Video Games and Their Power Over Me

I still get embarrassed sometimes on Christmas and my birthday when my family gives me gifts. They are all extremely thoughtful, they are what I asked for, and I am very appreciative of them, but I can't help just wanting to hide them up from some people. I can see the judgmental look on the faces of my cousins, my aunts-in-law, and my grandmother. I guess I can't blame them. They are just looking at a 20-year-old girl who asked for games like Assassin's Creed and Red Dead Redemption. "No, really, Grandma! I only like shooting people in video games!"

There was a time when everyone tried to get me out of my video game phase. Apparently, they thought that video games weren't the proper way for a young girl to spend her time. They attempted to break me with Nancy Drew and Barbie computer games. And don't get me wrong, I beat the crap out of those video games. There wasn't a My Little Pony that I couldn't successfully jump over a rainbow waterfall filled with candy fish, but, in the end, I wanted games that actually challenged me. So, why don't other girls feel this way? After all, as Lizzy Cuevas so delicately put it, "Having a vag doesn't mean our thumbs don't work" (Cuevas). Are they afraid of the shame that sometimes goes along with it? Is it because they are afraid to defy the norms of the way that females should act? Is it the fact that in most of the games that are popular now you have to either be a beefy, testosterone-enriched male character or a buxom, Victoria's Secret model-like female figure?

Let's look at that last question specifically. Most of the video games nowadays have you playing as male characters that have histories that include killing their wife and daughter in a fit of rage (God of War) or murdering a prostitute after having sex with her to get your money back (Grand Theft Auto). While it is a completely different discussion to ask how video games could be affecting males, let's just focus on how females are treated in these games. In God of War, the main character, Kratos, is remorseful for killing his wife and daughter, but he decides to show it by exacting revenge through basically murdering and destroying anything that gets in his way, including innocent bystanders. Females are no exception to Kratos. Unfortunately, there is also no female strong enough to stand up to the power of Kratos and his murdering ways.

In Grand Theft Auto (GTA), strippers and prostitutes are familiar faces. Rockstar Games, producer and developer of GTA, makes sure that they all look very similar, except for the occasional change in skin color, hair, and color of the skimpy clothes. In Bernadette Barton's "Dancing on the Möbius Strip: Challenging the Sex War Paradigm," she discusses how many of the males that come in to watch the dancers see them as no more than objects that are there for their own use (Barton). Who is to say that young males are not learning this lesson from their
video games? Especially when they are placed in the exact same situation, except one is actual and one is virtual. There is no regard given to the sex workers that are present in this game. They are seen by the players as no more than objectified props.

If you do get the opportunity to play as a female avatar, it is with characters like Lara Croft. Although she is quite the badass and has become more conservative over time, it is still not reasonable to say that she is realistic. I mean, come on, she dresses like that while shooting at people, (or T-Rexes), simultaneously doing jumps and flips, and she never once has a Janet Jackson Superbowl moment? Joking aside, the developers of the game know that their primary market is young men who want to look at women with a body like Lara Croft’s, so they give the consumers what they want. Where does that leave the females who want play? Obviously, Lara Croft is a very strong female character that is fun to play as, but it still brings up feelings of inadequacy when looking at her body.

While it can certainly be said that the video game empire is dominated by males, there are aspects of the video gaming world that are hopeful and progressive for females. My next discussion does not include all, or even the most important, steps forward that the industry has taken when it comes to females and gaming, but it does include two people and one website that I think stand out as progressive entities.

One female character that you have to appreciate is Samus. In the video game *Metroid*, the entire video game world was shocked when it was revealed that Samus was, in fact, a woman. Within her suit, it appears that Samus could be either sex, but since most video game protagonists are male, it was just assumed Samus was as well. After all, it is commonly known that males are the only ones allowed to wear beastly armor and wield laser cannons. There have been attempts to turn Samus into a sex symbol, which is very apparent when perusing Google images, but in the end, most of the gaming world views Samus as an empowered female who is always ready to kick some alien butt.

*Girl Gamer* is a website devoted to the ladies out there who like to bash in zombies’ heads, drive with excessive road rage, or save the day as the Caped Crusader. While it still appears to be in a state of construction, the fact that it exists and is progressing forward is an uplifting sight. It even has a tab labeled, “ZINE.” Yay! While the website has
many articles that review popular games, it is refreshing to see articles such as, “Dragons vs. Unicorns: Where Kittens and Turtles Fight to the Death,” which are a nice contrast to articles you usually see on male-dominated video game sites (GG-AngelThanatos).

Lexi Peters is a 14-year-old girl who I classify as a straight-up baller. Lexi is a fan of the NHL games, but she was not so excited that she could not create a customized character that looked like her since you could only craft players who are male. She decided to write to EA Sports to ask them to put the ability in the game to make female players. Quite surprisingly, EA Sports listened! They decided they would add females to the game, and in honor of Lexi, they are going to make her look the default female character (O'Brien). I’ll mark that down as a win for female gamers.

So let’s have a toast to Samus, to sites like Girl Gamer, and to Lexi Peters. That’s one small step for an avatar; one giant leap for ladygamer-kind.

“Up Next on ESPN...Women’s Sports?”

Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain, Hope Solo, Abby Womback, Michelle Wie, Shawn Johnson, Nastia Liukin, Alicia Sacramone, Lisa Leslie, that set of twins from the Disney Channel basketball movie, Michelle Kwan, Nancy Kerrigan, Tonya Harding, Venus Williams, Serena Williams, Billie Jean King, Maria Sharapova, Kim Clijsters, that track runner who was in the spotlight because her competitors thought she was a man, Jennie Finch, Dara Torres, Misty May-Treanor, Kerri Walsh, Lindsay Vonn, Picabo Street. Now, you may be thinking, “Wow, that is a lot of female athletes you just named there.” But is it really? I could name that many NFL players just from this season alone. I just sat here for twenty minutes thinking over every female athlete from the past 60 years that I could remember, and I came up with 26 women (minus the 3 whose names I don’t know). 26 WOMEN!!! I am ashamed of myself.

Pretty much every female friend I have has played a sport at one time in her life. Most of them are extremely passionate about the sports they played, and, if they are done playing, reminisce of those times very fondly. So why is there no transition from playing women’s sports to watching women’s sports? I don’t believe it is because