to experience the most intriguing form of escapism. In addition, they suggest

various ways of comprehending modern society (Shapiro 1). As video games grew more

beloved, its platform evolved from arcades to home consoles to portable handheld devices and

now, head-mounted display headsets such as the Oculus Rift. Even though many value video

games, others do not, claiming they are to blame for the excessive amounts of violence in the

world today. However, how does playing violent video games differ from reading violent

literature or looking for violent artwork (Miller 1)? Although video games do not encourage

violence outside of the virtual world, they are responsible for falsely illustrating an ideal just as

extreme.

Video games throughout the decades no matter the genre, as well as the video game

industry, have always contained one consistent dilemma. Gender inequality. Through careful and

extensive research on this unprogressive topic, a mass amount of people recognize this as a

quandary yet little to no significant changes have been made. I, as an active gamer on pc and

console systems since the young age of seven, will argue why there should be a gender balance

in the video game industry. This argument will explore the different types of gaming and their

relationship to both sexes, why gender representation in games and gender inequality within the industry needs to be addressed, and the difference in pay between the two sexes. Before immediately labeling the approach to this topic as an irritating feminist rant, consider the presented possible outcomes of a gender neutral environment within the virtual world and the industry.

"Gaming" is a very broad term that has constantly been redefined since video games became popularized. In the modern gaming era, the term "gaming" has been broken down into two categories: casual and hardcore. Casual gaming can be defined as a video game with simplistic rules that does not require a great amount of time, effort, and extensive problem-solving skills to complete. Typically, these types of games have no storyline and are solely derived from a cellular device or tablet such as *Candy Crush, Temple Run, Clash of Clans* and so on and so forth. The increase in women making up the gaming community have mostly found casual games appealing as opposed to most men being attracted to more "hardcore" games (Entertainment Software Association 5). There are many reasonable explanations as to why women favor these types of games more but the most evident is because casual games do not feature sexualized women and unnecessary violence (Pocilujko 1). Many popular game developers would express that casual gaming is not a legitimate type of gaming like "hardcore" since usually, casual games practice the strategy of freemium.

"Hardcore" gaming can be defined as a video game that contains a complex storyline and requires a great deal of time, energy, and problem-solving skills to complete. *Battlefield, Call of Duty, Halo, and Bioshock* are only some of the many video games that would be categorized under this title. According to Kondrat, more men gravitate towards these titles not only for the sexualized women and dangerous situations, but also because men enjoy the problem-solving

aspect that "hardcore" games offer (182-3). Although male gamers may perceive casual gaming as insignificant, these types of games could serve as a gateway to guiding more women towards "hardcore" games, but only if the gender stereotypes are renovated.

Most of the time it is not what you do, it is how you do it; this notion remains valid in regards to how video game companies illustrate gender representation. As a result of the long-lasting gender imbalance within the video game industry, representation of women in video games remain simplified to two mannerisms: sexualized or inferior to their male counterpart who strips them of occupying lead roles. "The representation of females in video games is usually sexualized presenting them as sexual objects wearing skintight clothing and having a slim figure" (Kondrat 178). Despite this fact, it should also be taken into consideration that the video game industry is not the only American company to sexualize women; it is modern society as a whole. America's conception of beauty includes straight white teeth, beautiful hair, a slim figure and much more. This notion is practiced on a daily basis from photo-shopping celebrity women on magazine covers to advertising attractive women eating burgers in Carl's Jr. commercials, so why should the video game industry be the one to change? For one, the video game industry starts targeting male gamers at the young age of thirteen (Entertainment Software Association 3), thus giving the video game industry the power to influence their vulnerable minds about the falsified demeanor of women. "This representation is harmful to children of both sexes since they will internalize these expectations and accept the idea that women are to be viewed as weak, as victims, and as sex objects" (Kondrat 182).

Another reason why gender representation matters is because negative stereotyping affects consumers as well as the industry. For example, every female character in the video game *Soul Calibur* is displayed wearing skin tight partial clothing. Surely a male gamer would be seen

playing this more than a female gamer since it is mostly more appealing to men. *Dragon's Crown – Sorceress, Mortal Kombat, Halo's Cortana, Batman, World of Warcraft*. All of these game titles feature oversexualized women. Due to a vast amount of video games sexualizing women, it is hard for a gamer, whether male or female, to take the female character seriously thus causing only forty-one percent of female gamers to buy games compared to fifty-nine percent of male gamers (Entertainment Software Association 4). The females in the video game audience have gradually been growing and now are at forty-four percent (Entertainment Software Association 3), a number that needs to be recognized by the gaming industry via producing games that not only less sexualize female characters but also target female gamers. Although some men in the game industry can argue that sexualizing women "carries strong sexual meaning for the young boys who predominantly play these games" (Kondrat 177), it still does not make it acceptable. The other excuse as to why the video game industry has continued this inappropriate portrayal of women in their games is because "sexuality sells best" (Kondrat 179), especially when their target audience has predominantly been males. But with time comes change, and changing how women are represented in video games is long overdue.

Another evident issue with female characters in video games is how fragile game companies portray them to be compared to their male counterparts. In Rockstar Games's *Grand Theft Auto V*, which focuses on three very unique lifestyles of three male characters, women are only resembled as eye candy or hookers. This female representation does not only exist in Rockstar Games's last installment, in fact, all five of the titles since 1999 retain this representation. Even the classic video game *Super Mario Bros.* portrays the female character Princess Peach as a damsel in distress, a prize to be won by the male protagonist Mario. The most popular exception to this almost concrete ideal is Square Enix's *Tomb Raider* series which

features Lara Croft, a "tomb raider" or someone who collects ancient artifacts from exotic locations, as performing dangerous stealthy tasks primarily by herself. Even if many male gamers would be opposed to game companies including women as the primary playable character since they can relate more to a male character, at least change their powerless image. Although the false portrayal of female characters is more noticeable than male characters, there is also an exaggerated motif about male characters.

Male characters in games are constantly illustrated as a glorified muscular hero and rarely sexualized. Moreover, they are often seen containing a great amount of arm muscle under their bulky armor (Maisonave 14). Marcus Fenix, a soldier-like character, in the game *Gears of War* is just one male protagonist that falls victim to this exaggerated motif. The physical representation of men as all powerful has the ability to create a false portrayal for young impressionable boys as they compare the physique of these heroes to the average male's physique in modern society. Furthermore, video games are constantly demonstrating the ideal that heroes have to be muscular or carry a gun, sometimes both. Not many games portray the smart thin male character to be the hero like detective Cole Phelps in *L.A. Noire*. When the term "hero" is brought up in video games, the image of the so called hero should not be fixed to a specific physical image, on the contrary, it should evoke countless images that young boys of any shape or size can identify with.

Many studies have showed how men and women are wired differently thus causing each to excel further than the other in certain career fields. Usually additional underlying reasons to this conclusion are not brought to light, until now. Jesse in *Redesigning Science: Recent Scholarship on Cultural Change, Gender, and Diversity* writes:

When women lag behind men in their performance (especially in STEM careers), the

argument is that there's something wrong with the women, whereas when men lag

behind, it is because the educational system is failing to engage them. In fact, most

evidence shows that men and women are equally capable of solving math problems or

navigating through problem-solving exercises, although they may take different brain

paths to the same destination (Jesse 831).

Consider the amount of girls that want to pursue STEM careers-Science, Technology,

Engineering, Math-in middle school or high school to then only reject that same desire upon

entering college. Spontaneously, findings of "African American women are more likely to

choose and stay in STEM careers [compared to White women] due to Historically Black

Colleges and Universities" (Jesse 832) came about. But what about all the non-African American

women? Social scientists concluded that their dropouts could be related to gender discrimination,

although no evidence was found.

Instead, it was discovered that "they [women] contributed to low levels of mentoring, a

mismatch of interests, and difficulties in shouldering the double burdens of family and career"

(Jesse 833). Some may categorize this gender inequality issue with the various other cases like

women in the U.S. infantry for example but there are significant differences between the two.

The most significant being: a male based infantry unit performs efficiently with little to zero

fault whereas a mostly male based environment within the game industry falsifies the

mannerisms of women. Since this issue is becoming more of a threat due to the growing number

of females in the gaming community, many companies may want to consider "the adoption of

policies that allow…family leave, establishing on-site day care, lengthening the tenure clock, and

facilitating two-career hires" (Jesse 835). At the very least develop more formal efficient

mentoring programs for women. With few women entering the game industry, one may contemplate whether or not women can reach high ranking positions.

Although many women are at a disadvantage upon entering the video game field, there are some notable women who climbed to the top and changed video game styles in a positive light like Amy Jo Kim, Bonnie Ross, and Kirsten Duvall (Gaudiosi 1-3). Kim is the CEO of the video game company Shufflebrain who worked on *The Sims*, a unique video game which allows the operator to control the lives of virtual characters called Sims resulting in its appeal to gamers of both sexes (Gaudiosi 2). On account of her game development, many women entered the world of pc gaming.

Ross on the other hand can be described as the woman who made video game history. She is the corporate vice president of 343 Industries who is currently leading one of the most globally successful first-person shooter video game franchises, *Halo*. Her persistent push for social justice in video games such as hiring more female game developers and introducing more female characters in video games has been creating controversy within the gaming community but could bring a new understanding of how women are perceived in a positive light in a popular video game franchise that many men play (Brustein 2-4, Gaudiosi 3). After all, with more females in the industry it could produce fresh new games with a different approach given that women think with both sides of their brain rather than men who chiefly use their logical analytic side (Jesse 832).

Another male dominated genre in the video game industry is sports however Duvall was able to wedge her way in as a product manager at Electronic Arts, the company known for creating all sport titled video games (Gaudiosi 1). She is another perfect example of how women can be successful in male dominated video game genres. Although these women have worked

their way up to high leveled positions in a male dominated industry, are they still earning the same amount of money as their male counterpart?

Understanding the unequal pay between men and women is another vital aspect when observing some of the weaknesses within the game industry and every company for that matter. "Women consistently reported lower salaries and lower levels of satisfaction than their male colleagues" (Jesse 837). Although it is understood that women get paid less due to their chances of becoming pregnant which would interrupt their concentration on work, equal pay should exist. For example, if a gaming company employs an experienced woman who has phenomenal programming skills in every language, why should she get paid less than the equivalent male in the same company. If a woman is putting in the same work as her male counterpart, there is no just reason why her pay check is twenty-one percent less (Institute for Women's Policy Research 1).

Such a shift will not be easy, but as more women become involved in this field, whether playing or creating the games, it will be demanded even more than it is now. With the emergence of women in the industry, the notion of "sexuality sells best" (Kondrat 179) can be eliminated and replaced with an ideal more appropriate for gamers of all ages and genders to experience and commemorate as they reflect upon the actual world. Girls of all ages should have the opportunity to relate to more than one heroine in video games because once that does happen, more women will break away from casual gaming to "hardcore" gaming as a way to experience the true art of what video games were intended to demonstrate.

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