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Sexism in Gaming

According to the BBC, “Online abuse has been prevalent in the gaming community for years. Notably, in 2014 and 2015, it played a major role in the so-called Gamergate controversy, when people on both sides of the furor complained of harassment” ("100 Women 2016: The women challenging sexism in e-sports" 2016). Sexism is extremely evident in gaming. When advertisers market video games toward male gamers and ignores the female gamers, this form of sexism hurts the game makers' profits and creates an uncomfortable environment for the players.

Sexism in gaming has not been around since the beginning. The first ever game created, *Pong*, was advertised to the whole family (Lien 2013). Another game that would be equally popular with females is the game *Pac-Man*. When it came time to renew the game for a sequel, the developers of *Pac-Man* made a female protagonist, *Ms. Pac-Man* (Burns 2015). This would last until the video game crash of 1983 (Oxford 2011), which happened because greedy video game publishers made terrible games such as, *I Want My Mommy*, *Lost Luggage*, and the game that is regarded as the worst among all gamers worldwide, *E.T.* (Hooper 2016).

Sexism started in gaming because of a decision made by Nintendo for the Nintendo Entertainment System otherwise known as the N.E.S. This decision started sexism in gaming because at first the N.E.S. was advertised towards 10-year-old boys. This choice was made after Nintendo conducted research that stated that boys were more likely to enjoy games, and technology as a whole, than girls were. This also help start the rumor is that women are not good at gaming, but in reality, is not true, for example a YouTuber by the name of iHasCupquake as the most subscribed gaming YouTuber (Hills 2018).

Aspects of the uncomfortable environment includes clothing worn by female characters, how female characters are portraited in video games, and actions taken by male characters towards female characters. One game that would come to mind is Rockstar’s game series, *Grand Theft Auto*. This game has gotten bad notoriety for having sexual content, such as the character is allowed to sexually assault female victims and is also allowed to go to a gentlemen’s club and sexually assault the women at the club. The worst part is that according to Time, people playing games like *Grand Theft Auto* identify with their character and his actions (Sifferlin 2016). For these reasons the game series has been banned in many countries such as Australia. Australia banned this game because of a few women banding together to ban a game that promoted sexual assault on women (Saar 2015).

Sexism makes gaming uncomfortable when the women are portraited as being “inviting.” For example, the character Tracer of *Overwatch*’spose she does when the player gets most of the kills in the game, got a lot of dissatisfaction with the female audience because of how tight her suit was and how it was hugging her “behind”. The problem was noticed by the game’s director, Jeff Kaplan, so he completely took away the pose in order to make a comfortable environment for the *Overwatch* communities. According to *Kotaku*, Jeff Kaplan said, “we want \*everyone\* to feel strong and heroic in our community. The last thing we want to do is make someone feel uncomfortable, under-appreciated, or misrepresented. Apologies and we’ll continue to try to do better” (Grayson 2016). It also does not help when any female gamer is playing multiplayer games and she gets attacked for being a girl. For example, according to Ethan Gilsdorf of *cognoscenti*: “One gamer known as TheIneffableSwede recently reported her story of playing in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) and the abuse she received: ‘Whenever I won against my opponents, which I did almost always, some male players would threaten to rape, mutilate, or even kill me (but rape was by far the most frequent threat)” (Gilsdorf 2013).

Sexism also can poke its ugly head in how women are portraited in gaming. Throughout gaming, armor for the female charecters in the games tends to portray women as objects. The clothing for female characters in video games is generally designed to “please” the male eye. Usually armor gets smaller and smaller as time goes on in the video game until the armor only covers the females “attributes”, which makes the women portraited as being seductive and inviting. One of the characters that come to mind is one from the *Dead or Alive*, which is a fighting game, Tina Armstrong. Tina’s reasons for joining the fight in the game is that she wants to be noticed for an actress or modelers positions (Zobel de Ayala 2014).

Female characters in video games are also usually portrayed as helpless and inferior. For example, the damsel in distress known as Princess Peach, from one of the well know games ever known *Super Mario Bros.* To put it simply, Mario and Luigi, the two-main protagonists of the games, watch Princess Peach get kidnapped by Bowser. Mario and Luigi go through worlds and castles to hear that “the princess is in another castle,” from the Princess Peach’s subject named Toad. Once Mario and Luigi reach the final castle, Bowser’s castle, and defeat Bowser, Mario and Luigi gets to eat cake with Princess Peach. This trope of the man saving the women is not limited to gaming, movies such as *Masters of the Universe*, *Superman II*, and *Deadpool*. This trope of this makes women look weak, when in reality women are not, take for example, Air Force Gen. Lori Robinson, who became the United States of America’s highest ranking official in the United States.

Also, *Tomb Raider*, a game of a female adventurer named Laura Croft goes on adventures to ancient ruins and fighting ninjas and dinosaurs (Fear 2018). In the video games, the main character, Lara Croft, has large breasts to appeal mostly to male audiences. When the first Tomb Raider movie came out, there was a public outcry over the female actress’s breast size. Most men who had played the game believed that the actress portraying Lara Croft should have large breasts or they would lose interest in the character.

Sexism has been present in gaming for a long period of time and still present today. When advertisers market video games toward male gamers and ignores the female gamers, this form of sexism hurts the game makers' profits and creates an uncomfortable environment for the players. Because gaming is becoming more and more prevalent in today’s society, sexism is a major problem with how the gaming industry is portraited, and it should be addressed. With the history of how sexism was started in games, with Nintendo pretty much only advertising to boys. The ways that sexism is installed in games, such as *Overwatch*’s character Tracer with her victory behind pose. Also, while women like Laura Croft can be empowering to women for what she does, but Laura is not there to empower ladies she is there to sell the game. This is why sexism is prevalent in gaming.

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