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The Hypersexuality Of Women and Videogames: The Effects It Has on Society and The Business Industry

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**The Hypersexuality of Women and Videogames: The Effects It Has on Society and the
Business Industry**

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Abstract

The misrepresentation of females in video games has created a harmful environment due to the hypersexual nature and stereotypes. This study is a data collection based on the harmful behaviors and patterns of both developers and members of the gaming community. The gaming community carries behaviors that can be deemed harmful and are close to office harassment towards women who are more hostile while playing video games and engaging with women outside of it. Harmful community behaviors also affect women in the gaming communities especially when most female main characters are seen with unrealistic body proportions which creates body image issues (in women) and leads to higher rates of depression. These behaviors contrast with the effect the gaming community has on each other and with the developers. Developers have created a data set pattern that monitors the community and the choices fans will make within video games so that said games would sell more. The data set monitors data sets for appealing characters, game functions, as well as fan service. These findings as a whole suggest that both the developers and the community itself need to change the way that they are treating women within the gaming community. The over-sexualization and stereotypes that are made of women in video games are desensitizing younger generations to this behavior, letting those new into the gaming community think that this problem is okay.

Keywords: Video games, hypersexuality, sexual harassment, behavioral, developers, psychology, sexual behavior, community

Introduction

Video games are a form of entertainment that has been around since the 1950s and have continued to grow in the entertainment industry immensely even today. Video games have become another way to communicate with each other, so much so that video game franchises made their own communities where players with common interests can talk and play video games together. However, as the gaming industry grew into something bigger its problems did too with both its developers and its communities. More precisely the problem lies in the representation of women in video games and the behavior that comes out of the communities because of these two. This behavior can be seen since the early 1980s when we can see the female portrayal in video games become a ‘damsel in distress’ type of role are usually waiting pretty for their prince charming to come and save them. The misinterpretation of women and the way that they are portrayed in video games are creating a community that is desensitized to harassment and unrealistic standards of women. This study specifically focuses on how the effects of the male gaze are turning the video game industry into a harmful environment for women and why it should be prevented. The male gaze is a perspective that sexualizes women and objectifies women for the male view.

Problematic Developers

The problem starts with gaming developers’ design of the characters and how they represent women in the game world. Edward Downs and Stacy L. Smith (2022) did a study where characters from 60 console games were “coded on a number of various overt sexuality variables, including sexually revealing clothing, nudity, unrealistic body proportions, appropriateness of attire, breast size, and waist size” (1). This study was based on a social cognitive theory that was used to understand that players can learn sexual stereotypes through

video games. It is often seen that men in video games are the strong main character who will save all and his “female characters are presented in games, ranging from damsels in distress (e.g., *Zelda*) to prostitution (the *Grand Theft Auto* series)” (Ferguson et al., 2022). Female characters are seen frequently as a counterpart that moves the story along for the male main character to have a chance to develop his skill and personality for the “final battle”.

The disregard for women is something that can be seen almost anywhere within the media. It is something that is portrayed in our everyday lives and is a topic that is almost ignored by society. When the female is the main character she may escape the role of being a ‘damsel in distress’ or a side character that is exploited to move the story along but the stereotype is being replaced by being “characters that fight and play in skin-tight, revealing outfits” (Downs & Smith, 2009). This can be seen in video games like *Tomb Raider* where you play as archeologist Lara Croft who sports low-waisted shorts and a tight-fitting tank as her everyday wear; an outfit that emphasizes her small waist and breasts more than anything. The outfit of choice seemingly clashes with the fact that Lara Croft is an archaeologist who wouldn’t be seen without the proper attire for excavation.

The development of female characters can also be seen in classic fighting games like *Mortal Kombat* where you can see Princess Katana in a skin-tight bodysuit and soldier Sonya Blade in a tight crop top and fitted pants. Both of these characters in *Mortal Kombat* change appearance throughout the matches, as in *Mortal Kombat* and most two-dimensional combat games(e.g., *Street Fighter* and *Tekken*) remove characters' clothes when beaten enough. These choices were specifically thought out with the male gaze in mind, tending to their largest audience and making more sales.

Developers portray only women in these games the clothes are removed, almost like they are placed on purpose, ripping or having missing pieces along the chest or excessive pieces around the thighs. There are also multiple conversations in the gaming community online that talk about this in two-dimensional video games. In an open online forum called Reddit, a community specializing in gaming the question was asked “Would you want MK12 [Mortal Kombat 12] to have ripped clothes featured from MK9 [Mortal Kombat 9] ?” The responses were surprising in the least possible way. Multiple profiles of the community responded with “I want them to be completely naked by the end of the fight”, or “Yes in a sexualized way. I not gonna complain about the new MK [Mortal Kombat] being prudish, but I do like when MK [Mortal Kombat] is coomer bait”. This summarizes that it is sexualized but is welcomed as it provides masturbation material for men. There are also those who realize this perverted behavior within games like this and have called upon developers to become more realistic with their characters and how they are developed with battle damage saying “I'm all for the battle damage, blood bruises all that good stuff...if someone just completely dominates Mileena (character in Mortal Kombat), is she going to be naked at the end of the fight?”. Mileena is a character within Mortal Kombat who is known for wearing a pink leotard suit, a long revealing black robe, or a short revealing pink robe with high boots and a mask.

The community is aware of what the developers are doing and how they are feeding into the problem of female video game characters. Giving attention to video games makes developers produce more products that showcase hypersexualized behavior and introduce hypersexualized concepts to younger generations of gamers (as well as gamers of all ages who are being introduced to this type of content).

Hypersexuality And Gender: Where Does It Start?

Hypersexuality in video games isn't anything new or a topic that hasn't been touched before. The term can have a lot of different interpretations and can be "used as a synonym for depictions of overtly sexualized characters" (Downs & Smith, 2011) in the context of women. In a study for gender role stereotyping in 47 games "males were dramatically over-represented relative to female characters by a ratio of approximately 5 to 1" (Downs & Smith, 2009) and that within the under-representation of the female characters were "six times more likely to have a low-cut neckline and 41% of those women whose busts could be seen were characterized as voluptuous" (Burgess et al., 2009). This type of behavior from developers in video games is in the least surprising when you look at it from a capitalist standpoint. The market of the videogame industry is hyper-focused on selling a game fast and making it enjoyable for the gaming community. With the gaming community being primarily dominated by males, developers turn to the male gaze as their market to focus on. Noelle Haslam gives input on how developers and the market have focused on targeting boys and men through the over-sexualization of women and how "sex and violence have become cheap industrial ingredients" (Downs & Smith, 2009). It is these two elements that now serve a large role within the gaming community and developers turn these two elements to make their game sell and become popular.

The use of sexual content in video games can be seen not only in action/fighting games but has now spread to appear in psychological horror (e.g Doki Doki Literature Club), musical rhythm-based games (Hatsune Miku), and even in more casual games (Jet Set Radio). However, Sexual content in video games can serve different purposes as well. A "basic level sexual content may simply be used for aesthetic purposes...more complex level sexual content may also be part of the main mechanics of video game allowing players to directly control the sex act with virtual characters...can also function as a form of reward" (Yao et al., 2009). This can be tactful for

developers to make their audience more likely to consume their product and the way that the message of sex and the appeal to the male gaze can be subliminal and almost hard to recognize when not paying attention. Sexual content doesn't have to be an in-your-face presentation with language, images, or actions but can be presented in a way that is suggestive and can linger on.

An example of a sexualized perspective like this can be seen in Resident Evil 8, where you play as father Ethan Winters as he travels through the game's castle to meet Lady Dimitrescu. She is a 9-foot-6 vampire with a long white dress that covers the majority of her body with a big hat. When looking and reading the description of her design, she is designed normally proportioned and yet became hypersexualized through fetishization. A sub-group within the gaming community who have size fetishes took the character by storm from a leak of her design by developer CapCom and Lady Dimitrescu became a victim of the male gaze. It had gotten so popular across all media that developers changed the character itself enhancing her butt and breast to a larger proportion. Developers even added a scene where the player would have to sneak up and paddle her butt with a fly swatter to appeal to fan service.

Effects of Stereotypes and Sexualization on Women

The promotion of the male gaze from developers to the community around them can have harmful effects on women and cause damage to the community that they are in. Some of the effects can be seen through the “differences between female body sizes in the media and actual body sizes have been linked to eating disorders, low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and feelings of objectification” (Downs & Smith, 2009). This message is important to note especially since unrealistic beauty standards have always been a problem in society; with today's diversity and now having major influencers be open with body positivity, the problem should be

decreasing. It is the need to constantly cater to the male gaze that is not breaking the cycle that is harming the female psyche and especially women of the gaming community.

Sexual Harassment in the Community

The hyper-sexualization of women in video games also creates a hostile environment for women both inside and outside of the community as “studies have shown that exposure to violent sexual content in which woman appears to be responsible for her own victimizations or appears to be sexually aroused can result in changes in men’s cognitive appraisal and acceptance of sexual violence” (Yao et al., 2009). This creates a huge setback within the community due to the fact that women today as well as men have created a huge platform that is made to support and help sexual assault victims. As developers using these behaviors in video games and the exposure of it to men and younger generations desensitize the fact that these behaviors are wrong. This behavior can be seen immensely in the Grand Theft Auto series, players have full mobility to do almost any action they want to which includes going to the strip club, hitting and harming women and others, as well as verbally abusing women and others. The series itself has been worth over \$9.9 billion dollars since its first release in 1997 and is a game that is known and has an ever-growing community to this day. This mainly stems from the lack of consequences within the game that allow the reader to do whatever they please.

As this destructive behavior may be translated in video games the harassment towards women is being translated into real life as well. It is stated that “in gaming culture, women are often harassed because they are perceived as an outsider and intrusive minority” (Tang et al., 2019). This can be seen through the competitive nature of men in online gaming. It is through most popular franchises like the Call Of Duty series and now popular Battle Royal games like Fortnite where harassment is most likely to take place. It is when tensions are high, that gamers

tend to be more aggressive with their words. As an example, “men seem to play games more in general and exhibit problematic gaming behavior more frequently, whereas women play games for social reasons more often” (Kneer et al., 2022). Women can also show these signs of aggression as well and cause harassment to the community that surrounds them but it is the language and saying that men use that make it different from other forms.

Another point of view to look at is when female players are being denied as “real” gamers but as “fake geek girls”; their harassment is deemed on social cues such as usernames, avatars, or profile images (Tang et al., 2019). In today’s society and in the gaming industry this behavior is shown most frequently in Twitch. A platform where a diverse crowd can stream to online viewers and interact with an online community as a streamer.

There are many female streamers within this business who broadcast video games for crowds to watch and interact with but the reactions from the audience aren’t always positive for the streamer herself. Sweet Anita is a thirty-year-old streamer who opened up about her experience being a female gamer who streams when one day she stumbled upon a subreddit claiming to host “NSFW” photos of her (Cook, 2021). It was a community who watched her streams and took pictures of when she showed cleavage, or revealing parts of skin that would show when she got up from her chair. This harassment continues to affect women in the video game community and even in their careers as gamers as well. Twitch has tightened harassment guidelines and guidelines for streamers to prevent these behaviors from occurring in the first place. These guidelines are now used to protect female and male counterparts from harassment as shown above from occurring again.

It is this type of behavior that makes the community less welcoming to diversity and women who have shown interest in the gaming community. Examples of these can consist of

sexist comments or insults, comments regarding a player's physical appearance, and rape jokes (Tang et al., 2022).

There are two common types of sexism that can be related back to work but also prominent in the gaming community first *Hostile sexism*, which can be defined as an antipathy towards women and a sense of superiority over women. This type characterizes women as manipulative and trying to dominate men due to women's inherent inferiority. The second is *Benevolent sexism* which can be portrayed as a paternalistic attitude towards women due to the rigid views of gender roles. Showcases women to be seen as weak and incapable of accomplishing the same as men which leads to the conclusion that women should be protected by men (Tang & Fox, 2022). Men translate these behaviors in the way that they act and speak online, finding others who have similar behaviors within the gaming community.

These types of interactions are common within the work environment and in gaming society it is becoming desensitized to the point where younger generations are picking up on this pattern of behaviors. Referencing an earlier topic, this can be seen on many platforms including streaming platforms like Twitch, YouTube, and TikTok. Experiences from females have been broadcasted in compilations and posted to the internet to show how men treat women within the games they play. Most popular games showcasing these examples in online gaming services like 'Call of Duty', 'Valorant', 'Overwatch', and 'League of Legends'. These games are offered to such a diverse and open platform to work allowing these types of harassment and mistreatment to take place almost easily. The only situation that can truly happen to someone who reported this behavior would be a suspension or elimination of the profile/player who said harmful things.

Conclusion

The misrepresentation of women in video games creates a hostile environment by the

men and developers within the gaming community. This type of behavior is created by developers appealing to the male gaze and profiting off of fan service that the male part of the gaming community wants to see. These actions create a desensitization for younger gamers and gamers who are new to the community to see this behavior and abuse. This can lead the newer generations of gamers to watch this behavior and think that it's okay to continue. Harassment towards women sexually and verbally has become so desensitized within the gaming community that it can be translated now into the work environment and even be categorized into a patterned form of sexism. In order to stop the over-sexualization and objectification of women in video games the actions of men and developers who make the video games need to listen to the voices of the minority and correct this behavior the gaming community a safer place for women.

This safer space can be made through more regulations and accountability for developers to recognize this destructive behavior that is being presented. The more the gaming community recognizes this problem within themselves the easier it will be to address and correct this behavior within the community. To have developers be more aware of what they are contributing to the gaming community and to find ways to still make a profit without the exploitation of women is possible in many ways. It is simply for developers to recognize that the mistreatment and stereotypes of women in their video games are doing more harm than good for their products.

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