

From Console Wars to Flame Wars: The Evolution of Masculinity in Video Games

by

Eric Anthony Vero

A thesis

presented to the University Of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

history

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2018

© Eric Anthony Vero 2018

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Today, gaming culture stands at a critical junction. Either it must adapt to house new diverse voices within its community, or be stationary in its old norms and mores. Specifically, female gamers are excluded from having a voice by the predominantly male presence within gaming culture. Overall, masculinity pervades gaming culture, and has since the beginning of video gaming. This thesis charts the evolution of masculinity within video game culture, examining the early days of video game arcades all the way to online culture on forums. Using print and web sources from online archives, this thesis explores how masculinity in gaming was about competition and violence, and intensified with the introduction of the Internet.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my ever supportive supervisor Ian Milligan. Without his guidance, this thesis would not be what it is. Thanks are also in order for Andrew Hunt and Geoffrey Hayes for challenging me in my defence, and inciting me to ask further questions about my topic. During the difficult times of the thesis (and even when things were okay), my loved ones were critical in their support of my efforts, and so I am grateful towards them. Everyone was supportive in my efforts, and that made all of the difference.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
1) Blasting Spaceships and Saving the Damsel: Generation G and the “introduction” of women into gaming.....	9
2) The split in video game masculinity: The console war, hypermasculinity, and controversy.....	34
3) “Fanboy antics” The 32-bit generation and how the Internet changed gaming culture..	67
Conclusion.....	97
Bibliography.....	103

“I am not throwing away my shot”

- Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton: An American Musical*

Introduction

Today, gaming culture stands at a critical junction. Either it must adapt to house new diverse voices within its community, or be stationary in its old norms and mores. Specifically, female gamers are excluded from having a voice by the predominantly male presence within gaming culture. Overall, masculinity pervades gaming culture, and as this thesis shows, has since the earliest days of video gaming. Recently, though, in the past couple of decades, male voices have become overtly hostile towards female gamers. Brianna Wu, a video game developer, wrote an opinion piece titled “No skin thick enough: The daily harassment of women in the game industry” for the game site *Polygon* in 2014, detailing the harassment that she, and other women in the video game industry experienced. She wrote, “Sometimes, I write about issues in the game industry that relate to the equality of women. My reward is that I regularly have men threatening to rape and commit acts of violence against me.” She concluded, “The industry is currently in the midst of a massive cultural shift. There’s a growing disconnect between the nearly half of gamers that are female, and overwhelmingly male population of game journalists and game developers.”¹ People’s lives are literally threatened due to a cultural force that is hanging on with a dying old guard in a community that stretches back several decades.

A critical examination of the development of masculinity within video game culture is necessary, in order to understand why there is such toxicity in the industry today. How is it that seemingly harmlessly playing with blips and bloopers on an arcade screen has turned into something nefarious, and full of hatred? My thesis explores how masculinity within video game culture evolved since the 1980s to produce the harassment that exists today. The work that has

¹ Brianna Wu, “No Skin Thick Enough: The Daily Harassment of Women in the Game Industry - Polygon,” *Polygon*, July 22, 2014, <https://www.polygon.com/2014/7/22/5926193/women-gaming-harassment>.

been done on video game history has focused on the industry's development, and little work has been done on the history of video game culture, no less an in-depth study of how masculinity manifested itself through the history of video games. I argue that the history of video game culture is one of the continuity of a masculinity that increasingly became more mature and competitive until the Internet, due to its unique traits of allowing for increased anonymity and connection to like-minded individuals, allowed male gamers to dominate their culture, and have the loudest voice in the room. The culture that they were inculcated with quickly intensified as they created a more complex sense of identities surrounding opinions on gaming. In all of this, female gamers, who were always marginalized within the gaming community, were further put into a masculine space that was toxic towards them. The reason for today's currently hostile force against women in the gaming community is the result of masculine norms being intensified by the Internet.

Methodology

I use two types of primary sources for my research. I begin with, and mainly use, digitized video game magazines that can be found on the *Internet Archive* (archive.org). Their "Magazine Rack" is a veritable treasure chest of scanned magazines that feature a wide range of topics, most importantly a robust section of video game magazines. I use them in all of my chapters, but mainly the first two. A benefit of these sources is that they are easily accessed, and are of high quality. However, due to the nature of online archives, there is a lack of consistency. I went back to consult magazines that I used, and found some gone from the archives. The magazine in question is *Electronic Games Magazine*, the first American gaming magazine that started in 1981. This is something unique to using online archives. Physical archives will almost always

have their material (unless there is some kind of accident that destroys it). The Internet is always changing as it is not physical, and so one potential hazard of using archived magazines is that they may not be consistently accessible to researchers.

Additionally, there are licensing issues with what can be stored in an online archive. I could only get my hands on *Nintendo Power* through a download link on an online forum. The *Internet Archive* used to house the magazine, but Nintendo ordered them to remove the files. Again, the liquid nature of the Internet causes issues for finding sources.

The other kind of source I used was archived web forum pages on the *Internet Archive's* Wayback Machine. The system allows a user to search for a website, and see how it evolved through time. A user can see snapshots that were taken by bots, just as if they were looking at the page in the past. However, there are many issues with using the system. It can only show you what was captured by bots. The farther back a user goes, the less likely they will be able to find a page. This is why I could only begin using these web sources in the early 2000s despite web forums existing before then. Additionally, a page's links do not always work. A bot would have needed to crawl that link also, in order for the user to be able to click on it, and arrive at the destination page. This meant that there were many dead links that inhibited my research. A promising forum post title often times resulted in a blank page. This is why I needed to use a wide range of website forums to get enough material for this thesis.

Overall, though, despite these problems associated with digital sources, both magazines and forums provided an ample foundation for my examination of masculinity within video game culture. These are the places where the gamer's voice was heard. It was also where the gamer "identity" was advertised. It is through looking at what gamers had to say in these media, and

how they were advertised to that we are able to understand the nuances of masculinity within this culture.

In order to understand how fans engage with their material, I turn to Henry Jenkins and his theories of fans and their cultures. In *Textual Poachers*, he approaches his study of fan culture as “a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement.”² I will also approach my study of masculinity in this way. Male gamers, as I argue, made meaning in their culture in deep and complex ways. They negotiated their masculinity with aspects of the video game industry. Most fundamentally, male gamers deeply engaged with their culture, and crafted their own aspect of it. In many ways, it was their own, as the industry catered to their desires for profit. Additionally, Jenkins’ book “describes a social group struggling to define its own culture and to construct its own community...”³ Gaming culture evolved over the course of several decades, and at all times male gamers were constructing their own meaning of masculinity in its relation to gaming.

Structure and argument

In chapter one, I begin with the early 1980s after a brief look into how the video game industry came to be. I start in the early 1980s, because this period gives insight into the video game boom that has grown a distinct video game culture. This is the first major period of mass culture around video games, because there are print sources that come into being. It is also when the kids who were born at a time in which they would not remember a time before video games were becoming young adults. This is key to understand, because this generation will grow up

² Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

throughout this thesis, and so will video game culture. In this chapter, I examine how video games were moulded by the key demographic: young males. They were full of competition and violence, shaping games for years to come. I examine how gaming culture at the time best embodied masculinity, and how the culture responded to the “introduction” of female gamers. In this chapter, I also argue that female gamers were being introduced into a masculine gaming culture that catered to a young male audience through violence and competition. Female gamers were given a tiny spot within this culture, allowed to stand on the sidelines while the boys played at football, and shoot-em-ups. At this time, the masculinity present within gaming culture was next to harmless. There were some elements that were more mature, certainly, but they were in the minority, and the main focus was on kids who wanted to engage in fantasy violence.

In my second chapter, I pick up after the video game crash of the mid-1980s, and examine the titanic struggle between Nintendo and Sega in the console wars that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s and how they epitomized different perspectives in the role and audience of video games. The first round was with the consoles with 8 bits, bits in this context referring to how many bits of data the console can access in a single operation.⁴ The important consoles are the Nintendo Entertainment System, and the Sega Master System. However, I focus on the NES due to it beginning that generation, and because it revived the video game industry in the United States. I examine Nintendo’s official magazine, *Nintendo Power*. It is the voice of Nintendo’s video game culture, and is full of game guides, and fan letters that provide a useful look into Nintendo’s fan base. In the 16-bit generation, I focus on both Nintendo and Sega, because Sega’s new console, the Genesis, presented a true challenge to Nintendo, and found

⁴ Dominic Arsenault, “System Profile: The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES),” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and Beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 112.

great success with a newly forming audience. For the Genesis, I look into Sega's own official magazine, *Sega Visions*. It functioned much like *Nintendo Power* in that it provided game tips, advertised to its audience, and published letters from Sega fans. I compare and contrast the two magazines. The key difference between the two companies is their audiences. Nintendo focused on creating a family-friendly atmosphere that was open to all. Sega, on the other hand, crafted a mature environment that was meant for older players, particularly males. Overall, there was continuity in these two generations from the previous ones, in that there was masculine competition, and violence, but Sega's entry into the market with a mature audience meant that there was a split in masculinity within video game culture. Sega created a hypermasculine space. Additionally, another layer, more intense aspect of competition was injected into video game culture through the sometimes vicious console war between the two companies that pitted the two fandoms against each other. Female gamers in this masculine space carved out more space during this period, but it still was very much a masculine space, certainly with Sega's influence on the culture. However, female gamers were welcomed into Nintendo's fandom as shown in the pages of *Nintendo Power*. They were portrayed equally with male gamers. Overall, though, gaming was becoming more mature, and this incited controversy, culminating in the senate hearings over *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*, two games that shocked concerned parents and lawmakers. Video game culture was undergoing changes, but there were still many continuities. The major change, I argue, is that there was no radical shift in masculinity in video game culture, but there was a split between Nintendo's more family-friendly culture, and Sega's hypermasculine culture, epitomized in the video game violence controversies in 1993.

In my third and final chapter, I begin by examining the next console war in the 32-bit generation that included consoles like the Nintendo 64, the Sony PlayStation, and the Sega

Saturn. After a look at how Sega began its descent in the wake of Sony's success, I examine how video game culture continued to become more mature in its game, and how it marketed itself to a generation of gamers that was growing up. Sony took the torch from Sega in upping the hypermasculine aspect of gaming culture. I then enter the next generation (beginning in the early 2000s), but change my sources to look at archived web forums. The Internet fundamentally impacted gaming culture as it allowed for gamers to connect in unprecedented ways. Now there was an almost unmediated way for gamers to disparage each other over their console preferences. I argue in this chapter that the Internet created a distinct turn in the history of video game culture's history. The masculinity present in previous generations escalated due to the Internet user's ability to become anonymous, and connect with like-minded individuals with little to no mediation. *Nintendo Power* and *Sega Visions* decided to include certain letters for good reasons, and to stay on brand. However, on the Internet, fans could write their thoughts for other fans without having to worry about real repercussions. Female gamers in this space were once again put on the sidelines, and in a masculine world that objectified them.

I am in a similar position as Jenkins when he talks about fan cultures. He writes “*both as an academic...and as a fan...*”⁵ I have been a gamer ever since I can recall. I remember playing the NES in my grandparents' basement. I am proud of my status as a gamer. I believe in the good of this community. But, I have also seen horrible things that overwhelmingly cast it in a difficult position to reconcile with. I intend for this account to help us better understand why the toxic things are the way they are. I also have seen good things in the community that have been accomplished through the Internet. The Internet is not inherently good or bad, despite how I argue about it here. In fact, I hope that this account can help gamers better use the Internet for

⁵ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 5.

good, and have particularly male gamers question their assumptions about their identity as members of this community. I also mention that I am a male gamer to let the reader know of any biases that I may have that could somehow jeopardize my arguments. I have sought to remove any of my preconceptions of gaming culture that have been programmed into me since I began interacting with the culture at a young age. I do know, however, that this research will contribute to our understanding of how fan communities operate, and why masculinity can be toxic, and thus dangerous. Everyone who comes to the table wanting to play games deserves a place there, regardless of their gender, age, or beliefs. This account was born out of this principle.

Chapter One: Blasting Spaceships and Saving the Damsel: Generation G and the “introduction” of women into gaming

On the cover of the winter premiere issue of *Electronic Games Magazine*, a boy, joystick in hand, stands in front of a screen of *Space Invaders* with flying saucers zooming toward him.¹ He stands ready to annihilate the enemy invaders, primed to deal with any competition that the game throws his way. This was the first American magazine for video games, founded in 1981, and it is of no surprise that the focus of its first cover reflects its target audience. Boys and young men were overwhelmingly the demographic for video games during the early eighties, and the popular video games of the time were moulded by this audience. As demonstrated by the boy on the cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*, demands from the gaming industry’s target audience shifted games towards a violent, competitive stance.

The best available sources to understand gaming culture during the early eighties are gaming magazines. Before the advent of the Web, these print sources were how gamers learned news about the industry. Their advertisements and their discussions on games were written for the audience that defined itself as gamers. A poll conducted by *Electronic Games Magazine* of their readers showcases the readership for gaming magazines. Of those surveyed, the typical arcade player was male and twenty-five.² Just less than half had education beyond grade twelve, and nearly one in four were in high school.³ On average, those surveyed played games for five hours a week with a large percentage spending over ten hours per week.⁴ Gaming as a hobby was important to this demographic. These statistics reveal that video game culture at the time was

¹ Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*, Winter 1981.

² Arnie Katz, “Switch On,” *Electronic Games Magazine*, May 1982, 6.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

made up of young males who had enough time on their hands to become heavily involved in an engrossing hobby. Even though gaming was a casual pursuit, young males engaged deeply with it. Given the male-dominated dynamic, however, we need to consider how female gamers fit into the overall culture during the early 1980s. Female gamers were on the sidelines of gaming culture since the beginning. Gaming culture began to recognize female gamers in the early 1980s, but it regarded them as a novelty. In this chapter, I examine how gaming culture embodied masculinity during the early 1980s, and how the culture responded to female gamers as part of the culture.

The chapter begins in the 1980s for several reasons. Video games in arcades and in homes, as I will demonstrate later, had become firmly established by this point, allowing for the formation of a distinctive culture. Additionally, Generation G was beginning to engage with gaming. Generation G consists of people born in the early 1970s who had greater access to games than ever before due to the growth of arcade video games and home consoles. From then on, each subsequent generation also would grow up having access to games.⁵ Finally, video game magazines began publishing in the early 1980s, which give a rich primary source base to examine the topic. The magazines are an example of how gamers engaged with their culture, which the video game industry was influencing to target their young male audience.⁶

In this chapter, I argue that during this period female gamers were introduced into a masculine gaming culture that catered to young males through violent and competitive games. Although female gamers were welcome to play shoulder-to-shoulder at an arcade machine, the

⁵ Peter Zackariasson and Timothy L. Wilson, "Marketing of Video Games," in *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*, ed. Peter Zackariasson and Timothy L. Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 58.

⁶ Carly A. Kocurek, "Identities," in *Debugging Game History*, ed. Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 238.

video game community's attitude was paternalistic, and crafted a subordinate place for women in the hierarchy in the community. Girls could be gamers, but they were still outsiders in a culture that prized masculinity. First I will outline the history of the video game industry up until the early 1980s. Then, I will examine how masculinity manifested itself in gaming culture through various game genres. Finally, I will examine how print culture reacted to the increasing number of female gamers. Through this, we learn how, since its beginning, masculinity was at the heart of gaming culture.

The Video Game Industry: An Introduction

Programming and playing computer games goes as far back as modern computers themselves. Alan Turing, considered to be the father of modern computing, began to create a computer chess game in 1947 (which had to be finished by others after his death). During the 1950s, games like *Checkers*, *Nim*, and *OXO* were created by computer scientists to demonstrate the capabilities of computers. The first game to gain popular traction was William Higinbotham and Robert V. Dvorak's *Tennis for Two*. Higinbotham, the head of the Brookhaven National Laboratory's Instrumentation Division, wanted to better engage visitors interested in computers. So, for Brookhaven's annual open house in 1958, Higinbotham and Dvorak programmed *Tennis for Two* on a machine meant to plot missile trajectories. The game was rudimentary, but incited interest. Two players used controllers with buttons to hit a ball back and forth. It was a hit among visitors.⁷

⁷ Richard Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games: From Atari To Xbox One* (London: Robinson, 2015), 16-19.

However, consumers did not have access to these computer games – personal computers were prohibitively expensive – and at first could only play electronic games at the arcades. Before video arcade games, there were pinball games, and electromechanical arcade games, which were popular during the 1960s and 1970s. Electromechanical arcade games had a range of genres. Some examples include the bowling game *Fantastic* (1968), the shooting game *Carnival Rifle* (1968), and the driving game *Drive Master* (1969). These games were in upright wooden cabinets with their controls in front of a display where the action took place, which became the model for video arcade game cabinets. Electromechanical arcade machines are distinguished from video arcade games for not having microprocessors or monitors, and for running on motors, switches, relays, and lights. Electromechanical arcade games were popular, but they often would break down due to their many moving parts. The arcade industry sought an alternative to this unreliable form of arcade games.⁸

The first notable commercially sold arcade video game was *Computer Space*, released in November 1971.⁹ Designed by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabny, it was based on *Spacewar!*, which was created in 1961 at MIT.¹⁰ Bushnell and Dabny then went on to incorporate Atari on June 27, 1972. Their first arcade release was the famous *Pong*, which, by the end of 1973, had sold 2,500 machines. The *Pong* revolution had begun. Meanwhile, outside of the arcade world, Ralph Baer created the Magnavox Odyssey, which was released on May 22, 1972. It was the first home video game console. Over that Christmas, it sold over 100,000 units. Wanting to seize the new frontier of the home console market, Atari released the home *Pong* console. It was released

⁸ Mark J. P. Wolf, “Arcade Games of the 1970s,” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and beyond* ed. by Mark J. P. Wolf (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 35.

⁹ In actuality, *Galaxy Game* was the first commercial game to be released, but it was a commercial failure.

¹⁰ Another game that was created to play around with the capabilities of computers.

as the Sears Tele-Game *Pong*, and it sold 150,000 units over Christmas 1975. It was only slightly better than the Odyssey, but its reputation from the arcades meant that it was a sure fire success. Atari then went on to release the Atari Video Computer System on September 11, 1977,¹¹ which was capable of removable cartridges. With so many companies making home video game consoles, however, there was a crash, with many companies bowing out of the industry. Despite this, Atari remained at the top.¹² Additionally, home computer games were on the rise. During the mid-1970s, as well, computer games were coming into their own with the entrance of home computers onto the market.¹³ Finally, back in the arcades at the end of the 1970s, the video arcade game industry was successful, becoming more popular than pinball games and electromechanical games.¹⁴

By the early 1980s, video game culture was well established and cemented in pop culture. Arcades were drowning in quarters, home computers were on the rise, and there was a raging battle between different home consoles that competed for the coveted place in front of the television in a family's den. While the video game industry crash was around the corner, the sector seemed ascendant. Throughout the 1970s, arcades had become prosperous and were forced to be innovative due to the competition of home consoles such as the Atari 2600.¹⁵ There was a wide range of game genres, from space games to shooting games, *Breakout* clones,¹⁶ and even board games.¹⁷ Atari was making good use of its patented scrolling, making *Football*, *Sky*

¹¹ Also known as the Atari 2600.

¹² Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games*, 33-50.

¹³ David H. Ahl, "Mainframe Games and Simulations," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History From Pong To Playstation® And Beyond* ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 31-34.

¹⁴ Wolf, "Arcade Games of the 1970s," 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-3.

¹⁶ Atari's *Breakout* was a widely copied game. The player has to knock a ball with a paddle to destroy all of the bricks at the top of the screen.

¹⁷ Wolf, "Arcade Games of the 1970s," 41-43.

Raider, and *Fire Truck* (a unique game in which two players controlled separate ends of a fire truck with a pair of wheels).¹⁸ There were many sports games, including Taito's *Trampoline*, Midway's *Shuffleboard*, Atari's *Sky Diver*, and Meadows Game's *Gypsy Juggler*.¹⁹ Sophisticated arcade video games spanned entire genres, being firmly established by the early 1980s. In 1980, the release of *Pac-Man* ushered in what is considered by the industry to be the "golden age" of arcade video games.²⁰ In 1981 there were 24,000 full arcades, 400,000 street locations, and 1.5 million arcade video games in operation.²¹ The arcade video game industry and its culture were massive.

However, arcades shared video games with home computers, where gaming culture also began to take root. Video games were extremely popular software for computer users, being the "killer app" that introduced the personal computer into homes.²² Whatever the computer, there was a game that could run on it. The Apple II provided ample specs for games that could begin to touch the fidelity of arcade video game machines, and even the TRS-80 (a computer limited to the ASCII character set) with limited graphics could still run text-based adventures. With so many computers on the market, computers were becoming more and more widespread.²³ In the home, just as in the arcade, more people were becoming gamers.

Perhaps more famous on the gaming home front than the adoption of personal computers was the competition between gaming consoles. Many companies sought to create successful consoles, but only Atari, Magnavox, and Coleco created more than one, and pushed forward the

¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

²¹ Mark J. P. Wolf, "Arcade Games of the 1980s," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 91.

²² Bob Rehak, "The Rise of the Home Computer," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 76.

²³ Ibid., 78.

technology to compete with the arcades.²⁴ By 1980, another heavy weight entered: Mattel's Intellivision.²⁵ Moving into the 1980s, then, there was a large base of games, systems, gamers and the culture that came along with them. Across the board for arcade video games, computer games, and home console games, there was a plethora of content centered on a specific demographic: young males.

“If you’ve got the guts, we’ve got the game” Masculinity in video games

Scholars have convincingly demonstrated that masculinity and the male gender are culturally associated with violence and competition. These assumptions are inherent throughout the academic literature on male exposure to violent and sexist video games. One study found that exposure to violence in video games was correlated to aggression, and that traditional masculinity ideology “moderate[d] the relationship between exposure to violent videogames and aggression.”²⁶ Another study found that male participants playing video games who identified with a masculine game character had less empathy for female violence victims. It concluded that masculine beliefs were reinforced by violent and sexist video games.²⁷ Indeed, when discussing masculinity and video games, commonly studies focus on how masculinity in video games is embodied through violence against women specifically.²⁸ Competition is also associated with

²⁴ Leonard Herman, “Early Home Video Game Systems,” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and beyond* ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ Kimberly D. Thomas and Ronald F. Levent, “Does the Endorsement of Traditional Masculinity Ideology Moderate the Relationship between Exposure to Violent Video Games and Aggression?,” *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 47.

²⁷ Alessandro Gabbiadini et al., “Acting like a Tough Guy: Violent-Sexist Video Games, Identification with Game Characters, Masculine Beliefs, & Empathy for Female Violence Victims,” ed. Andrew L. Geers, *PLOS ONE* 11, no. 4 (April 13, 2016): e0152121, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0152121.

²⁸ Victoria Simpson Beck et al., “Violence Against Women in Video Games: A Prequel or Sequel to Rape Myth Acceptance?,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27, no. 15 (October 2012): 3016–31, doi:10.1177/0886260512441078.

masculinity. One study found that in a competitive game, subjects were likely to think that their opponent was male than if they were in a cooperative situation.²⁹ I will use these assumptions when discussing violence and masculinity in my argument. These masculine norms are used by the industry to cater to male interest.³⁰ When discussing the periodicals in this chapter, I will examine how the industry during the early 1980s does so.

The magazines *Electronic Games Magazine* and *Computer & Video Games* exhibit how the industry catered to the young male demographic. They included advertisements, articles, and also source code that a reader could type into their computer, in order to play a game. They are also the first video game magazines published in the United States. Let us take a look in depth at how the genre games of these periodicals exhibit masculinity. In a *Computer and Videogames* article that highlights new and upcoming games, common genres are seen. There is the science-fiction game *Super Invader* where “Your role as an intergalactic hero is to save your planet from the onslaught of a race of space warriors whose singular aim is to obliterate all life.”³¹ There is also a war game called *Capture The General* that has “a battalion of men under your command” where the player tries to “capture an enemy general.”³² *Quest For The Rings*, a thinly-veiled Tolkien rip-off, pits the player against enemies “ready to injure or destroy you at the slightest provocation...”³³ Comics showcasing a game’s action were also used as advertisements. In a later issue of *Computer & Video Games*, an advertisement of the game *Trader* shows an out of control ship in an asteroid field, an astronaut zapping with a laser gun a vicious crocodile-like

²⁹ Wesley C. King, Edward W. Miles, and Jane Kniska, “Boys Will Be Boys (and Girls Will Be Girls): The Attribution of Gender Role Stereotypes in a Gaming Situation,” *Sex Roles* 25, no. 11–12 (December 1, 1991): 607–23, doi:10.1007/BF00289567.

³⁰ Kocurek, 238-245.

³¹ “Video Screen,” *Computer & Video Games*, March 1982, 74.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 75.

alien, and an alien world.³⁴ All of these are gendered games for a particularly young male audience. Most of them involve violence, whether it is blasting aliens, or cleaving orcs in two. Even when there is no violence, such as the racing game, there is competition through sport.

Perhaps the most iconic genre in early video gaming is science fiction, which entailed the premise of blowing up alien ships, and this certainly was part of the programs of *Computer & Video Games*. “ZZZZZZZZZipppppppppp!” reads a game’s description overlaying a ship that looks similar to a Star Wars’ X-Wing.³⁵ In this game, *Alien Chase*, the player must stop aliens, but “Unfortunately the only way you can stop the runaway is pretty terminal. You blast him with a laser.”³⁶ In an “Invaders” clone called *Space Laser*, the player is “the attacker, controlling a laser firing base at the top of the screen while aliens come at you from their planet below.”³⁷ The gaming genre of science fiction was violent, even if it was cartoonish for having non-human victims terminated in awesome explosions.

The genre also could emphasize competition. One game called *Gorf*, a collection of science fiction mini-games, was called “A Game For Real Men” by *Computer and Video Games*.³⁸ The game was said to be challenging, and “The game also barks out an insult at the player when he loses a man.”³⁹ Even though the player’s adversary was not necessarily another player, the computer certainly was. Inherent in the challenging aspect of a video game was explicit masculine rhetoric. The player in *Gorf* was meant to shoot up aliens, but every time they

³⁴“The Trader Trilogy,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1982, 82.

³⁵ Janek Sirrs, “Alien Chase,” *Computer & Video Games*, December 1982, 38.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “Space Laser,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1982, 33.

³⁸ “Arcade Action,” *Computer & Video Games*, December 1982, 30.

³⁹ Ibid.

failed, the game would deride them for “not being man enough.” *Gorf* was virulent and aggressive in its deriding of the player for not being competitive enough.

The controls in these games also needed to feel visceral and therefore have a fidelity to actual violence. In the thirteenth issue of *Computer & Video Games*, a reviewer compared different “Invaders” clones. One game, *Spectral Invaders*, had the drawback of gun turrets “respond[ing] slowly to the keys” as they “did not explode until a split second after it had been hit...”⁴⁰ Additionally, “The Invaders themselves did not explode immediately they had been hit either – causing you to hesitate, unsure if you had hit them or not.”⁴¹ *Spectral Invaders*, wrote the reviewer, was the only one of the games compared that felt similar to the arcade version of *Space Invaders*.⁴² Using the controllers had to feel right. This tactile fidelity was important in order for the player to feel satisfaction in destroying their alien enemies. From the level of theming all the way to the physical realities of using the controller, science fiction games had to feel visceral. The player had to feel like they were really blowing up those aliens.

Another popular genre was fantasy. Much like in science fiction, the player fought inhuman baddies. However, the male fantasy of empowerment was slightly different. In *Save the Princess*, “Bad Baron Megabyte has imprisoned the beautiful Princess Minnie on the top floor of his nine storey castle. She is guarded by his minions who have orders to trample any intruder to death.”⁴³ Then, the male fantasy comes to the fore: “Armed with your magic crossbow, you, the brave knight Gothur Lothur Bott, have to find the keys to release her and then guide her to safety for a fairytale ending.”⁴⁴ The damsel in distress pervaded the genre of fantasy. In a game news

⁴⁰ “Software Reviews,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1982, 100.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ George Taylor, “Save the Princess,” *Computer & Video Games*, June 1982, 50.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

section of *Computer & Video Games*, the game called *The Knight's Day* includes a drawing of a goblin with his arm around a scantily clad woman.⁴⁵ The fantasy genre, unlike the science fiction genre, had the male fantasy of female objectification. *Save the Princess* was certainly not the first to have this, but this trend as we will see later blurs the line between video games as something for boys and something for men. Boys were being exposed to the sexualisation of women, and the playable characters allowed them to step into this fantasy.

The most realistic violence depicted in these video games was found in war games. They involved shooting enemies, but just not in space, and it was not as removed from reality. It involved harming actual people rather than orcs or aliens. At the very least, the implication was that the player was killing other human beings. In *City Bomb*, the player was “to blow away the entire city...”⁴⁶ Although the player was high above the city in the game, it is clearly implied that the citizens of the city below would be killed in the bombing. In *Dogfight*, the player duels with the Red Baron. “The joystick is used just like a real aircraft stick and the player has to fly his aircraft toward enemy planes and shoot them down.”⁴⁷ Once again, the tactile nature of controls is tied into the violent nature of the game. The game is meant to simulate actually flying and shooting a fighter plane.

Toughness was an essential part of the competition and violence. One game in *Computer & Video Games* called *Potshot* was a western game where the player was challenged to make trick shots. “Not just anybody can get served in the Computer & Video Games City Saloon. Newcomers are challenged to prove that they are good enough to drink with the other game players. The only way to prove what a player’s gotta prove, is by demonstrating your nerve and

⁴⁵ “Game News,” *Computer & Video Games*, December 1981, 13.

⁴⁶ Stephen Adams, “City Bomb,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1981, 55.

⁴⁷ Richard Barton, “Dogfight,” *Computer & Video Games*, December 1982, 63.

reactions in a few rounds of Pot Shot.”⁴⁸ *Potshot*’s challenge is wrapped in toughness, and overcoming this challenge results being part of a club of other elite players. Although it is a single player game, and the description is entirely for flavour, it is indicative of the video game culture’s propensity for having competition being about masculine pride.

Nowhere more could this tone be seen than in advertisements. On the back cover of *Electronic Games Magazine* for August 1982, a marine opens his camo jacket to display a t-shirt with a print of Activision’s *Chopper Command* on it.⁴⁹ “If you’ve got the guts,” says the ad, “we’ve got the game.”⁵⁰ The hyper-masculine imagery and language portray *Chopper Command* as a game for males ready to accept the challenge that the ad proposes. Young male gamers were participating in an amped competitive culture that was marketed directly to them.

Killing things was pervasive in games. Young male gamers were being masculine for their engagement with violence. Whether it be in the genre of fantasy, science fiction, or war, there was violence everywhere. Regardless of how cartoonish it may have been, the masculinity was strong within the games and culture.

Aside from killing things, masculinity can also be about competition. This is present in sports games, where male gamers lived out competitive fantasies. Football was a popular sport for games. *Electronic Games Magazine* devoted an entire six page article that discussed strategies for various football games.⁵¹ “Put two electronic sports game buffs together in a room,” stated the article, “and it won’t be long before they’re arguing the questions of which company makes the best videogame football cartridge. It’s an issue that will never be decided,

⁴⁸ Ivor Stones, “Potshot,” *Computer & Video Games*, December 1981, 46.

⁴⁹ Back cover of *Computer & Video Games*, August 1982.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Players Guide to Electronic Football,” *Electronic Games Magazine*, October 1982, 43-8.

simply because different people want different things out of their games.”⁵² Much like how sports fans debate which team is superior, sports video game aficionados argued over the merits of football video games. The realm of video games provided an ample environment for sports fans to enjoy their sport in, because of its competitive nature in both playing the game, but also in debating which game or console was best for their sport. Another aspect of the male sports fantasy that is present within this article is its portrayal of women. Illustrations throughout the article show burly football players in various states of play.⁵³ Right under an illustration of a kicker, there is another illustration of synchronized cheerleaders.⁵⁴ On the front cover of this issue is a cheerleader in front of a backdrop of one of the football video games.⁵⁵ The gender roles surrounding sports are clear. Young men were to play these sports (both physically and digitally) while young women were relegated to the sidelines. In this way, much like the other genres, video games served male audiences. Soccer was also a popular sport in games. In one game called *World Cup Manager*, the player takes on the role of a manager of a soccer team during the World Cup. The game is quite detailed and provides the player with lots of control over their team. The players can pick any of the 24 countries involved in the 1982 World Cup, and guide them even down to the level of tactics during a game.⁵⁶ The game plays to a young man’s gendered interest in sports and competition. Although it may not contain violence, *World Cup Manager* appealed to a male audience for being about competition.

However, not all games were gendered, and some avoided violence, opting for more family-friendly entertainment. Sometimes these games were puzzle games, such as *Minotaur*, a

⁵² Ibid., 43.

⁵³ Ibid., 43-48.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁵ Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*, October 1982.

⁵⁶ Terry Allen, “World Cup Manager,” *Computer & Video Games*, June 1982, 32.

program from *Computer and Video Games*. In it, the player was meant to solve the Minotaur's maze in a time limit.⁵⁷ This game is not necessarily gendered for a male audience, and its puzzle nature sets itself apart from the usual male power fantasy. Additionally, digital board games could also be found. *Computer and Video Games* also published a digital version of Snakes and Ladders, and solitaire.⁵⁸ The competitive nature of video games did not necessarily always manifest itself as masculine. Puzzle and board games did not involve violence or gendered sport.

Additionally, there were games whose themes were clearly meant for children. In *Ice Cream Vendor*, up to four players can run their own ice cream trucks.⁵⁹ The illustration depicts an ice cream vendor selling cones to a group of smiling children.⁶⁰ The game challenges the player: "Can you tell the difference between a Lolly-Gobble-Choc-Bomb and a Face-Freezin' Fruit Fantasy? You can! Well this is the game for you."⁶¹ This game stands in stark contrast with the previous science fiction, fantasy, and sports games. The game is clearly marketed to a younger audience. The illustration is not of an exploding spaceship, a knight slaying a dragon, or a cheerleader on the sidelines of a football game. This is family friendly entertainment that uses playful wording in describing various types of ice cream. Another game called *Granny*, a *Frogger* clone, was also meant to be playful. The player is meant to guide "Granny" across a busy street.⁶² The description is comical, light-hearted, and comes from the perspective of "Granny": "'You youngsters don't know how well off you are! It's not easy being an old-age-pensioner you know.'"⁶³ She talks about her struggles crossing busy streets: "'It's lucky I'm still

⁵⁷ Mays Oehrman, "Minotaur," *Computer & Video Games*, May 1982, 62-63.

⁵⁸ A. Worral, "Snakes & Ladders," *Computer & Video Games*, July 1982, 28-9; Peter Randle, "Solitaire," *Computer & Video Games*, July 1982, 30-1.

⁵⁹ G. W. Gallagher, "Ice Cream Vendor," *Computer & Video Games*, November 1982, 37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶² Andrew Morton, "Granny," *Computer & Video Games*, December 1982, 48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

quick on my pins otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you now.”⁶⁴ Much like *Ice Cream Vendor*, *Granny*'s premise is not gendered like most were. In these games, the player was meant to compete with the computer certainly, but there is nothing visceral, or serious about it. The game was humorous in a family friendly way.

However, these games were a minority. Video games were largely being marketed for young males, appealing to masculine norms of violence and competition. The games advertised in these periodicals were full of war, fantasy, and science fiction that allowed the player to engage in violent behaviour. Games were less about helping a granny cross the street, and more about reaching a high score for blasting away aliens, or beating another team in football.

“Delightfully seamy” – Mature content in periodicals

In these magazines, young males were exposed to more mature material. Indeed, as the aforementioned *EGM* survey noted, the average age of their readership was twenty-five, but mature content coincided with family friendly gaming, showing that there was a wide age range of readers. In this way, gaming culture can be seen as a melting pot, or at least a spectrum. From its beginnings, gaming culture was partially comprised of adult content that oversexualized women, further creating a culture dominated by males.

In gaming magazines, mature gaming content was intermingled with general content. *Computer and Video Games* reviewed an adventure game called *Softporn*. The game is clearly meant for heterosexual male adults (with no alternative games for heterosexual female adults to be seen). The illustration depicts a scantily clad woman with large cleavage leaning up against a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

bar, wearing a short skirt, and high heels.⁶⁵ The point “of the game is to find and seduce three women.”⁶⁶ The game, according to the review, “is delightfully seamy in theme throughout but humorously entertaining too.”⁶⁷ The player traverses city of “Lost Vagueness” (a clear allusion to Las Vegas), trying to win money at casinos, and finding women at bars and dance floors.⁶⁸ The seducing of women is gamified: “On kissing a girl it issued a series of frantic bleeps and stars filled the screen – if a seduction had taken place it would probably have exploded! But obviously my sex counted against me and I found no women willing to respond to my charms,” according to the reviewer.⁶⁹ This game is an example of how mature games served male fantasy. The player took on the role of a playboy, a high-roller who could seduce women through the right combination of actions. The playboy in *Softporn*, similar to the space commanders and knights we have already seen, was certainly filling a male fantasy role. These roles were about having power over other things, like forcing defeat upon enemy aliens, or holding control over the affection of women. Regardless of the content’s maturity, these examples all are related in how they allow the player to live a power fantasy.

Both types of games meant for young and mature audiences co-existed in magazines. In the same issue that *Softporn* was in, there was a cute game called *The Bugs*, and another playful one called *Treasure Hunt*, which was complete with a cute cartoon of pirates carrying a giant treasure box.⁷⁰ That being said, *Softporn* was also meant to be humorous. In the mailbag of a later issue, a reader asked if there would be any other similar games. “I noticed you claimed that

⁶⁵ Elspeth Joiner, “Soft Porn,” *Computer & Video Games*, January 1982, 77.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “The Bugs,” *Computer & Video Games*, January 1982, 63; Murray Summers, “Treasure Hunt,” *Computer & Video Games*, January 1982, 40-1, 43-4, 47, 49.

Softporn was one of a ‘new generation’ of software aimed at the adult user. Is it likely that we will soon be seeing a computerised version of Libido and do you know of any similar ‘fun’ adventures for the Acorn Atom?”⁷¹ The editor made sure to correct the reader that the game was more of a parody of adult entertainment: “Apart from its misleading title, Softporn seemed an innocent piece of fun and quite typical of this genre of adventure game... This magazine’s function is to inform its readers about new trends in the computer games industry and I don’t feel we can fulfill this properly if we hide from any aspects of that industry.”⁷² Certainly the game can be seen as humour, but the nature and objectives of the game reveal a mature portion of video game culture. There were plenty of adults who owned computers, and there was a market that appealed to adult entertainment (even if it was partly meant for humour).

Adult games were advertised in these magazines that were meant for a younger audience. In *Electronic Games Magazine*, there is an advertisement for a forthcoming quarterly book that lists adult games. The ad stated, “Such programs have circulated informally among computerists for some time, but now there’ll be a clearing house for X-and R-rated material.”⁷³ Once again, we see that there was a market for adult computer entertainment, and it was occurring concurrently to the rest of video game culture. *The Dirty Book*’s brochure said “Take a break from space wars, shoot-‘em-ups, hide and seek games. Add spice, flavor and sensual stimulation instead... Enough chasing Klingons around the tube. Let’s take a different trip around the world.”⁷⁴ These games were fun, but not naïve. Playful, but not guiltless. One ad’s headline from *Computer & Video Games* proclaimed: “Sex and your computer???” right beside a drawing

⁷¹ “Mailbag,” *Computer & Video Games*, March 1982, 7.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Electronic Games Hotline,” *Electronic Games Magazine*, March 1982, 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

of a naked woman.⁷⁵ It advertised a game called *The Naughty One*, an adventure game that is similar to *Softporn*. “Pay your way through gambling dens, bars and houses of vice, be secluded or seduced, earn a slave, acquire part of your opponents’ bodies.”⁷⁶ Once again, we see male sexual fantasies being gamified. Ownership of sexuality is central to the game, whether that is undressing an opponent, or owning a slave. In a later issue in the game news section, *Naughty One* is featured.⁷⁷ In this issue as well, a thirteen year-old wrote in to ask a question about their computer.⁷⁸ *Computer and Video Games* was being read by both adults and children alike, even though most of the games were being marketed to a younger demographic. Most of the games discussed by these magazines were age appropriate for young males. But, concurrently there is mature subject matter that these young males were confronted with.

From early on in the history of video game culture, content meant for children could be just as easily accessed as mature content. Indeed, *Softporn* was not a game that children readers of *Computer and Video Games* could plug into their system just like *The Bugs* or *Treasure Hunt*. But, all of these games existed in the same cultural fabric. Books like *The Dirty Book* existed to market adult games. Although they did not have as much ad space, ads for adult games were still part of early video game print culture. The young males, whether they were boys or teenagers, who played space games were also exposed to the presence of games that were too old for them or that they were just on the cusp of. Additionally, in this diverse culture that centred on male gender norms, women were sexually objectified, of course, in mature content.

⁷⁵ “Sex And Your Computer???” *Computer & Video Games*, April 1982, 36.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Game news,” *Computer & Video Games*, June 1982, 18.

⁷⁸ “Mailbag,” *Computer & Video Games*, June 1982, 5.

“They’re full of drugs, booze, and all kinds of things!” Fighting for respectability in arcades

Arcade culture also was represented in print. Video game print culture was trying to fight the stigmas surrounding arcades. As mentioned above, of those surveyed by *Electronic Games Magazine*, the average arcade player was twenty-five.⁷⁹ The arcade was a place where children physically were in the same place as adults, and this was part of the concern of adults surrounding arcades. However, print culture actively tried to dispel myths surrounding the dangers of arcades through writing articles that displayed the best aspects of coin-op culture.

One article from *Electronic Games Magazine* -- written by a Ph. D. no less -- sought to empirically shut down the misconceptions about arcades. In *Exploding The Arcade Myths: A Scientist Evaluates the Coin-Op Gaming Scene*, B. David Brooks, Ph. D. visited arcades to see if children really were acting immorally at arcades. Although it is difficult to find information on the author, his article still provides an interesting take on the arcade scene. According to the article, parents’ concerns over arcades could be summed up in: “Never will I let my daughter go into one of those arcades. They’re full of drugs, booze, and all kinds of things!”⁸⁰ Additionally, there were fears of children developing back or eye problems from using coin-ops too much.⁸¹ And, there was a pervasive belief that arcades were dens of immoral behaviour, and perhaps worse, depending on how far a parent wanted to even consider. Additionally, a woman in the article who voiced her concern wanted her daughter to have nothing to do with arcades, because girls especially were not supposed to enter the arcades. That would especially be immoral. This

⁷⁹ Katz, 6.

⁸⁰ B. David Brooks, Ph. D., “Exploding The Arcade Myth: A Scientist Evaluates The Coin-Op Gaming Scene,” *Electronic Games Magazine*, August 1982, 35.

⁸¹ Ibid.

quote represents moral concerns surrounding arcades. The woman who spoke was part of a meeting of the City Council of Long Beach, California that discussed giving a permit for a new arcade. Another spokesman stated his concerns: “An arcade would result in groups of adolescents and young adults loitering, littering, vandalizing, fighting, drinking and engaging in other forms of anti-social behaviour’ ...”⁸² Just as with any new craze, adults questioned the safety of arcades.

Dr. Brooks conducted his casual study and dispelled several myths. He found that only two of the ten arcades he checked did not ban food, drink, and smoking, and a “win-at-all-cost” mentality that could be dangerous was not present.⁸³ In response to the notion that arcades took children away from their families due to a mentality that adults were not on their level, he found that “Adults and peers were friends, sharing a common bond in their efforts to survive against the little blips on the screen.”⁸⁴ A common interest in video games created comradery. He also dispelled the myth that kids were skipping school during arcades. Of the ten arcades he visited, “I saw several school-age children—a total of no more than six—during hours they should have been in school.”⁸⁵ He also found no gambling, and no one he could judge being addicted to playing arcade games.⁸⁶

For having such a small sample size, Dr. Brooks’ study is far from being scientific and truly accurate of what kids were doing at arcades. His article, however, does reveal the attitudes of gaming culture at the time. In spite of the moral panic surrounding arcades, coin-op players were part of a community that they were proud in. They were not at arcades to be part of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

immoral activities. They were not there to rebel against their parents' rules. They were competitive, but only saw this as a bond within their community. The stakes were far lower than gambling. The only thing on the line was reputation, and this shines through in Dr. Brooks' article. He wrote, "Try as I might, I could not find even one [addicted player]. There were players, however, for whom the term 'over-doing it' might be appropriate..."⁸⁷

Electronic Games Magazine ran a series of articles that showcased impressive arcades. One was called Castle Park. It was ornate, and expansive, having pool tables, a chandelier, and four mini golf courses.⁸⁸ The owner "has gone to considerable lengths to ensure that things don't get out of hand and ruin the fun-and-games atmosphere. Castle Park is very much a family arcade, an environment so wholesome that parents frequently drop their children off while they do the marketing."⁸⁹ Arcades themselves were trying to combat the stigma surrounding them. Video game print culture was only too happy to pick up on this, and extol it. At this point, arcades were "becoming more colorful and exciting..."⁹⁰ They were working to appeal to a wider audience, and this was an involved task. For one arcade called Star Fleet Command in Mountain View, California, the owner, Shirley Raynal, had problems getting a license from the city, "but Shirley's background and strict rules eventually changed their minds."⁹¹ However, despite these stellar, clean-cut arcades that were family-friendly, arcades (and video games in general) still primarily catered to the demographic of young males. One key moment that began to change this was the introduction of *Pac-Man* in 1980, which heralded a "new" group into the world of video games: girls and women.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "Arcade Spotlight – Castle Park," *Electronic Games Magazine*, March 1982, 12.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bill Kunkel, "What's New In The Arcades," *Electronic Games Magazine*, March 1982, 70.

⁹¹ David Lustig, "Arcade America," *Electronic Games Magazine*, August 1982, 72.

“Women join the arcade revolution” The “introduction” of women into gaming

In 1982, the number of female arcade players was rising, but males still accounted for 96% of the total, according to a poll taken by *Electronic Games Magazine*.⁹² But, there was impetus within the industry to create games that could be inclusive to female arcade players. Toru Iwatani, a Namco game designer, came up with the idea for *Pac-Man* while eating pizza. He realized that “All the computer games available at the time were of the violent type-war games and space invader types. There were no games that everyone could enjoy, and especially none for women. I wanted to come up with a ‘comical’ game women could enjoy.”⁹³ Iwatani realized that there was a demographic that was untapped for the gaming market. Previous to *Pac-Man*, as we have seen, most games were violent, or at the least still gendered for males. But, *Pac-Man* could appeal to both males and females. It showed game designers that there was a demand for “cute” games, widening the potential pool of gamers.⁹⁴ By appealing to a wide demographic, the arcade version of *Pac-Man* alone took in more than a billion dollars, and it is estimated that it was played more than 10 billion times during the twentieth century.⁹⁵

To continue forward with this momentum, Midway, the North American distributor of *Pac-Man*, released *Ms. Pac-Man* in 1982.⁹⁶ The new character’s creation was to further appeal to a female demographic; however, the game’s life began with different origins. MIT students

⁹² Katz, 6.

⁹³ Susan Lammers, *Programmers at Work* (Redmond, WA: MicroSoft Press, 1986), quoted in, Mark J. P. Wolf, “Video Game Stars: Pac-Man,” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 73.

⁹⁴ Mark J. P. Wolf, “Video Game Stars: Pac-Man,” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 74..

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Steve L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokémon and Beyond, the Story behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World* (Roseville, Calif.: Prima, 2001), xiv.

Doug Macrae and Kevin Curran created modifications for arcade machines after becoming interested in game design.⁹⁷ They modded *Pac-Man*, which resulted in Atari pressing charges for copyright infringement. This led to settlement out of court, and the two would be paid to create games for the next two years, but had to stop creating enhancement kits.⁹⁸ Rather than waste their work on *Pac-Man*, they talked with Midway, which resulted in the idea for *Ms. Pac-Man*. Doug Macrae stated that “As we kicked it around and what the sequel should be, we came up with the idea of, well, it should be the female *Pac-Man*...”⁹⁹ After throwing around different names as to what to call her, they settled on “Miss” Pac-Man, trying to avoid connotations that her and Pac-Man had a child out of wedlock (one of the animations between levels featured her and Pac-Man having a child).¹⁰⁰ Already, the first female video game character was sexualized and gendered as a way to appeal to female gamers. Even though *Pac-Man* already was designed to be inclusive to women, the game’s follow-up sought to appeal even more to female gamers.

How did print culture react to the introduction of the growing demographic of women gamers? On the front cover of *Electronic Games Magazine* for May 1982, a woman in tight pants, high heeled boots, and a sleeveless t-shirt is playing at an arcade cabinet. The caption reads “Move Over Guys, Here Come the Gals Women Join the Arcade Revolution.”¹⁰¹ From the outset, female gamers were defined by their sexuality, and in this example it is through the magazine’s marketing to its main demographic: young males. This magazine cover stands in counterpoint to the cover mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that depicts a boy gleefully holding a controller. One is innocent, and the other is not quite so innocent. The boys represented

⁹⁷ Ibid., 167-8.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 169-70.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 171.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰¹ Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*, May 1982.

by the boy in the premiere issue's cover were those being marketed to through the use of sexuality on the cover for the May edition.

In the cover article, the language is welcoming to female gamers, yet patronizing. "Women have officially arrived in the world of electronic gaming. They're not just there for decoration, either. These females can zap a centipede or blast an asteroid as well—and sometimes even better—than any man."¹⁰² Due to arcades traditionally being rather dirty or sketchy, says the article, "When a woman did actually show up, she could usually be found hanging timidly at the fringes of the action, watching her date prove his masculinity by basing a poor defenseless pinball machine into submission."¹⁰³ However, now that arcades were cleaning up, women "flock[ed]" to arcades, and now

liberated ladies are rapidly discovering that electronic gaming is one activity in which the sexes can compete on absolutely even terms. This is certainly not the case with such popular pastimes as tennis, swimming and basketball. The size and strength advantage which most men possess simply doesn't count here: Dexterity, finesse and quick thinking are the main ingredients of electronic gaming success.¹⁰⁴

The article is eager to be inclusive to women, but the gender expectations of the time means that there was still a hierarchy between the two sexes. Girls could join the boys, but even if games were an even playing field, the girls were still in boy territory.

They were still in boy territory, because most games were still catering to males. *Pac-Man*, a leader in creating a more diverse gaming culture, became one of the world's most popular video games, but video game culture in the early 1980s was still rooted in a decade's worth of shooting games, space games, and other violent games (if we are to exclude sports and more gender neutral games). At first, the predominantly male video game community was accepting of

¹⁰² Joyce Worley, "Women Join The Arcade Revolution," *Electronic Games Magazine*, " May 1982, 31.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the inclusion of female gamers. There was nothing insidious within the culture as of then. The culture was being opened up to more female gamers. But, a divide existed. In discussing *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Computer & Video Games* interviewed industry experts who delineated between the more traditional games that had themes of violence, and the newer ones that appealed to females for being non-violent.¹⁰⁵ From the beginning, there was a divide between what was expected of gamers according to their gender. And from these expectations would come conceptions of gamer identity that would exist through the late 1980s, and beyond.

Male gamers were expected to play violent and competitive games. Ever since the beginning of gaming, there was an emphasis on violence, even when spaceships were only dots on a screen. In the early 1980s, as seen in the print culture, gaming in all genres was masculine. Players were being competitive even when they were not being violent against an orc, or an alien ship. Young male gamers were also beginning to argue about what made games good. Even though it was not as bad as we will see, the gamers who argued over what sport games were the best were involved in a competition of words and opinions. There was no real skin in the game at that point. That would only come about when they went to war for home consoles in the decades to come.

¹⁰⁵ Elspeth Joiner, "Ms. Pac-Man," *Computer & Video Games*, July 1982, 73.

Chapter 2: The split in video game masculinity: The console war, hypermasculinity, and controversy

In a letter written to *Sega Visions*, the official Sega magazine, a female gamer expressed her concerns about playing video games. She wrote, “I am the artist of the family. My younger brother is the brain. He can figure out how to play any video game.” She then explained, “Anyway, my brother thinks that only boys can be good at video games. I think that is totally sexist and that girls are just as good as boys at playing video games. What is your opinion?” *Sega Visions* took a tactful reproach and responded, “We think girls are just as good as boys at playing video games...” However, what they wrote next reveals the larger problematic assumptions that underpinned the field: “...but that boys seem to be more interested in playing them. That may be because a lot of games are fighting or sports games, and girls prefer different kinds of activities.”¹ Although, as this chapter demonstrates, female players were able to carve out some space during the 8-bit and 16-bit generations, video game culture remained a very masculine space.

Masculinity from the early 1980s in video game culture persisted into the late 1980s and early 1990s. In many ways, there was continuity in its level of competition and violence, but the console war between Nintendo and Sega led to an evolved cultural landscape around male gender norms. I argue in this chapter that there was no radical shift in masculinity in video game culture, but there was a split between Nintendo’s more family friendly culture, and Sega’s more mature and hypermasculine culture that marketed itself to an aging Generation G.

¹ “Yo Sega!” *Sega Visions*, October 1993, 15.

“Phoenix Down” The industry rebounds, and Nintendo rises

In 1982, the video game industry was rapidly expanding. In May 1982, *Business Week* projected that it would expand until 1985 at the very least, when video game systems would be in nearly half of all American homes with a TV set. Companies, seeking to jump into the market, flooded it with poorly made games. CBS, Parker Brothers, Milton Bradley, 20th Century Fox, and even Quaker Oats, for example, made forays into game making. Home computers came down in price, and software was more readily available. There were too many companies making too many poor games, meaning that the industry was primed for another crash. There were also ill omens in the arcade video game industry. Video game arcades more than doubled between 1980 and 1982, peaking at around 10,000 arcades, but over 2,000 closed in 1983. The video game market crashed. By the end of 1983, the video game industry’s profits went down about 25 percent from 1982. Across the industry, losses totaled about \$1.5 billion, Atari losing more than a half a billion dollars.² Video games seemed like a fad that would soon float away.

It took a Japanese company named Nintendo to reboot the American video games industry after the crash. Nintendo was founded in 1889 in Kyoto, Japan, and it manufactured *hanafuda* playing cards.³ Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, president Hiroshi Yamauchi modernized the company, seeking ventures in things like instant rice, a taxi company, and in the toy industry. In 1975, it started to produce arcade games, the first being *EVR Race*, a top-down driving game. Gunpei Yokoi, a designer at Nintendo, created the Game & Watch after seeing a commuter on a train playing with a calculator in 1979. The Game & Watch was a handheld gaming device that used cheap LCD displays and semiconductors. They were a hit. Sixty games

² Mark J. P. Wolf, “The Video Game Industry Crash,” in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 103–5.

³ *Hanafuda* is a Japanese card deck that players can use to play multiple games.

were made, selling around forty-four million units before they were discontinued in 1991. Its success led Yamauchi to see the potential of video games. He poured resources into the arcade division, resulting in several games, including *Radar Scope*. This was a wildly successful game in Japan (second only to Pac-Man), leading the newly formed Nintendo of America to order a large amount of the game's cabinets. However, this venture was unsuccessful, leaving Nintendo of America on the verge of bankruptcy. Yamauchi advised the president of Nintendo of America to make the machines into new games. He assigned Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo's apprentice designer, to create a replacement game.

From this would come one of the world's most famous video game franchises. As an early deal to use *Popeye* characters fell through, Miyamoto created original characters: Jumpman (later known as Mario), a gorilla (soon to be named Donkey Kong), and Pauline (Jumpman's captured girlfriend). He created the video game masterpiece *Donkey Kong*. Yamauchi was convinced by *Donkey Kong* and *Game & Watch*'s success to start work on a cartridge-based console. The Famicom was released on July 15, 1983 in Japan, selling around half a million units in six months. In the United States, Nintendo of America released the Nintendo Entertainment System in October 1985. To differentiate it from the doomed consoles in the crash which used terms like "cartridge" and "system", it strategically branded its console as an "Entertainment System", and its cartridges as "Game Paks." This helped to ensure that consumers would not associate components of the NES with those of previous consoles. The Famicom / NES was the first console to be popular in Japan and America, selling 61.91 million units across the globe. Japan now dominated the industry.⁴

⁴ Richard Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games: From Atari To Xbox One* (London: Robinson, 2015), 112-9.

Nintendo began working on building its unique brand of family friendly entertainment. It learned from Atari's mistake of allowing any kind of game to be put on the system (most importantly adult content), and employed a lock-out chip to ensure that only Nintendo-licensed games could play on the NES.⁵ Nintendo forged partnerships with successful Japanese game developers, locking them into publishing a maximum of five exclusive games per year if they wanted to be able to develop for the console at all. Atari tried to sue Nintendo for monopolizing the market, but ultimately failed. By the end of 1987, Nintendo controlled between 86 to 93 percent of the market. To further ensure that these licensed games were kid-friendly, they established the "NES Game Standards Policy" to force publishers to change their games. They did not allow the inclusion of illegal drugs, sexual content, graphic violence, or even religious, ethnic, or nationalistic content. For example, in many games, crosses on hospitals or tombstones had to be removed.⁶ Nintendo wanted to ensure that there would be no controversies surrounding its games.

For Nintendo, the days past of games having explicit content were gone. Instead, every game on the NES was set to a certain standard that did not allow for mature content. Nintendo aimed for a family audience through its brand of colourful games that everyone was allowed to enjoy. In everything that it did, and to this day, Nintendo lives to serve this large demographic.

⁵ Stanton, 119.

⁶ Dominic Arsenault, "System Profile: The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 110–1.

“Now you’re playing with power” The official guide to everything Nintendo

The official mouthpiece of Nintendo was the magazine *Nintendo Power*, the central place for tips, tricks, and Nintendo video game culture, starting in 1988. Nintendo skillfully exhibited its brand through the magazine, especially on the premiere issue’s front cover. Advertising the main article on *Super Mario Bros. 2*, Mario hops over a mushroom in a Claymation world while being chased by Wart, the final villain of the game.⁷ Colours abound, and the picture being claymation portrays the scene in a childish, kid-friendly tone. This is not to say that there were not any more “mature” *Nintendo Power* covers (indeed, the next issue depicted a muscular Simon Belmont holding the severed head of Dracula for *Castlevania II: Simon’s Quest*.)⁸ However, *Nintendo Power* covers would never be as “mature” as the suggestively dressed woman playing an arcade game on the cover article for *Electronic Video Game Magazine*’s article on women in gaming. Fantasy violence was okay, but sexuality, for Nintendo, was too mature for their family audience. The violence in video games of the past decade was here to stay, even under Nintendo’s watchful eye.

The game articles in *Nintendo Power* placed the reader into the shoes of a tough hero. In one game called *Clash at Demonhead*, “you guide Sgt Bang through the twisted passages of Demonhead in search of a kidnapped professor and his Doomsday bomb.” Sgt. Bang even speaks in the article: “I’m Sgt. Billy ‘Big Bang’ Blitz, of S. A. B. R. E. (Special Assault Brigade for Real Emergencies) and I’m the best at what I do—bustin’ bad guys.”⁹ Nintendo games were also no stranger to the hyper-masculine need to blow up aliens like what we saw in the previous chapter. In *Contra*, players make their way through scores of enemies only to run up against

⁷ Cover of *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988.

⁸ Cover of *Nintendo Power*, September / October 1988.

⁹ “Clash Demonhead,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1990, 38.

aliens from another world. The player has access to different gun power-ups that they use to annihilate the bad guys that fill up the screen.¹⁰ *Nintendo Power* described the player's task in *Contra* in epic terms: "Our brave warriors have been given orders that will be nearly impossible to carry out. No one else is foolish enough to enter the base where the evil Aliens await" – a challenge issued to the player – "Will you be able to survive long enough to carry out your mission? The ultra-radical action is about to start – GOOD LUCK!!"¹¹ *Nintendo Power* also incites the player to fight in *Cobra Triangle*. "More than a race," it says, "more than an obstacle course, and more than a fight to defeat gigantic sea monsters, Cobra Triangle is all of this in one exciting action game!" The appeal to this game, like many others, is the obstacle of an epic encounter with a monster, a challenge worthy of any player willing to get caught up in the fantasy. *Nintendo Power* further challenges the player: "Only your pilot skills can save you! Give it your best shot in this wave-jumping, water-spraying boat chase that will keep you entertained for hours on end."¹² This theme of seeking worthy players can also be seen in how *Nintendo Power* introduces a mode in one of Nintendo's best games of all time: *The Legend of Zelda*. It asks if the player was "brave enough to beat all of Ganon's henchman in the First Quest?...And then were you mighty enough to take on Ganon...? If your answer is yes, get ready for....the Second Quest of The Legend of Zelda....Can you be victorious the second time around?"¹³

This culture of competition permeated *Nintendo Power* like it did with the computer games in the previous chapter. A major aspect of the magazine was disseminating secrets and

¹⁰ *Contra*, directed by Hidenori Maezawa and Shinji Umezaki (Minato, Tokyo: Konami, 1988), Nintendo Entertainment System.

¹¹ "Contra," *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 74.

¹² "Cobra Triangle," *Nintendo Power*, May / June 1989, 28.

¹³ "Zelda: The Second Quest Begins," *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 27.

tips for games. Information was like a currency, and the richest players were held in the highest esteem. *Classified Information* was a section where the pros at *Nintendo Power* shared hot tips and tricks. “Read them. Practice them,” says *Nintendo Power*. “And astound your friends with your on-screen hocus pocus and cool tricks. You’ll be amazed at the secrets hidden deep within your favorite games. And you’ll be even more amazed when you learn how to do them yourself!”¹⁴ The magazine was selling video game street-cred, and the ability for readers to show off. It was catering to the competitiveness of its readers. It was important for players to know secrets and tips to finish the game and have bragging rights.

Nintendo Power was quite aware of what it was doing, and referenced this culture of needing to be in on the secrets to the point of satire. In each issue, there was a comic called *Howard & Nester*, which details the misadventures of Nester, a cocky know-it-all (who proves that he does not quite know as much as he lets on), and Howard, a knowledgeable gamer who catches Nester in his lies. In one comic, Nester proudly proclaimed, “Ask me anything I know it all.” Upon being asked to guide two people through the game *Castlevania II*, he ignored the help of Howard, got lost and wound up being whirled away in a gust of wind.¹⁵ Players were competing to know all that there was to know in NES games. Indeed, *Nintendo Power* had a section in each issue called *NES Achievers* where players submitted their high scores. “Will you be the next NES ACHIEVER?” asked the magazine.¹⁶

The competitiveness of boys can be seen in their letters to the magazine. One boy wrote in talking about *The Legend of Kage* where “You are armed with two weapons: your Ninja sword and a limitless supply of star knives that can be hurled at your opponents like stones....Sound

¹⁴ “Classified Information,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 56.

¹⁵ “Howard & Nester,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1988, 24-5.

¹⁶ “NES Achievers,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 98.

fun? Think you have what it takes?”¹⁷ In their letters, readers could nominate “Power Players”, exceptional game players who were worthy of mention and bragging rights. These letters could be written by the self-nominated gamer themselves, or by another wishing to nominate someone else.¹⁸ Typically, the ones written by the nominee are dripping in braggadocio. “Looking for a Power Player?” wrote Jeff. “Search no more. With seventeen games...I’m a sure fire winner. Nintendo is the best hobby I’ve ever had....I’ve even been known to play all night without stopping...”¹⁹ It was not just that Jeff had beaten so many games. It was also that he *lived* the lifestyle of a bona fide hard-core gamer who would not even let sleep stop him from playing. In 14 year-old Aasif’s letter, the young boy followed a similar formula to Jeff: “I hear that you’re looking for Power Players. Well, you just found your man.”²⁰ “Power Player” letters often started off with this show of confidence.

Within this boisterous male competitive culture in *Nintendo Power*, what was the role of girls and women within its pages? In the game articles, and unlike many of the examples explored in the last chapter, thanks to Nintendo’s family friendly image, females were largely not sexualized. That being said, they often were objects that needed to be saved, and largely certainly not depicted as being on par with male characters. In the game *Racket Attack*, the magazine advised that “The female players pace their game slower than the men for endurance and can win a match in only two sets. You may want to participate in the women’s tournament first.”²¹ Playing in the female tournament was easy mode. This assumption of female athletes being inferior to male athletes harkens back to chapter one where the article that “introduced” women

¹⁷ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 96.

¹⁸ Interestingly, most letters were not written by self-nominated gamers. An equal portion came from others nominating another person.

¹⁹ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, March / April 1990, 7.

²⁰ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, May / June 1990, 7.

²¹ “Racket Attack,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1988, 73.

into arcade gaming stated that arcades were a more even playing ground for men and women, because it only involved dexterity and not more intensive physical activities. Within the sports context, if women were not within their own league, they were on the sidelines being cheerleaders. In an article on various NES football games, a lineup of illustrated female cheerleaders lines the bottom of a page.²²

That being said, if the editors were not including them in their copy, female gamers saw themselves represented in the magazine by writing in themselves. The “letters to editor” section is a notable source. In one letter, a writer wished to thank Nintendo for creating *Ice Hockey*, a game she, her brothers, and boyfriend were obsessed with playing. “The living room in our house has never been so crowded!” she wrote. She then detailed the lengths to which they went to find a NES and *Ice Hockey*. Overall, in their desperate search, the system and game costed them “\$2,249.82, but it was well worth it!”²³ Passion for Nintendo games knew no gender boundaries. Female gamers also wrote in to boast as Power Players. As a matter of fact, one writer puts it, “...I am a Power Player.” She lists her long lists of accomplishments, such as beating Ganon in *The Legend of Zelda* in both quests (the second quest is more difficult than the first), beating Mike Tyson in *Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!!*, and getting all six diamonds in *Gumshoe*. She then relates some advice by divulging a moment she is proud of:

In Mike Tyson’s *Punch-Out!!*, guys like Bald Bull, Mr. Sandman and even Super Macho Man are ‘a piece of cake’ once you’ve got to Mike Tyson a couple of times. When I beat Tyson, I had been playing for over an hour and kept getting knocked out in the Third Round. It was close to midnight and I said to myself, ‘This is my last game, then I’m going to bed.’ Well, that was when I beat Tyson! It was hard, but each time I fought him got easier and easier. It will with you, too. Don’t worry.²⁴

²² “NES Football Games,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1989, 72.

²³ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1988, 6-7.

²⁴ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1988, 101.

Another female gamer wrote in telling about her accomplishments in *The Legend of Zelda*. She says that “I think I’d be kind of considered a Power Player. I don’t want to brag but, to me, this is quite an accomplishment because of the amount of time that it took.” She then explained how “I figured it all out in one week and one day. And then I defeated Ganon!” She also proclaimed that she really liked *The Legend of Zelda*, because she was playing it so much.²⁵ Female gamers were proud within this competitive environment, and engaged with it alongside male gamers. There was space for them to do this within the columns of *Nintendo Power*.

It was not just older girls either who were passionate about Nintendo. One parent wrote in to say, “I thought you might enjoy seeing our youngest NES player, Seth Allen. He mimics his eight-year-old sister, Erin, playing her games, and he looks mighty happy doing it!”²⁶ Although Seth is the focus of this letter, his older sister, Erin, represents how Nintendo could also appeal to girls. There was plenty of masculine content within the video games, but that did not stop female gamers. In fact, many thrived in the friendly competitive environment that Nintendo cultivated. This was an environment that was careful to be inclusive – something that the entire family could enjoy. The letters that *Nintendo Power* chose to publish reflect this fact. Most letters published were written by males, but the magazine took special care to include letters from female gamers. Indeed, this fit well with Nintendo’s branding as a family-friendly organization.

This family-friendly branding is prominent throughout *Nintendo Power* seen through the number of letters from parents (and even grandparents) talking about how Nintendo products brought their families closer together, or benefited them in some way. For example, one parent wrote in to say “that Nintendo Power has motivated [her son David, age 6] to learn how to read!”

²⁵ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, September / October 1988, 100.

²⁶ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, July 1991, 6.

Additionally, his younger brother Robbie (age 3) “has gained a lot of confidence through his accomplishments. There is a definite place for Nintendo in our house.”²⁷ Another mother’s experiences echoed this. Her 4 year-old son had been playing the NES for a year. In her own words, her son

holds his own with the older kids and the adults, often beating the best of them. At first, I was concerned that we had a video junkie on our hands, but I’ve found that he’s learned a great deal from the games. His reaction time is excellent and he’s learned to differentiate directions like left and right and up and down, and he’s even learning how to spell and read a little and how to keep score.²⁸

Showing that Nintendo games could actually be beneficial for children was a calculated move on the part of *Nintendo Power* as a key marketing tool by Nintendo.

A common theme was mothers writing in to express their newfound love for Nintendo. One woman wrote that her sons gave her a Game Boy for Christmas. “This letter is,” she wrote, “to advise you that Game Boy is the greatest thing since sliced bread—it’s addictive but soothing and relaxing.” She even went as far to say that “I’ve thrown away my aspirin and now ‘chill out’ (as my kids say) with Tetris or Side Pocket. The concept is terrific. Thanks!”²⁹ Another writer “was delighted to see” a poem in *Nintendo Power* from a grandfather. She reported that her friends in their mid-twenties and older “who have kids play NES video games more than the kids do! A lot of your readers are adults and proud of it.” She closed her letter with “I’m 34 and have two kids of my own. Move over, children, Mama’s on a roll!”³⁰ Another mother wanted “equal time for us Moms” in the letters section. She wrote, “The only person I know who is better than I am is another Mom!” Aside from her boasting, she explained her thoughts on how “the NES is a

²⁷ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, August 1991, 6.

²⁸ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1989, 97.

²⁹ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, July 1991, 6.

³⁰ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, February 1991, 6.

learning tool. The adventures and RPGs give kids an incentive to read.” She summed up her thoughts on the educational benefits of the NES: “What other activity improves fine motor coordination, teaches map making, logic and problem solving, and is fun at the same time?”³¹ One kid wrote in on how his mom tried playing their NES after saying that “her life was monotonous.”³² “Nintendo Moms” were very much a thing, and *Nintendo Power* was happy to highlight them.

Another older demographic that *Nintendo Power* liked to put in the spotlight was grandparents, further reinforcing their family-friendly branding. The inclusion of these letters in *Nintendo Power* made a point to highlight the wide range of players who could enjoy Nintendo. One grandmother wrote about how her grandson visited with a NES. This prompted her and her husband to buy their own system. She was invested in playing, saying that she hoped to surprise her grandson, because “I am getting very close to at least seeing the hostages before I bite the dust in Commando.”³³ Another couple wrote in, saying, “Whoever said Nintendo is for kids is right, but let’s not forget the Grandpas and Grandmas.” The writers were engaged with their games: “My wife and I and Samus are currently blasting Zeebetite chambers on our way to Mother Brain...”³⁴ Another couple bought a NES, and enjoyed it, while also finding it to “close the ‘generation gap.’ You can talk Nintendo with almost every young person.”³⁵ Another grandfather wrote in to talk about how Nintendo positively impacted his relationship with his grandson. He wrote, “We are both Nintendo freaks, with one difference. David’s mom lets him play only an hour a day, while my mom doesn’t restrict me.” There is not just a playful sense of

³¹ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, September / October 1990, 6.

³² “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, September / October 1988, 97.

³³ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1988, 96.

³⁴ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, September / October 1988, 96.

³⁵ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1990, 7.

competition in these letters; often times there is an undercurrent of deferring to their grandchildren. “Whenever I’m in a jam, I call David for advice,” he wrote. He does not brag about his gaming prowess, but he clearly was proud of his grandson’s. “He never reads instruction manuals. He simply plays and learns. I doubt that I will ever have his extraordinary dexterity or his ability to solve the puzzles posed by the games....He’s a special guy who deserves mention.”³⁶ These letters represent the wide appeal of Nintendo, and the ability for barriers to be taken down within its gaming culture. As shown through *Nintendo Power*’s selection of published letters, there was something of a positive gaming community between children and their parents. Certainly, the magazine had a vested interest in portraying its games like this. But, these bonds over video games did exist, and this was due to Nintendo’s family friendly gaming environment. An oft-repeated sentiment was, as one elderly man writes, “you’re never too old to play the NES.”³⁷

Another aspect of Nintendo’s gaming culture were *Nintendo Power*’s gaming clubs that they encouraged fans to organize. In response to a letter about the writer’s own club, *Nintendo Power* wrote, “Clubs are a great way to get your friends together to play your NES. You can exchange tips, arrange contests and tournaments, and as we’ve learned from the NES Heatseekers [the writer’s club], you can be well organized too.”³⁸ The writer’s club was well managed, and he outlined how to run one, where elections are held, how there are agreed upon membership rules, and even how to have money collected to purchase new games.³⁹ There was healthy competitiveness within the clubs. One writer described how her club held their “First Annual Power Player” championship, where the writer’s uncle was made to be the club’s Power

³⁶ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1990, 7.

³⁷ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, March / April 1989, 6.

³⁸ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1989, 97.

³⁹ “Mail Box from Players,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1989, 97.

Player.⁴⁰ Clubs were a way for Nintendo gamers to come together and take part in friendly competition, and organize as a community. Although they were only local to a handful of people, they still represent a community (that, as the previous letter indicated, included female gamers).

On a larger scale, Nintendo also held the *Nintendo World Championship* that was certainly about competition, but was still friendly in nature. The competition took place in 1990, and involved players divided into different age groups competing in mini-games. The top players would face off for the title. *Nintendo Power* emphasized the large scope of the event. “The most impressive aspect of the NWC will be the sheer scale of the activities. Everything will be laid out in a high-tech style...”⁴¹ There was lots of toys for kid and adult alike. However, the main event was to be the ultimate in bragging rights. “Perhaps the most anticipated part of the NWC will be the Competition Area. Over 100 Game Stations will allow thousands of players to compete.” What lay for the lucky few who bested the rest of the other players was “a ‘throne game station area’...set up so top players can ascend above the crowds to exhibit their video game mastery on big screen projection systems.”⁴² It did not get much cooler than that. One writer in *Nintendo Power* was enthralled by it. “My favorite part was the Competition Arena. It was impressive.” The championship itself was quite a spectacle, also. “The competition was tough! When the adrenaline starts pumping you really get into it!”⁴³ Despite the charged competition, the culture of the event was welcoming. One writer (the sister of one of the 7 year-old competitors who placed third) told how her brother “said that he has never met a nicer bunch of people... All of them made the kids feel like winners.”⁴⁴ Indeed, even girls competed. In the November /

⁴⁰ “Power Player,” *Nintendo Power*, May / June 1989, 97.

⁴¹ “World Championship,” *Nintendo Power*, January / February 1990, 90.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, July / August 1990, 6.

⁴⁴ “Video Spotlight,” *Nintendo Power*, March 1991, 7.

December 1990 issue, the article on the Nintendo World Championship proudly proclaimed “First Female Finalist!” The article explained how “She says that it felt ‘awesome’ to beat the boys who didn’t think she had a chance!” Even though the Nintendo World Championship encouraged friendly sportsmanship, there was still plenty of negativity directed towards girl gamers. But, as the article put it, “She’s confident that she can win but hopes that the other finalists continue to underestimate her ability. Watch out guys!”⁴⁵

Nintendo deliberately cultivated a friendly and open gaming environment that meant all people could enjoy their products. This meant that girls, like the finalist at the Nintendo World Championship, could safely participate in a culture that was masculine and competitive. Indeed, girl gamers seemed to relish it. Reading between the lines, and seeing what the girl finalist had directed at her at the Nintendo World Championship, it is apparent that this was a masculine world even with the addition of girls and families on the gaming scene. Nintendo games were still violent. *Nintendo Power* encouraged players to be experts in the games they played, and to have the highest score among all of their friends. But, it was not an intense masculinity. It was watered down for easy consumption by all ages. Nintendo’s competitor, Sega, would take a very different approach.⁴⁶

“Separate the Men from the Boys” Sega begins the Console War of the 16-bit Generation

Sega, a primarily arcade making company, launched its first foray in the North American console market with the Sega Master System in 1986. This system was technically superior to the NES in

⁴⁵ “Nintendo Powerfest,” *Nintendo Power*, November / December 1990, 95.

⁴⁶ For an excellent overview of the 16-bit console war between Nintendo and Sega, see the seminal narrative work Blake J. Harris, *Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle That Defined a Generation* (New York: itbooks, 2014).

several respects, but lacked the games that Nintendo so jealously guarded. Overall, the Master System lagged in sales and reception. It sold thirteen million units worldwide, whereas the NES sold sixty-two million. It did, however, begin Sega's claim to the console market, and teach them how to properly make and market their next system.⁴⁷ The next time around Sega did not pull any punches. They adapted their 16-bit arcade board for a home console thanks to less expensive microprocessor costs. This meant that their new console, the Genesis, could play games that were closer in quality to their arcade versions. The Genesis was launched in Japan on October 29, 1988. It never quite beat the Super Famicom (the successor to the Famicom, and named the Super Nintendo Entertainment System in the US), but that did not matter so much, because Sega was aiming for the American market.⁴⁸ In the United States, they sought to be edgier than the family friendly NES many families had come to love.

With this in mind, Sega looked to change how they marketed their console. They hired Mike Katz, the president of Atari's entertainment division. Katz only held the position for a short time, but it was his idea to portray Nintendo as a company that made children's games. He also brought on professional athletes to push Sega's products, lending credibility to the Sega brand. Eventually Katz was fired, and Tom Kalinske was placed in his stead. It was Kalinske's decision to package *Sonic the Hedgehog* with each Genesis console.

Sonic was designed to compete with Mario, Nintendo's iconic plumber. Yuji Naka, the designer of Sonic, wanted Sonic to do what Mario did not. Naka upped the speed factor, making Sonic more fluid than Mario. Mario often stopped and started in the player's attempts to reach higher platforms and dodge enemies. *Sonic the Hedgehog* was released on June 23, 1991 in the

⁴⁷ Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games*, 128-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 159-60.

US and Europe. The character's "cool" factor was a major selling point that grasped the attention of young audiences. Sonic ran like lightning, and had a "radical" attitude. This was the first of many volleys of fire in the Console War. That Christmas, Sega outsold Nintendo's Super Nintendo almost two to one.⁴⁹

Sega beat Nintendo in the "cool" department. It had a mascot that was faster, and more "in-your-face" packaged in with each Genesis. It had endorsements from major sports icons. And, it conducted a successful smear campaign against Nintendo that portrayed their competitor as being a toy for kids. However, Sega did follow Nintendo's lead in some aspects of their marketing. *Sega Visions* was Sega's response to Nintendo's successful magazine.

"Yo Sega!" The Console War in the columns of *Sega Visions*

A vicious marketing war began and this is the fundamental reason for Sega's response to *Nintendo Power*: their own magazine, *Sega Visions*. *Sega Visions*, like *Nintendo Power*, also advertised new games, published fan letters, and provided news on upcoming games and events. But, it did it with such zeal against Nintendo. In the first issue, the famous Sega ad "Sega Does What Nintendon't" was published. The title looms over the three-page spread that showcases different games that are meant to be seen as impressive. There are sports games, a Michael Jackson game, and a Spider-Man game. "Imagine. You're Spider-Man, scaling the face of a towering high-rise," it begins. "Or Joe Montana, rolling left to throw the winning touchdown pass... And there's only one place you can do it all. On Genesis by Sega."⁵⁰ Nintendo was truly threatened by the loss of their fanbase as scores of gamers changed sides during this generation.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 160-3.

⁵⁰ "Sega Does What Nintendon't," *Sega Visions*, June 1990, 25-7.

For example, one previous Nintendo fan had his letter published.⁵¹ “At first I was a little skeptical,” he wrote. “Why? Simple. I was the owner of a Nintendo....But I just had to have the Genesis, so I told my dad to sell everything...” He signed off the letter with “I’m your absolute #1 fan!”⁵² Fan loyalty could be fickle, and yet fierce. Sega was only happy to play on these charged emotions in their ad campaigns and writings against Nintendo.

The publisher’s letter section was typically full of vitriol against Nintendo. *Sega Visions* was free for owners of the Genesis and the Master System, and in one letter from the publishers, they vowed “to KEEP VISIONS FREE!” It then snidely remarked “And, unlike some game company magazines we could mention, VISIONS™ wants to keep in touch with all of you.”⁵³ *Nintendo Power* required a paid subscription, and *Sega Visions* directly responded to this by being a free magazine for console owners. Another letter from the publishers was entirely devoted to braggadocio, and, as they put it “blow[ing] [our] own horn.” They reasoned:

But what can you do when you know you’re at the top of the heap? It’s hard not to brag. Well, that’s the position we’re in here at Sega. When you, the hottest gamers going, keep coming back for more, and keep telling us how awesome we are, it’s hard to stay modest...And no one – absolutely no one – can touch us there. No questions, guys. Sega is the leader when it comes to video game excellence.⁵⁴

Important for the Sega brand was the emphasis on the players *also* being the coolest. That is why they liked the Genesis, after all, and not “childish” Nintendo.

Also, the comparison to Nintendo was always present. In what succeeded their inaugural letter from the publishers, *Sega Vision* discussed how more publishers and developers who made games for Nintendo were now also making games for Sega. “It seems that a number of game

⁵¹ A note about letters in *Sega Visions*. Partway through the magazine’s history, letters are signed with initials, a decision made by the magazine. Therefore, it can be difficult to ascertain the gender of the writer.

⁵² “Mailbox,” *Sega Visions*, December 1990, 6.

⁵³ “A Letter from the Publishers,” *Sega Visions*, December 1990, 4.

⁵⁴ “A Letter from the Publishers,” *Sega Visions*, September 1991, 4.

companies used to make games only for Nintendo systems are now jumping onto the Sega train.”⁵⁵ Then, responding to what was Nintendo’s own dismissal of Sega, *Sega Visions* shot back in a paragraph titled “Genesis is Number One.” The paragraphs listed top-selling games on the Genesis, and said “Funny thing, last year the president of Nintendo was quoted as saying that he doesn’t consider Sega as competition. Sounds like pretty stiff competition to us.”⁵⁶ *Sega Visions* was always looking for Nintendo’s weak points to exploit for their competition hungry audience of devoted fans.

Advertisements in *Sega Visions* also spouted this criticism against Nintendo. An ad for the Sega-CD says in bold letters “Believe it or not, the brains behind the Sega CD don’t wear pocket-protectors or glasses held together with tape. (Those guys work at Nintendo).”⁵⁷ This ad demonstrates the importance of being cool as a gamer rather than being a nerd. Sega possessed the talent to create cutting edge graphics, but did not have to sacrifice their coolness to do so, whereas Nintendo inherently was uncool for being family-friendly. Another ad was for the Sega Game Gear, a portable system. The first page shows a close-up of a dog behind a Game Gear and a Nintendo Game Boy. The Game Gear’s screen is full of colour, while the Game Boy’s displays black and white. The next page, in bold letters, proclaims, “If you were colorblind and had an I.Q. less than twelve then you wouldn’t care which portable you had.”⁵⁸ The Sega Game Gear was cool for having colour, while the Game Boy was uncool for only having black and white. This ad in particular is quite vitriolic for effectively insulting Game Boy players.

⁵⁵ “Overheard at Sega,” *Sega Visions*, May 1992, 4.

⁵⁶ “Say What? Overheard at Sega,” *Sega Visions*, June 1993, 4.

⁵⁷ “Believe it or not...” *Sega Visions*, September 1992, 8.

⁵⁸ “If you were colorblind...” *Sega Visions*, April 1993, 48-9.

Sega Visions was apt to harping on the inferiority of the Game Boy. One contest had readers find creative ways to repurpose a Game Boy that has been tossed aside for being outdated. The contest asked readers “Just come up with a good way to recycle your old monochrome portable!”⁵⁹ *Sega Visions*’ spite towards the Game Boy was petty enough to make a contest out of mocking it. The winners came up with creative, hilarious solutions to the contest. One in particular, which won the contest, proposed to use a Game Boy as a “Butt Scrubber” in the shower.⁶⁰ The Game Boy was the object of derision, and this played well into Sega’s overall strategy of competitively mocking Nintendo.

Sega Visions’ player guides, articles that gave tips for games, were similar to *Nintendo Power*’s, although not as in-depth. They were also on brand. For its guide of *Mickey Mouse in the Castle of Illusion*, *Sega Visions* assured the reader that “Now, don’t let Mickey’s starring role mislead you: this is definitely not just for little kids. There are some real mind-stumping challenges here.”⁶¹ *Nintendo Power* would have had no identity crisis associated with the game just because it was not a more “mature” game. In stark contrast to a Mickey Mouse game, *Sega Visions* also looked at *Splatterhouse 3*. It described the game as “Gross. Totally gross.” The letters are written in blood, and there’s a monster on the page.⁶² There was also more “mature” language associated with the games it reviewed. For the skateboarding game *Skitchin*’, the description reads “Quit yer bitchin’ – let’s go *Skitchin*’!”⁶³ The reviews and guides were more mature than they were in *Nintendo Power*. When the games were not, such as the Mickey Mouse game, *Sega Visions* made sure to keep its image, and try to sell it to a more “mature” audience.

⁵⁹ “Enter the Sega Visions Save the Planet Contest,” *Sega Visions*, June 1994, 74.

⁶⁰ “The Sega Visions Save the Planet Contest Winners,” *Sega Visions*, October 1994, 114.

⁶¹ “Mickey Mouse in the Castle of Illusion,” *Sega Visions*, December 1990, 18.

⁶² “Splatterhouse 3,” *Sega Visions*, August 1993, 50.

⁶³ “Review This!” *Sega Visions*, September 1994, 80.

Just like with *Nintendo Power*, *Sega Visions* carefully cultivated its presence to be in line with Sega's branding. A key part of that was demeaning Nintendo, and placing Sega as the better company for not being for children. This involved attack ads that only served to further reinforce the beliefs of the magazine's readers. The magazine was all about creating brand loyalty by galvanizing its readers into buying products that reinforced their identity of maturity.

“Sega does what Nintendon’t” Comparing *Sega Visions* and *Nintendo Power*

It is worth taking a break to contrast this with *Nintendo Power*. While *Sega Visions* was writing about skitchin' instead of bitchin', *Nintendo Power* was writing about games like *Kirby's Dreamland* and *Super Mario Kart*. For *Kirby's Dreamland* it writes, “The residents of Dream Land led an extremely peaceful life until a gluttonous beast named King Dedede and his villainous henchman invaded. They stole all of the Dream Landers' Sparkling Stars.”⁶⁴ *Super Mario Kart's* description is also fun and suitable for all audiences. “Holy smokin' tires! Kart Mania is spreading and has invaded the realm of Super Mario World.”⁶⁵ Even when the game's content included violence more realistic than a tortoise shell banging into a kart, there was more of an emphasis on adventure over violence. For *Prince of Persia*, *Nintendo Power* wrote that “a brave youth has entered the cunningly devised maze to rescue [the princess].” The accompanying picture is what appears to be an enemy holding a dagger pointing at the reader. However, with the written text emphasizing the youth engaging in an adventure over engaging with violence, the context lessens the violent nature of the picture. It highlights that the violence is meant as a

⁶⁴ “Kirby's Dreamland,” *Nintendo Power*, August 1992, 46.

⁶⁵ “Super Mario Kart,” *Nintendo Power*, October 1992, 83.

danger, just as one of the cunning puzzles is.⁶⁶ Overall, there was just tamer language compared to *Sega Visions*. For *Gargoyle's Quest*, *Nintendo Power* wrote, "The King of Destruction is waging war on the creatures of the Ghoul Realm...Join Firebrand, the fearless Gargoyle, as he searches for a way to restore peace to the land."⁶⁷ No blood, or gore are present in *Nintendo Power* guides. Just a player seeking to right wrongs in fantasy worlds.

When *Nintendo Power* did include violent games, their language tended to not be violent. For *Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf*, *Nintendo Power* wrote, "Stormin' For Glory."⁶⁸ Even for the *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* game, the most menacing language is "He Said He'd Be Back," which feels more like referential humour more than anything.⁶⁹ Violence tended to be more fantastic and less realistic, such as with *Intergalactic Ninja*. This ninja, "the most sought after soldier of fortune in the cosmos," employs "his mental and physical abilities, as well as his Photon Stick," and the player "can help Zen when you pop this Konami cartridge into your NES."⁷⁰ Zen uses violence, but in a super hero like fashion. Even when the content was more mature, such as with the *Alien 3* game, the more gross and bloody elements of the game were downplayed. *Nintendo Power* wrote, "Using a multitude of weapons and radar, you can help Ripley tackle the job."⁷¹ The description for the game could have been more "mature" considering the content of the film, which involves acid spitting, parasitic monstrosities.

However, *Nintendo Power* could portray hypermasculine characters. For the SNES port of *Wolfenstein 3D*, an incredibly muscular man holds a gatling gun, and is primed for action. The

⁶⁶ "Prince of Persia," *Nintendo Power*, September 1992, 14.

⁶⁷ "Gargoyle's Quest," *Nintendo Power*, August 1992, 8.

⁶⁸ "Desert Strike," *Nintendo Power*, December 1992, 72.

⁶⁹ "Terminator 2: Judgement Day," *Nintendo Power*, February 1992, 62.

⁷⁰ "Zen: Intergalactic Ninja," *Nintendo Power*, February 1993, 80.

⁷¹ "Alien 3," *Nintendo Power*, March 1993, 76.

text underneath reads “Man On a Mission.” The description includes violent language, but nothing too “mature”: “This series of missions takes B J through many maze-like levels, each more deadly than the last, as he battles his way to his ultimate confrontation...”⁷² Again, no guts or gore, just a straightforward shoot-em-up. Another instance of hypermasculine imagery was for the game *Crash ‘N’ the Boys: Street Challenge*. A group of tough looking boys are primed for the game’s different sporting events. However, the cartoon nature of the drawing takes away from the overall mature effect.⁷³ It is meant to be “cool”, and nothing more.

Nintendo Power also included a guide for *Barbie Game Girl*, a game that could appeal to traditional female norms. “Barbie is in a search for the perfect outfit at the Fantasy Mall, but her adventure is far from just a fashion show” due to the obstacles she must overcome.⁷⁴ The most *Sega Visions* included in this vein was an ad for *Barbie Super Model*. “Hi Tech Expressions lets girls take over the control pad from her bros. with a title that has “For Girls Only” stamped all over it.”⁷⁵ Both magazines overwhelmingly included masculine games, but *Nintendo Power* included more feminine games, even if it was a meager amount. Overall, in the 16-bit era, *Nintendo Power* continued to write more family friendly guides and reviews, whereas *Sega Visions* was overwhelmingly “mature” in its masculinity.

Ads in *Sega Visions* expressed intense masculinity. “Play with the Big Boys,” announced an ad for *Altered Beast*.⁷⁶ In an ad for the Sega Game Gear, Game Boy was once again targeted: “Separate The Men From The Boys.”⁷⁷ The Nintendo Game Boy was meant for children,

⁷² “Wolfenstein 3D,” *Nintendo Power*, March 1994, 14.

⁷³ “Crash ‘N’ The Boys: Street Challenge,” *Nintendo Power*, November 1992, 14.

⁷⁴ “Barbie Game Girl,” *Nintendo Power*, September 1992, 61.

⁷⁵ “Vizkids,” *Sega Visions*, February 1994, 116.

⁷⁶ “Play with the Big Boys,” *Sega Visions*, June 1990, 1.

⁷⁷ “Separate The Men From The Boys,” *Sega Visions*, June 1991, 27.

according to Sega, and the Game Gear was branded to be used by men. It played to its audience who wanted something more than just a “toy.” Ads were just more intense than their Nintendo counterparts, and were not afraid to be gross or ugly. In an ad for Sega’s helpline, there is a cartoon of a boy being pulled into the TV by a monstrous, grotesque green hand.⁷⁸ *Sega Visions* ads were also not afraid to include intense language to sell their products. “Thrill to... Beautiful, Entombed Princesses. Chill to...Psychotic, Death-Dealing Sorcerers. Spill to....Deranged, Draconian Firedogs. Run Like H___ From...Hideous, Head-Stamping, Hopgoblins” is the description for the game *Stormlord*.⁷⁹ An ad for *8-Meg Death Duel*, stated “The Body Count Begins In January” right beside a drooling green alien with large fangs.⁸⁰ *Sega Visions* also advertised the Genesis 32X port of *Doom*, welcoming the reader “to The Hallways of Hell.” The ad depicts the famous cover of *Doom*: a surrounded space marine, spraying bullets into a horde of space demons.⁸¹ For *Super Smash T.V.*, the ad said, “If you can get to the 12th room, Mutoid Man greets you with rocket launchers & laser beams! If you survive, the Pleasure Dome awaits...”⁸²

Violence in particular was showcased in these Sega ads. In one ad, an older boy stands at the ready in a karate pose. Over him in bold there is “Satisfy your aggressive tendencies with Sega CD.” On the next page, various violent games are listed: *Final Fight*, *Batman*, *Dracula*, and *The Terminator*.⁸³ In another ad for *Streets of Rage 2*, violent imagery abounds. One fighter nails another right in the armpit, a half-naked man is kicked in the air, and another man crawls on the ground, suffering from his injuries. Adding comedy to the scene is a couple (in black and white,

⁷⁸ “Who Ya Gonna Call?” *Sega Visions*, June 1990, 8.

⁷⁹ “Stormlord,” *Sega Visions*, December 1990, 2.

⁸⁰ “8-Meg Death Duel,” *Sega Visions*, December 1991, 32-3.

⁸¹ “Doom,” *Sega Visions*, October 1994, 12.

⁸² “Super Smash T. V.” *Sega Visions*, September 1992, 6.

⁸³ “Satisfy,” *Sega Visions*, August 1993, 20-1.

contrasting the colours of the ad) walking their dog down the street that is full of pandemonium. The woman said, “Honey, the fellow with his knee in the street thug’s groin – isn’t that the Johnson boy?”⁸⁴ Violence was not treated seriously in this ad, despite the vivid depictions of punches and kicks.

Even Sega sports game ads were heavily masculine compared to Nintendo. In an ad for *Hard Ball III*, a grizzled baseball player stands up against a brick wall, his uniform stained with dirt. The caption reads, “Eat dirt, sweat, scratch and have Al Michael describe every detail.”⁸⁵ Masculine sports were messy, and this game was meant for players to revel in the dirty details. It was also for older kids. In the ad for *Tecmo Super Baseball*, it stated, “This ain’t no pee-wee league.”⁸⁶ Not only that, but it was for real men who did not complain or cry. “Quit crying about getting hacked, or how your shoes hurt, or how you can’t shoot outdoors. Just shut up and jam,” said the ad for *Shut Up and Jam!*⁸⁷ This stands in stark contrast to how Nintendo sports games were represented in *Nintendo Power*. The magazine advertised a group of sports games to show how the SNES did indeed have sports games (despite the commonly held idea that Sega was where to go to for sports games). The title is “Where The Pros Play!” According to the ad, “The Super NES Sports library is growing by leaps and bounds and is pulling away from the pack!...You’ll find everything from football to bowling to Formula 1 racing to golf. If you’re up to the challenge...the Super NES is the place for Super Sports!”⁸⁸ Sega sports were all about the blood, sweat, and (lack of) tears. Nintendo sports were about fun competition that everyone

⁸⁴ “Streets of Rage,” *Sega Visions*, December 1993, 106-7.

⁸⁵ “Hard Ball III,” *Sega Visions*, December 1993, 11.

⁸⁶ “Tecmo Super Baseball,” *Sega Visions*, August 1994, 97.

⁸⁷ “Shut up and jam,” *Sega Visions*, June 1994, 27.

⁸⁸ “Where the Pros Play!” *Nintendo Power*, November 1992, 4.

could join in on. Nintendo sports were indeed masculine for being about competition, but they could not compare to how masculinized the Sega ad campaigns were.

The issue of maturity comes into play when discussing the masculinity within *Sega Visions*. The magazine flaunted how hypermasculinity could be mature, despite it poking fun at violence. However, it embraced how masculinity eschews weakness, and takes hold of maturity based on that. Sexuality was also part of this conception of maturity. In one ad for *Summer Challenge*, it outlined key summer moments. “Three summers ago it was zits. Two summers ago it working at Bun N’ Run. Last summer it was dating the Klinefelter twins.” For the last sentence, there is a picture of a woman’s cleavage.⁸⁹ This is not the kind of audience Nintendo was aiming for without a doubt. Sega could get away with including sexuality in the first place. In an ad for the Sega 32X (a hardware add-on for the Genesis), a boy eyes the 32X being placed onto a Genesis, and asks “Mommy, what are those two Sega machines doing?” to which the mother replies “They’re making an arcade system, dear.”⁹⁰ Although this was a harmless, cheeky innuendo, this would have never been printed in *Nintendo Power*.

Even when *Nintendo Power* tried to be more mature, it was rare and felt out of place. In one ad for the Game Boy, the ad said, “Punish your father when he gets home” for using your Game Boy. This is seemingly a response to the more mature ads of Sega. At most, it lacks any of the grit present in Sega’s sports games, any of the violence of its fighting games, or any of the sexuality present in ads. Otherwise it is a vague command that results in a happy ending: “You’ve given him his chances, but **now** it’s time for him to get his **own** Game Boy. He’s lucky

⁸⁹ “Summer Challenge,” *Sega Visions*, August 1993, 101.

⁹⁰ “Mommy, what are those two Sega machines doing?” *Sega Visions*, December 1994, 50-1.

that it's also time for Father's Day."⁹¹ In the end, dad was punished by getting a Game Boy despite his "bad" behaviour.

Within *Sega Visions*' hypermasculine space, there was room for female gamers who made their voices be heard. One gamer who wrote in was 26 years-old, and "owned the Master System for 3 years and the Genesis for one year."⁹² In one issue, *Sega Visions* put together a section of just female writers. One writer asked, "I'd like to know why there aren't very many women in Sega games. Sure there's a bunch, but not as many as men. Most of them wait around for the guys to save them. So in the next game, I'd like to see girls throwing punches, not kisses."⁹³ The other writer echoed that more games should be geared towards girls: "I think Sega Genesis is more for boys because the games are fighting and violence, and I'm not into that. I know you have some girls' games, but not enough for me. If you make more girls' games, I'm sure that some girls will get a Sega Genesis."⁹⁴ Female gamers were clearly within the culture of the Sega Genesis, but felt more disenfranchised than female Nintendo fans.

As we have seen so far, Nintendo's cultural space was more accepting to females due to its environment that could appeal to everyone. *Nintendo Power* made sure to play up that there were female gamers. This is shown not to be the mandate of *Sega Visions* who had a specifically more mature male audience. Throughout the 16-bit generation, *Nintendo Power* continued to publish letters from female gamers, in stark contrast to *Sega Visions*. In one issue, *Nintendo Power* asked readers to write in about their favourite *Street Fighter* characters. Male gamers usually picked male characters. One male writer said, "Ryu is the most well-rounded fighter. I

⁹¹ "Punish Your Father When He Gets Home," *Nintendo Power*, May 1992, 4.

⁹² "Mailbox," *Sega Visions*, April 1991, 10.

⁹³ "Yo Sega!" *Sega Visions*, December 1994, 10.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

asked 30 people this and 19 said ‘Ryu.’ The others picked Ken. The only thing different about them is the speed, and who’s stronger.” Another wrote, “Guile, Ryu and Ken are the most skilled World Warriors and consistently win more matches.” Female gamers who wrote in, however, tended to pick Chun Li, a female playable character. “Chun Li is the best. Her best moves will defeat anyone and with the Kikoken, she is unstoppable!” wrote one female gamer. “Chun Li is by far the most skilled player. Her Lightning Kick is easy to avoid others’ moves and easy to attack from above. The Whirlwind Kick will take any opponent by surprise—what more can I say? Chun Li is THE choice!” wrote another. Female gamers identified with Chun Li, a female character who is in the minority in the roster of *Street Fighter*. As one female writer put it “Her moves are some of the easiest to learn and she is unique, being the only woman fighter.”⁹⁵

Female gamers happily showed off their gaming related accomplishments in *Nintendo Power*, most specifically their art. One 19 year-old woman sent in some of her *Legend of Zelda* art. She became interested in art after getting *The Legend of Zelda*. “When I wasn’t playing it, I was drawing it. I tried so hard to draw Link just like the instruction booklet. As I grew older, I expanded and drew new poses and made up my own characters.” She thanked Nintendo “for inspiring me through those critical years. You’ve helped me to let my imagination go and now I draw nearly anything ... I’m going to college now to major in graphic design.”⁹⁶ Another writer explained how her “brother, Greg, usually sends his accomplishments, and hints to you guys, but since we got Mario Paint, I’ve been addicted to Nintendo more than ever.” She included a picture of Hawaii, where she lived. “...if you could print my drawing in your magazine,” she added “it would make me very happy and would bring me sweet revenge on my brother.”⁹⁷ *Nintendo*

⁹⁵ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, December 1993, 6.

⁹⁶ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, January 1994, 6.

⁹⁷ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, July 1993, 6.

Power celebrated female gamers for their involvement in the community for not just playing games, but engaging with the fandom creatively.

As much as there were female gamers playing Sega games, the Sega gaming culture was still geared very much to older males. The female gamers writing into *Sega Visions* were asking for better representation within games, whereas female gamers writing into *Nintendo Power* were more established into the inclusive culture, and engaged with it in a multitude of ways, from sending in their high scores, beating their brothers in games, and even sending in art. The gaming culture during the 8-bit and 16-bit generations was more of the same since the early 1980's, but Nintendo's family friendly environment made it so that violence in games was toned down, and that there was a growing place for female gamers in the culture. However, with Sega arriving on the scene with its Genesis console, a new market was opened up for older males. Sega focused its efforts on creating a hypermasculine culture of games that had little room for female gamers. Sega pushed the envelope in terms of "maturity" in the gaming market, and this partly led to controversy that resulted in a main staying institution of the industry to this day.

"Enough to give adults nightmares" *Mortal Kombat*, *Night Trap*, and the establishment of the ESRB

Due to the increasing technological prowess of consoles during the 16-bit era, graphics improved by 1992. This meant that games, which most often incorporated violence to some degree, were becoming more graphic. As we have seen, Sega played up the gore present in their games in their advertisements. Doing so meant that they could sell to their market the promise of better graphics and more mature content. Graphic violence in video games was becoming ever more present

during this generation, and nowhere can this more be seen than with 1992's arcade hit *Mortal Kombat*. Unlike other fighting games, such as *Street Fighter*, it showcased brutal techniques to terminate the player's enemies. Some of these techniques, called "fatalities", the player could employ at the end to "FINISH HIM." The player, depending on their character, for example, could rip out the skeleton of their enemy's body. There were other such gruesome moves like electrifying the opponent into a pile of dust, or ripping off their head, complete with spinal cord.⁹⁸ Eventually the game found its way onto both the Genesis and SNES. Its violence shocked concerned parents everywhere.

The other game to cause controversy was 1992's *Night Trap*. This game was for the Sega CD, an add-on to the Sega Genesis that could play CDs capable of holding video files (a key selling feature of the add-on). This meant that full motion videos could be incorporated into the games. *Night Trap* is a game that fundamentally relies on full motion videos, because it involves the player watching security cameras in a house full of young women. The point of the game is to protect them from being captured by Augers, vampire-like creatures who intend to suck the blood out of their victims. The player watches for Augers, and sets off traps to catch them.⁹⁹ Even though the player is attempting to save the women, however, concerned adults only saw the game as a horrible game that involved murdering women.

Moral panic surrounding these two "morally corrupt" games, took off in December 1993 when Senator Herbert Kohl of Wisconsin published a press release that condemned video games. "The days of Lincoln Logs and Matchbox cars are gone for a lot of kids. Some of these interactive video games, complete with screams of pain, are enough to give adult nightmares," he

⁹⁸ *Mortal Kombat*, designed by Ed Boon and John Tobias (Chicago: Midway, 1992), arcade.

⁹⁹ *Night Trap*, designed by James Riley and Rob Fulop (Tokyo: Sega, 1992), Sega CD.

stated. At the same time, Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut held a press conference about violent video games. He stated, “I personally believe it is irresponsible for some in the video game industry to produce them. I wish we could ban them constitutionally, or that the industry would stop making them.” A week after, the U. S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs’ Subcommittee on Regulation and Government Information and the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice met to deliberate on *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*. Lieberman described the “fatality” system in depth to those present. He then explained the visual horror of *Night Trap*: “*Night Trap* uses actual actors and achieves an unprecedented level of realism. What is particularly troubling about the scene in this film that we have an extract of is a graphic depiction of the violence against women, with strong overtones of sexual violence. I find this segment deeply offensive, and believe that it simply should be taken off the market.”¹⁰⁰ Lieberman and his compatriots were on a mission to improve the moral fibre of video games.

Sega and Nintendo responded differently, because they were treated differently. Nintendo’s guidelines for family friendly entertainment meant that the SNES port of *Mortal Kombat* had been toned down in violence and gore. Their reputation due to their family audience meant that blame was not saddled at their feet. Instead, Sega, who had an older audience was held under scrutiny. William White, Sega’s vice president of market, tried to express that the average age for a Sega CD user was twenty-two years-old. But, that did little to stop the castigations of the Committees. In the end, *Night Trap* was pulled off the market, and *Mortal Kombat* (certainly helped by the controversy) became even more of a best-seller.¹⁰¹ Despite what seemed to be a loss for Sega, the industry as a whole benefitted, because the congressional

¹⁰⁰ J. C. Herz, *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, And Rewired Our Minds* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 188-90.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 190-1.

hearings did not result in a government rating system. Instead, the leaders in the industry banded together to create the Interactive Digital Software Association, which created the Entertainment Software Ratings Board.¹⁰² The ESRB is a body that rates video games “so parents can make informed choices.” It gives a letter ranking for each game to denote what age group it is for (E for Everyone, T for Teen, etc.). Their aim is to give guidance to parents as to what games to give to their children.¹⁰³ Their ratings are ubiquitous and standard for all games in the industry.

Conclusions

Going into the mid-1990’s, then, the state of video game culture had changed in the past decade. Nintendo brought it back to life, and instilled an inclusive, family friendly environment. This meant that the masculinity seen in the early 1980s was maintained, but tempered by Nintendo’s culture of friendly competition. It was a safe masculinity that allowed males to be competitive, and enjoy violence in games, but they were shoulder-to-shoulder with their other family members, notably their fellow female gamers. As the few examples in this chapter have shown, there certainly was sexism against female gamers – boys tended not to see girls as gamers. However, Nintendo encouraged girls to join the ranks of a growing community. Barriers were being taken down. Boys were still blowing up space ships, and decimating aliens, but the family friendly culture meant that there were limits on how mature content could get.

Sega, however, entered the scene, and changed video game culture by heightening the masculinity that had existed since the beginning of video game culture. They accelerated masculinity into hypermasculinity for the sake of appealing to a new audience. After all,

¹⁰² Ibid., 191-2.

¹⁰³ “ESRB Mission and Additional Information,” accessed December 8, 2017, <http://www.esrb.org/about/>.

Generation G, those born in the early seventies, were entering or in their twenties during the 16-bit generation. This was an audience that more mature content could appeal to. Ultimately what this led to was a split forming in video game culture. It took a console war to fracture the monolithic entity that was video game culture of the early 1980s. Fierce brand loyalty meant that divisions were further drawn in the sand. Now there were two major sides in video game culture that were at odds with each other: a more family friendly market that changed little from earlier video game culture, and a mature market that sought to push boundaries to keep up with the aging gaming population. For masculinity in the culture, this meant that the bar was set higher for what was deemed acceptable in content. Masculinity was growing up.

Chapter 3: “Fanboy antics” The 32-bit generation and how the Internet changed gaming culture

In 2003, Craig Beers, a PC video editor for *GameSpot* – an online video games magazine – wrote an article addressing a worrying trend in gaming culture. “There’s such a thing as an enthusiast, and then there’s such a thing as a fanboy....This sort of mob mentality isn’t exactly new to the gaming industry. Back in the day, you either owned an NES or a Sega Master System.” By fanboy, Beers was referring to a fan in the community who vehemently defended and championed a game, or console, usually getting into arguments with other gamers. He asked, “So what happened to turn innocent favoritism into the mean-spirited flame-fests engaged in by today’s fanboys?” His answer: “I supposed the Internet is to blame. Look at where most of the fanboy antics take place: niche message boards...These people are so gung ho about their preferred consoles that it seems like a part of life to them.” He figured the problem was that “The Internet makes it easier to lash out at fellow human beings because you’re hidden.”¹

Central to online video game culture was the concept of being “hard-core.” Much like in previous generations, the more someone knew about video games and played them, the more they had “cred.” Online with enough “cred,” someone could be called a hard-core gamer. Many forum posters identified as this, citing their vast amount of knowledge on topics, spouting their opinions on current topics, and even listing off their impressive gaming collection.

There was a distinct turn in the history of video game culture with the introduction of the Internet, and its capability to connect gamers all around the world. Up until the early 1990s, gaming culture had – as we have seen in the previous two chapters – been marked by remarkable

¹ Wayback Machine,” February 1, 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030201092950/http://www.game-revolution.com:80/chat/gamepost.html>.

consistency. Gaming was gendered to be masculine as it involved things like competition and violence. Sega intensified masculinity in gaming by providing more mature content, and by inciting the first console war on gamers. But, overall, this was a history of continuity. As I argue in this chapter, gaming culture stayed the same in the wake of the 16-bit generation with the 32-bit generation.² It is with the adoption of the Internet that gaming culture's worst element, toxic masculinity, escalated due to the Internet user's ability to be anonymous and connect with like-minded individuals. First, I will explore the mid-1990s and Sony's entrance into the market, picking up on the themes of hypermasculinity present within the culture. Then, I will examine the introduction of the Internet and how that impacted gaming culture.

Sony enters the fray: CD-ROMs, the fall of a giant, and the rise of another

Early in the life of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES), Nintendo planned to develop a CD add-on which would extend the capacity of the limited cartridge-based system. Nintendo saw many possibilities in using CDs. A CD could hold 550 megabytes of code, or "2,000 times that of the most powerful cartridge CD-based games offered the ultimate in complexity, detail, and sound."³ In 1991, Nintendo planned a \$700 CD add-on for the SNES through a partnership with Sony. They could also use characters from films by Columbia Pictures, a company owned by Sony. Sony planned to create the Play Station, which could play both SNES cartridges and SNES CD games. Additionally, Sony would gain rights over games developed for the CDs. Nintendo president Yamauchi backed out of the partnership due to this,

² The 16-bit generation included the SNES, and the Sega Genesis (to name a few), as we saw in the previous chapter. The 32-bit generation included the Sega Saturn, Nintendo 64, and the Sony PlayStation.

³ Leonard Herman, "The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems," in *The Video Game Explosion: A History From Pong to Playstation(R) and Beyond* ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 161.

and instead commissioned Philips to work on the CD format. Later that year, Philips made the SNES CD format compatible with its own system, the CD-i. The partnership with Philips fell through, however, after the CD-i failed to be successful. Sega also entered the CD gaming market with its Sega CD, an add-on for the Genesis in 1992. It utilized the expanded storage for full motion video, which was more of a novelty than a true improvement for game design. Players were not enticed to spend the extra money for a novelty that offered little in the way of better games, and this early generation of CD consoles languished.⁴

Other companies entered the CD-ROM market as multimedia systems, something that could play games, but was used more for interactive material, such as educational software. In 1991, the founder of Electronic Arts, Trip Hawkins, began creating the 3DO, a system that was meant to be a universal CD console. Hawkins presented it as a multimedia system, and not as a gaming console, much like the Philips CD-i, and the Commodore CDTV systems (which were also released in 1991). Because it was unclear to consumers what these systems were, they were unsuccessful. Commodore tried to address this problem with their new system, the Amiga³² in September 1993. It was advertised as a 32-bit gaming console. It only found short-lived success in Europe. Finally, in October 1993, the 3DO was released. Despite there being many educational titles for the console, the many games led consumers to believe that it was just another gaming console, and the \$700 price tag scared away potential customers. Atari released its final console, the Atari Jaguar, in late 1993. It was more powerful than the other systems at the time, but the complexity of its hardware meant that fewer third party developers made games for the system. It did not stand a chance when Sony and Sega later released their new systems,

⁴ Ibid., 162.

which I will discuss later.⁵ In 1995, the Jaguar stopped selling. Between 1993 and 1995, Atari sold around 125,000 units. By December 1995, Atari had around 100,000 units in inventory.⁶

Before releasing a proper 32-bit console, Sega released the 32X add-on for the Genesis. This adapter allowed the Genesis to play 32-bit games. However, it failed due to its high price, and because Sega would soon be releasing a proper 32-bit console, the Sega Saturn.⁷ Sega advertised the 32X and the Sega CD alongside the Saturn, despite the newness of the 32X, the Sega CD, and Saturn. In the same issue of *Sega Visions* where the magazine printed a 37 page in depth look at the Saturn, an advertisement proclaimed “Genesis to the X-treme!”⁸ In the previous issue, a 32X game called *Tempo* was advertised as having “tons of color, scaling bosses, amazing movement in the backgrounds, and some seriously solid game play.”⁹ In the same issue, an article for *Ecco: The Tides of Time* advertised “16 minutes of animation created just for CD gamers.”¹⁰ Sega thought that it could sell a system, and two add-ons at the same time, ultimately stealing attention away from its new system, the Saturn.

Nintendo announced that it would be foregoing their deal with Sony in favour of Philips at the 1991 Consumer Electronics Show, one of the largest industry gatherings. Sony decided to continue development on its Play Station despite this, but there was a further dispute which resulted in having Sony no longer developing its Play Station to be SNES compatible. Instead, it decided to develop its own system called the PlayStation.¹¹ In the wake of Nintendo’s betrayal, the engineer of the Play Station, Ken Kutaragi, convinced Sony’s CEO, Norio Ohga, to push for

⁵ Ibid., 162-3.

⁶ Richard Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games: From Atari To Xbox One* (London: Robinson, 2015), 179.

⁷ Herman, “The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems,” 163.

⁸ “Sega Saturn Delivers,” *Sega Visions*, May 1995, 8-28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40-1, 44-6, 48-53; “Genesis to the X-treme,” *Sega Visions*, May 1995, 3.

⁹ “Tempo: Hip Grasshopper Grooves on 32X,” *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 38.

¹⁰ “Ecco: The Tides of Time,” *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 48.

¹¹ Herman, “The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems,” 163-4.

Sony's stake in video games. Ohga was furious with Nintendo, and so readily gave the go ahead for Kutaragi.¹² Both the Sega Saturn and the Sony PlayStation released in America in 1995. Sega announced that the Saturn would release on September 2, but surprised everyone at E3 that year by revealing that the Saturn would release that day. This caught third party developers and retailers off guard. Only a select few retailers had Saturns. Those without Saturns at launch were angry at Sega for not including them. Meanwhile, Sony released the PlayStation in America on September 9. Nearly 100,000 units were sold through pre-orders by that point, setting a record for console pre-orders. Sony ended 1995 with a strong lead in the market. Sega's marketing concept of being "cool" had worked for it so far. But, Sony had a wider scope. It was targeting young adults who grew up with gaming. It "was lifestyle marketing – aspirational, slightly edgy, the backing tracks familiar and the faces hip."¹³ Sony brought to the table a new layer to gaming culture that aged up its target audience.

Unlike Sega, Nintendo's push for its new console, the Nintendo 64, was focused. In the lead up to the release, *Nintendo Power* gave extensive coverage and previews of the N64. In January 1996, it covered the Japanese release of the system. "You've heard about the light at the end of the tunnel? The debut of the Nintendo 64 in Japan appeared more like a super nova exploding in your face. Everything we wanted, everything we hoped to find, everything we dreamed about in the ultimate video game system was there..."¹⁴ *Nintendo Power* was only too happy to publish excited fans' reactions. One writer exclaimed "My initial thought when I read Volume 79 was HOT DANG!! Of course the first thing I checked out was the first look at the NU 64 controller. Sweet glory of heaven!"¹⁵ *Nintendo Power* also showcased a N64 game that

¹² Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games*, 182.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁴ "Out of the Shadows: Nintendo 64 Debuts in Japan," *Nintendo Power*, January 1996, 20.

¹⁵ "Players' Pulse," *Nintendo Power*, March 1996, 6.

was in development: *Mission: Impossible*. It interviewed the developers, and showed concept art of the game.¹⁶ In June 1996, it published a massive 31 page “exclusive world tour of the first Nintendo 64 games.”¹⁷ When the N64 was released, *Nintendo Power* made sure to add another article on the console (although it was not as long as the June article).¹⁸ Nintendo released the N64 in America in September 1996. Nintendo kept with cartridges despite the other companies moving to CD-ROMs. This garnered criticism, because cartridges were more expensive, and took longer to produce than CDs. The tacit reason for Nintendo sticking with cartridges was that it allowed for Nintendo to have a tighter grip on licensing and manufacturing, due to the cartridges being proprietary. N64 pre-order sales in Japan broke the newly set record of the PlayStation’s pre-sales. In North America, the N64 sold 500,000 pre-orders, even though there were only just two titles available. Sony had sold this many in three months. Sega had sold this many in an entire year.¹⁹

During this generation, the 32-bit era (the N64 being the exception to the bit rule, being a 64-bit machine), the console war began anew (or never truly stopped). A writer into *Computer and Video Games* expressed doubt as to what to buy. “When is this barrage of Next Generation machines going to stop?” he wrote. “I want to buy one, preferably a PSX [a Playstation], but am worried that something else new and lush, i.e. Ultra 64 [a N64], will be the best machine in a year, making my machine outdated and poo!”²⁰ In *Nintendo Power*, of course, there was no doubt where people’s loyalties lay. One writer called out other gaming companies for discrediting Nintendo. “I know that it’s all overdriven, hyped-out-of-this world smoke screen.

¹⁶ “Mission: Impossible,” *Nintendo Power*, May 1996, 22-5.

¹⁷ “The Fun Machine,” *Nintendo Power*, June 1996, 11-42.

¹⁸ “Blast Off to the Future,” *Nintendo Power*, September 1996, 10-3.

¹⁹ Herman, “The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems,” 163-5.

²⁰ “In the bag,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1995, 79.

For example, Sega's Vectorman has computer-modeled graphics that are only possible on the Genesis because they're simplified down to poorly colored animation. Donkey Kong Country did computer-modeled graphics FIRST AND BETTER!"²¹ One writer expressed remorse for selling his SNES for a PlayStation. "It sucks," he lamented. "All the games for PlayStation have weird graphics and they are soooooo [sic] boring. Galaga for Game Boy is more fun than any of them."²² In the transition between the age of Super Nintendo and the Sega Genesis to the age of PlayStation and Nintendo 64, not much had changed in terms of competition between the loyalties of consumers.

This generation was also one of continuity. Another mainstay of this generation from the last was the mature culture within competition and violence. Nintendo kept up with its family friendly tone, while Sega kept up with its more mature image. One ad from *Sega Visions* for the *Sega Channel* (an online game service) proclaimed "YOUR TOMBSTONE WILL READ 'GAME OVER.'"²³ Another ad has an unsettling head with eyes at its back. The caption is "If you don't have eyes in the back of your head, you're dead meat."²⁴ The grotesque, as always, was essential to the hard-core, mature image that Sega crafted. Sega also used the controversy surrounding *Night Trap* to sell the game's 32X port. "Controversy. Congressional hearings. *Night Trap* sparked it all.....Senators hate it! You'll love it!"²⁵ Taboo things, like racy controversy, were attractive to Sega's mature audience. Additionally, part of this mature, hard-core culture was the win all or lose all mindset. In one ad for the Game Gear, the caption spelled

²¹ "Players' Pulse," *Nintendo Power*, April 1996, 9.

²² "Players' Pulse," *Nintendo Power*, June 1996, 8.

²³ "Your Tombstone Will Read 'Game Over,'" *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 25.

²⁴ "If You Don't Have Eyes in the Back of Your Head, You're Dead Meat," *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 60-1.

²⁵ "Night Trap," *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 42.

it out: “if it’s not Sega...you lose.”²⁶ Sega maintained its “bad” reputation for an audience that was still present (even if the most recent console, the Saturn, was turning out to be a dud).

Sony built on this hard-core culture with its material for the PlayStation. Sports games were advertised in similar competitive language. For *NFL Game Day 98*, the caption is “It must be important when 22 men will go to war over a piece of land no wider than this ad.”²⁷ Advertisements for games were also gruesome. The ad for *Nightmare Creatures* warned, “It’ll take your breath away, followed shortly by your arms, legs and head.”²⁸ Language was violent. “Some kill for sport. Some kill for glory. You kill for power,” is the caption for *Machine Hunter*.²⁹ For *Maximum Force*, the ad depicted the outline of a body with a bloodstain on it. The caption is “Admit it. Sometimes you’d feel better if you could just shoot every damn thing in sight. (But then there’s that death penalty thing).”³⁰ In a similar ad for *Loaded in Computer and Video Games*, the game is advertised with this language: “They wanna be free to do what they wanna do – they wanna kill people.”³¹ Competition and graphic violence were part of Sony’s mandate, just as they were for Sega’s.

Another aspect of this mature culture that remained was sexuality. In an ad for PlayStation’s *Pandemonium 2*, it told the reader: “Satisfy all your needs, wants and desires.” Above is “ID EGO LIBIDO.” Under the “LIBIDO” title is a woman.³² Racy content is also found in *Sega Visions*. The advertising for the Sega 32X, an ad-on that is inserted onto the top of a Genesis console, was not subtle in sexual innuendos. One ad showed the 32X being lowered

²⁶ “If it’s not Sega...you lose,” *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 46-7.

²⁷ “NFL GameDay 98,” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, October 1997, 1-2.

²⁸ “Nightmare Creatures,” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, October 1997, 3-4.

²⁹ “Machine Hunter,” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, October 1997, 23.

³⁰ “Maximum Force,” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, October 1997, 115.

³¹ “Loaded,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1995, 20.

³² “Pandemonium 2,” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, October 1997, 101.

onto a Genesis with words above: “oh YES...more, MORE! Faster, FASTER! Faster! oh baby, oh baby...”³³ Masturbation also was a common theme in these racy ads. “Stop Playing With Yourself” was the title for an ad for the XBAND Video Game Modem.³⁴ Interestingly enough, there was an ad for a Nintendo game that followed this trend. For the *Earthworm Jim* Gameboy port, the ad said, “Now you can play with your worm in public.”³⁵ What may explain this is that it was an ad for a third party title, and the ad was in *Computer and Video Games*, and not *Nintendo Power*.

Female gamers continued to exist in a complex, contested space in gaming culture. In a *Nintendo Power* letter, a male writer voiced his opinion on whether or not women were being portrayed fairly in video games. “Quit printing these stupid letters about the portrayal of women in video games,” he wrote, in what could be read as a condescending tone. He explained how there were more male video game players, and “Therefore, companies try to make games more appealing to guys by making the hero male and all the girls very attractive.” Furthermore, he added, anyone could be “captured by a giant turtle[.]” And in response to what women characters tended to wear he wrote: “Have you ever noticed what the guys look like?”³⁶ In his justification of what the industry did, he highlighted how the industry was sexist. It is interesting to note that the arguments today within gaming culture concerning these topics existed twenty years ago, and normalized sexism within the culture, just as they do today.

In the wake of the N64’s success, the Saturn was in third place. Sega decided in early 1997 that the company needed a new console. After having two teams work on different

³³ “Genesis 32X,” *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 6-7.

³⁴ “Stop Playing With Yourself,” *Sega Visions*, February 1995, 36-7.

³⁵ “Now you can play with your worm in public,” *Computer & Video Games*, November 1995, 15.

³⁶ “Players’ Pulse,” *Nintendo Power*, May 1996, 6-7.

consoles, Sega chose the system that would be called the Dreamcast. It was released in North America on September 9, 1999. It found success among hard-core gamers, and was the first console to include online gaming. It had a built-in 56k dial-up modem, which was a first, and a broadband Ethernet modem was also available. SegaNet was the online service set up to allow gamers to play against each other over the Internet. The Dreamcast used the Microsoft Windows CE operating system. This allowed PC game developers to port over their games more easily. This meant that Microsoft had an inside look into designing video game hardware.³⁷ Dreamcast's propriety GD-ROMs could hold more data than CD-ROMs, and it was "capable of visuals that were a true leap beyond PlayStation." Additionally, the Dreamcast's release lineup of games was formulated to be numerous and of good quality while catering to a wide range of interests. Sega initiated a huge marketing blitz in North America that encouraged pre-orders, In the first day, Sega sold 225,000 units.³⁸ Sales for the system were good, moving the Dreamcast ahead of the N64.³⁹

However, Sony announced the PlayStation 2 in 2000, and the hype surrounding its launch meant that sales faltered for the Dreamcast. Gamers were more interested in seeing what Sony could offer, one of the reasons being the backwards compatibility of the PS2 (which meant that it could play games from the original PlayStation). Another reason for the hype surrounding the PS2 was its adoption of the DVD format for its games. The DVD format had been released in late 1995, but had yet to obtain ubiquity. It was superior to CD-ROMs for having six times as much data storage. The PS2 not only used its DVD player for its games; it also could play DVD movies, something unique to the PS2 among gaming consoles at the time. This attracted movie

³⁷ Herman, "The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems," 166.

³⁸ Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games*, 205-7.

³⁹ Herman, "The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems," 166.

enthusiasts, because the PS2's cost of \$300 was less than DVD players of the time. At the outset of the PS2's Japanese release, Sony sold over one million units, setting new records. The demand was huge, and Sony had difficulty resupplying stores. There were reports of robberies in the lines for the consoles.⁴⁰ "Never before had so many instances of violence been reported during a launch of a system."⁴¹ As grim of a sign as it was, this zeal during the PS2's launch meant that it was a success for Sony. Sony was also still making money off of the PS1. It re-released the system as a smaller unit that was around the size of a portable CD player, and named it the PSOne. The price was set below \$100, and offered a screen that could be used with the system. Using the screen, the system was marketed as a portable console that could be used in cars for example. It was such a success that it "went on to outsell all other competing consoles, including the PS2."⁴² Sony was at the top of the heap during this console war.

That did not mean that there was no room for competitors. After working on the Dreamcast, Microsoft began looking at creating its own system. Bill Gates at the Game Developer's Conference announced that Microsoft was developing a console just three weeks after the PS2 was launched in Japan. This killed the Dreamcast. Fearing that another console on the market would further hurt its sales, Sega ended production in March 2001. This meant that Sega bowed out of hardware production for good, focusing on software development to this day. Meanwhile, Microsoft's system, the Xbox, was released in November 2001 in North America for \$299. This was the first American console in nearly a decade. The Xbox could also play DVDs, but required an additional remote to do so. Three days after the Xbox was released, Nintendo released the Nintendo GameCube. It used a proprietary disc, meaning that the system could not

⁴⁰ Ibid., 166-7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 167.

⁴² Ibid.

play DVDs. The Xbox was more powerful than the humble GameCube, but it did have Nintendo's familiar and trusted library of characters and intellectual property. Microsoft began Xbox Live in November 2002, a subscription service that allowed gamers to play with each other over the Internet. Sony sold, over all, over 120 million units, making it the clear winner of this generation's console war. Microsoft, although not reaching that level of success, still did well, and sold 24 million Xboxes. Nintendo came in last, selling 21 million units.⁴³ Overall, there were around 3,900 games developed for the PS2, 1,000 for the Xbox, and 600 for the GameCube. The PS2's library is considered to be "the richest any individual console in history has to offer..."⁴⁴

The 32-bit generation was one of continuity. Releasing the N64, Nintendo continued to hone its family-friendly image, and Sega further developed its mature brand with the Sega Saturn (and the add-ons to the Genesis). However, Sony entered the console war, shaking things up for the industry. It outplayed Sega at the game of having a mature gaming console. Sega's Saturn languished behind the other consoles. Despite Sega faltering, not much had changed in gaming culture since the previous chapter. There was still a divide between family-friendly gaming, and games meant for a more mature audience. Additionally, fans were just as loyal to their respective consoles as ever (even when they jumped ship only to climb on board with the PlayStation). What was waiting in the wings, however, was the Internet. It took this culture of competition, and hard-core gaming to another level.

⁴³ Ibid., 167-8.

⁴⁴ Stanton, *A Brief History of Video Games*, 225.

The Internet and gaming culture

As this process was unfolding, the Internet was gaining in popularity across Canada by the late 1990s. Gaming culture would collide with the Internet to accelerate many of the forces we have seen unfolding since the 1980s. The Internet allowed fans from all across the globe to organize, and express their deeply held opinions to each other. Oftentimes, they did so in explicit and angry ways. The Internet allowed for anonymity, letting fans to express their voice unmitigated. As we saw before with print culture, magazine editors chose which letters to publish. On the Internet, there was little in the way of gatekeeping.

There is little literature about the Internet's history, but that only makes it deserving of historical study. Part of the issue when talking about historical Internet sources is that there is "a shortage of accessible conventional historical sources..." In the late 1990s, archival professionals and digital preservationists started to preserve web pages as sources. The best way to view these archived web pages is through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, which allows us to look back all the way to 1996 for some sites.⁴⁵

Yet these are not perfect, all-encompassing archives. I could only go as far back as the early 2000s for my examination of online gaming forums. These are invaluable historical sources. They give us a direct connection to the voices of gamers, whereas print articles, like the ones previously used, are merely created by the industry and marketed towards a specific target demographic. Children accessing the early Internet could "engage with a world on a very different level....They had much greater freedom online than in person, being able to present

⁴⁵ Ian Milligan, "A Haven for Perverts, Criminals, and Goons": Children and the Battle for and Against Canadian Internet Regulation, 1991-1999," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 47, no. 96 (May 2015): 248-9.

themselves” as someone of their choice.⁴⁶ So, this means that Internet forums were a way for gamers to shape their own identities online. Additionally, the Internet is the “most hospitable medium for offensive communications” due to anonymity.⁴⁷ The Internet is primed for posters to use it to express their masculinity, and their negativity.

I chose as many forums with usable archived pages as I could find. I looked into *GameSpot*, *Gamefaq*, *Ars Technica*, *Games Radar*, *Game Revolution*, and *IUp*. Not all of these provided material I used in this chapter, but I looked at them nonetheless. Because there is so little saved, I tried a wide range of sites to get the best coverage that I could. Most pages include dead links, and it took patience and time to find useful material. I ended my search in 2005, the beginning of the seventh generation of video game consoles⁴⁸ with the release of the Xbox 360. This is due to the scope of this project not extending beyond an acceptable length. It also provides enough of a look into Internet culture to demonstrate the transition from print to Internet culture, and how masculinity evolved.

Hard-core culture, something that existed since the days of the Genesis, flourished online, and intensified as more people identified with the hypermasculinity within the culture. Hard-core identity was pervasive. However, there were some who questioned the validity of it. One poster on the *GameSpot* forums wrote, “All right, everyone here loves games...but do we really have to be called ‘hardcore?’ [sic] I enjoy playing games, I probably play them too much, I even am writing on a video game forum, but I don’t want to be called a term that is mostly associated with pornography and wrestling. Hardcore’s connotation brings withit [sic] much

⁴⁶ Ibid., 274.

⁴⁷ Saul Levmore, “The Internet’s Anonymity Problem,” in *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech, and Reputation* ed. Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 50.

⁴⁸ The generation after the 128-bit. The seventh does not have a bit moniker.

unneeded [sic] baggage.” Even though the writer questions the validity of the term hard-core gamer, they still have to cite their own credentials in order to be heard by their audience. The writer reiterated their point when they wrote “So please, let us ‘Hardcore’ gamers band together and make a new name for ourselves. Post your submissions on the forum. The revolution is at hand.” The post had a single reply, which did not comply with the wishes of the original poster.⁴⁹ Another poster, an adult, had an issue with the grown-up masculine image surrounding video gamers. Once again, though, this poster needed to exert their authority on the topic: “Most of you if not all of you are younger than I am.” He continued, “Don’t you all realize that ALL video games are considered kids [sic] games. It [sic] makes me laugh when I read all these posts on kiddie games.... Think about it, why [sic] do we play video games? It’s all make believe!... Kids play make believe alot [sic]. WE ARE ALL KIDS AT HEART!!” Posters in the thread were sympathetic. “Hey someone who see I [sic] eye to eye with me...” wrote one poster.⁵⁰ These outlying views, these critiques on hard-core gaming identity reveal the pervasiveness of it within the community. There was enough of a presence of it that a minority of people saw aspects of it that needed to be examined

However, most posters embraced their hard-core gaming identity. Some were happy to let their extensive opinions be known. One poster on the *GameSpot* forums wrote a rundown on the benefits of the PS2 to people who have not bought a system yet to have them “open their eyes

⁴⁹ “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010625043209/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@79033@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@79033?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.

⁵⁰ “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010625025156/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78926@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78926?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.

more to the PS2. I'm not writing this to XBOX and Gamecube devotees (if you're one of these people, forget the crap about telling me that I'm starting flame wars...I've got a public service to perform!).” The post is dripping in patronizing language that extols the virtues of the PS2 over the other systems, being provoking to fans of the other consoles. “XBOX and Gamecube devotees who trash the PS2 clearly do so out of fear, and they have many reasons to be fearful, since PS2 unquestionably will be the dominant next-generation system. They can only resort to scare-mongering tactics to try to dissuade you from buying a PS2.” He then lists twenty-three “Grade A titles coming out soon for the PS2...” He does note that most of the games “are geared toward the mass gaming public, not just the hard-core gamers.” That being said, the way in which he writes towards fellow hard-core gamers on the forums reveals that this “public service” is less for the general public, and very much to prove that the PS2 is the superior console for that generation. He then linked to articles about PS2 at E3, and a list of one-hundred games for the PS2 off of the *EB Games* website. Posters criticized his write-up. “You can argue specs and such as long as you want, but why are you all so avidly devotional to one console?...Just play the games. I don't worship Sony, neither should you.” Another poster responded to some of his claims: “Sorry I really don't know anyone who fears the PS2, come on man be a little realistic...Neither you or me has played any the [sic] games from the Future PS2 title or the Xbox titles or the Gamecube titles, so that you claim is very very speculative.”⁵¹ For every opinion there was another that shut down the other.

When opinions were high in emotion, they were at extremes. There was a controversial article written by Brandon Justice, an xbox.ign.com editor. The other posters in a discussion

⁵¹ “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010625010046/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78807@F@1@D-.D@ALL/@article@mark@78807?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.

thread entitled “And you call yourselves ‘gamers’” about the article imply that it was meant to be more humorous than offensive, but that did not stop the poster from complaining about how Justice had been apparently fired. The poster wrote:

Brandon Justice has been one of the most open-minded editors. Yet, now because of a ‘slip’ in words , he [sic] is gone. Boy, I hope that you guys feel good about that. It’s not really surprising though as the only real game-lover seems to be Alex W. [another forum user]. Seems ironic. We come here for game news, and other sites, and then argue the true-stuff, disscout [sic] it if you will. Do you want to play games? Or just hand money to a company? At least there are two poeple [sic] who have brains, and the nuts, to enjoy them-no matter what console.⁵²

I have attempted to find the article in question, but I cannot find it. It may thus seem like this post is too out of context to analyze, but it does tell us a few things.

Indeed, we can use the post to garner insights into gamer culture. The title is calling out those reading it on their gaming credentials. It is meant to be inflammatory, and an extreme reaction to the apparent firing of an *IGN* editor. Other phrases like “Boy, I hope that you guys feel good about that” also reflect the gut reaction nature of this post to attack other people. Especially the phrase “At least there are two poeple [sic] who have brains, and the nuts, to enjoy them-no matter what console” attacks the masculinity of the reader for insinuating that they are too stupid, and do not have the manly courage to enjoy all games (whatever that is supposed to mean). We can also get a glimpse into the article in question based on what the other posters had to say about it. It also (even if it was apparently satirical) is part of the larger hard-core culture that is accusatory and critical. “He basically said the GC [GameCube] wasn’t all that at E3(which [sic] I disagree). MS [Microsoft] had a lot of work to do and Sony had the best games. He

⁵² “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010625015842/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78879@F@1@D-.D@ALL/@article@mark@78879?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.

compared GC fanboys to Nazis and everyone choked and died over it. I didn't think it was that offensive. He's right, fanboys are like Nazis."⁵³ Tone can be difficult to find in text, but even if this poster was being tongue-in-cheek, his comments still represent the culture at large. Fanboys pitted themselves against each other, disparaging their reputations for liking one console over another.

Perhaps the most obvious way this hard-core culture presented itself in was the "Console Wars" being waged between fans of the PS2, the Xbox, and the GameCube. Gamers flung their opinions at each other from opposite corners of the Internet. Video game culture was no stranger to this phenomenon. Indeed, the industry itself, as we have seen, inculcated it, and those who identified as gamers took sides. But, with the Internet, the tools of expression were given solely into the hands of the gamers, and the platform from which they could stand on allowed for a wide reach in their message. There were forum posts titled simply like "X BOX FAN BOYS ARE SO ANNOYING!!!!!!!" The body message was non-surprising: "U X BOX GUYS ANNOY ME!!! GO GAMECUBE!!!!!!!" In response, one poster called the original poster out for being bellicose, but failed to have the moral victory in the end. "and your [sic] not annoying?????...well I myself am a happy and always will be SONY customer!"⁵⁴ Fanboys were everywhere on forums, and they needed for their opinions to be known on the topic of what console was the best.

Some posters found the incessant warring to be annoying. In one post entitled "Anyone tired of the console wars?" a user wrote, "I'm new to this forum, and a bit of a hardcore gamer."

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game," July 30, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010730191005/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78462@F@1@D-.D@ALL/@article@mark@78462?EXP=ALL%26VWM%3d%26ROS%3d1%26VWM=%26ROS=%26OC=300>.

Once again, we see the need to exhibit one's credentials as a hard-core gamer, in order for their opinions to be heard with respect. He continued,

My belief is that there are no bad game machines, only bad games...Each new system has its pros and cons, and i'm [sic] willing to open up and give each of them a chance....What I am tired of though, is the endless bickering in the forums, everyone seems down about something, attacking eachother [sic] over petty issues. We seem to be missing the point here, instead of fighting, we should be getting excited.⁵⁵

One poster expressed sympathy: "Yeah, I agree Gary. Who cares who's gonna [sic] come out on top? Why not just enjoy same games?" But, the tone of many of the other posts was more pessimistic. "You get used to them," wrote one poster. "You have no other choice, because they'll never go away." Another wrote, "I am tired of it. The system wars forum is in my opinion the worst peice [sic] of crap there is. Factless [sic] opinions are for children, not people who claim to be mature....I wish these forums had more peeps like you."⁵⁶ In another thread, the original poster explained his solution: buy all three consoles. He wrote, "It was inevitable that the mud slinging [sic] system wars would return, especially with three viable systems in the running....So why all the fuss? I mean, two systems are launching in the same week. Now thats [sic] something to get excited about. So why are some so miserable and angrey [sic]?"⁵⁷ It was all well and good for Bill, the original poster, that he could get all three systems. But, the reality for most gamers was different, as pointed out by another poster.

See the problem here is people who can't afford all three. If you can only afford one console, when your [sic] friends are sitting around talking about how great the console you don't own is, your [sic] bound to be pissed off, and so in order to make yourself feel

⁵⁵ "ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game," June 25, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010625004400/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78801@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78801?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game," July 30, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010730200128/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78641@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78641?EXP=ALL%26VWM%3d%26ROS%3d1%26VWM=%26ROS=%26OC=300>.

better about your [sic] the purchase you did make you try to demean the other console. yeah [sic] it's pretty stupid...⁵⁸

This poster sums up a gamer's dilemma quite well. The reason for such virulent attacks during the console wars was due to usually being only able to purchase one console. That meant brand loyalty. As we have seen, game companies exploited that for their own benefit. What now existed on the Internet was a version of the console war of Mario versus Sonic, but louder, and in the hands of a more mature audience. Some gamers revelled in the competition between competing gaming loyalties. On *Ars Technica*, a popular technology website that also hosted forums, one user's post was entitled "Now that all consoles are out WHAT'S WRONG WITH A CONSOLE WAR?"⁵⁹ Despite all of the traction against flame wars, online gamers were overwhelmingly keen to take to the battlements and defend their gaming preferences. Competition, as we have seen, extends throughout gaming culture, from gaming against other people to defending gaming preferences.

The Internet facilitated in-person gatherings as well as online discussion. One aspect of competitive gaming culture that opened up alongside the Internet was LAN gaming. The Internet allowed groups to organize events, in which attendees would bring their computers to a location where everyone would access a local network to play games on. One thread posted on the *Ars Technica* website gave a detailed account of a LAN party in Cincinnati. The language used by the original poster in their account is telling of the more "mature" culture in that it deals in expletives and inappropriate words. They list the things that they did not like at the party: "The

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Gaming, Extra Strength Caplets - Forum Powered by Infopop," December 17, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20011217043503/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=frm&f=39309975&p=4&q=Y&s=50009562>.

fucktard who moved my high quality [sic] Love Hina instead of copying it across the network. Ends up guest has write/delete access to shared directories in Win-fucking-2k.” They continued: “The player ‘I ate a turd’ I don’t know if this guy is Arsian,⁶⁰ but he had so many tk’s in RtCW it ceased to be funny, and just started really pissing me off.” Another posted sympathized about the annoying player: “Who the hell WAS I ate a turd? That guy was annoying the piss outta me.” That being said, everyone seemed to have a good time. There was a real sense of camaraderie. “I can’t wait until the next one, meeting everyone and playing the games in person was just a time and a half. All the Arsians there immediately got along...” wrote one poster. Another poster echoed these sentiments: “You guys were all great, but the best part was meeting Fuzz and Vigi. Old-school punkers that know what a fucking skin is, and the ones to embrace, run from, or attack with a cheese grater(j/k) [sic].” Part of the appeal here is the shared jokes and experiences at being at a place exclusively for gamers. The “old-school” punkers, hardcore gamers, were held in high esteem. The poster continued, “Seeing fuzz, vigi, psyber, and wookie together reminded me what an ‘Old Crew’ is like, and made me think of the old days and my old scene. You can’t fake that kind of comraderie [sic].”⁶¹ This was fun indeed, but it is a form of elitism. Being part of a group, one that prizes being the best in something, creates exclusivity. Those who attended the LAN party were out of the group, and could not be part of the “Old Crew.”

Competition over playing games was still as prevalent as ever, but it took on a more intense tone online. It stood in stark contrast to *Nintendo Power’s* call for players’ high scores. One poster on the *Ars Technica* forums, replied to another poster expressing how older gamer

⁶⁰ Arsian being a forum user of *Ars Technica*

⁶¹ “My Favorite Cincy Lan Party Gaming Stories, and/or Quotes- Post Here - Topic Powered by Infopop,” December 1, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20011201022019/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=tpc&f=39309975&m=2280942913&s=50009562>.

parents had to deal with beating their kids at games. “I’m 34 and was a clan and competition player in Q2 and Q3, and there’s nothing more enjoyable than thrashing teenagers....You don’t grow old till you stop enjoying things. I look forward to playing Quake 10 when I’m 60 and STILL beating the crap out of teenagers.”⁶² The language used is harsher than what we saw in *Nintendo Power*, or even in *Sega Visions*. At least the harsh language in *Sega Visions* tended to be directed towards enemies within the game, and not at opposing players. Looking at forum posts gives a revealing look into the language used by players who had grown up a significant deal since previous generations. This specific poster was born most likely in 1967, just on the cusp of Generation G. When he picked up gaming, we cannot be sure, but we can be sure that whenever he did, he would have been part of the maturing of gaming culture.

An important part of being a hard-core gamer was having your controversial voice heard over everyone else’s. The more polemic your question or opinion was, the better. A poster on the *GameSpot* forums asked “What is the most over rated game of all time?” The post received 49 replies.⁶³ Another poster asked what the “Most underrated game of this gen” was and got 19 replies.⁶⁴ “Do casual gamers make you mad?” asked one poster.⁶⁵ Often, posters directly replied to groups of gamers who believed a certain strongly held opinion. They were contrarian on purpose. One poster started a thread to prove that “People who say that GTA3 couldn’t be done

⁶² “Gaming, Extra Strength Caplets - Forum Powered by Infopop,” December 17, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20011217204506/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=frm&f=39309975&s=50009562>.

⁶³ “General Games Discussion - GameSpot Forums,” August 12, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20020812105201/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board?board.id=basic_vide_o&page=8.

⁶⁴ “GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” September 4, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20040904171228/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

⁶⁵ “General Games Discussion - GameSpot Forums,” April 23, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20040423211822/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board?board.id=basic_vide_o&page=4.

before the power of this gen are wrong.”⁶⁶ The language is so matter of fact. Another poster wrote, “I find it odd why people complain about the PSP’s price. Because...” and received 48 replies.⁶⁷ One poster was quite brutal in its defamation of EA Games when they posted, “EA buys everything, changes name to Satan,” and received 205 replies.⁶⁸ There was a general tone of negativity throughout. On the topic of the release of *Halo 2*, one forum user posted, “I really hope Halo 2 wins for biggest dissapointment [sic] of the Year,” and received 123 posts.⁶⁹ One poster on the *IUP* forums, expressed frustration about the PS2: “Fucking retarded ps2.”⁷⁰ Posters’ language was negative, and often loud, meaning to incite debate on forums.

“Any girls out here?” The female gamer presence online

Just as it had been since the beginning of video game culture, online gaming culture treated women as second class citizens. Indeed, female gamers had a place beside male game players at the arcades, and on home consoles, but they were always treated differently, whether that was through objectifying female video game characters, or through creating a masculine space that left little room for female gamers. When video game culture transitioned from print to digital media, video game culture’s sexism transformed with it. Women are disproportionately affected

⁶⁶ “GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” March 8, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20050308104207/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

⁶⁷ “GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” October 14, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20041014090514/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

⁶⁸ “GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” December 22, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20041222132431/http://forums.gamespot.com/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

⁶⁹ “Advertisement,” July 24, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130724062915if_/http://ad.doubleclick.net/adi/N2790.Gamespot/B1481517.16;sz=728x90;ord=2004.12.17.05.19.34.

⁷⁰ “General Gaming Board - IUP Message Boards,” November 26, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20051126063012/http://boards.iup.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general>.

by cyberbullying and cyber harassment, being threatened, demeaned, and being made vulnerable.⁷¹ Females had a smaller presence online than males. One female poster on the *IUP* forums asked “Any girls out here?...besides me?” One male poster chimed in, writing, “I know of a number who post at Iup. Just not at this particular board.” However, another female poster did post, simply writing, “I am.” In addition to having a small presence, female posters had to deal with weird attention. A male poster wrote, “I can pose as one if you want me to...” The original poster replied, “...thats [sic] ok.” Yet another male poster wrote, “I guess the next logical step here is to see some pictures.” Another female poster responded to deflect the attention: “I have some pictures...but then again I’m also in a long term relationship...Just thought I’d tease ya (It’s a girl thing).”⁷² The original poster could not connect with another female gamer without receiving unwanted male attention. The space for women in online forums was small enough for having so few members without it being crowded by males wanting to encroach on their space.

Within gaming culture, there was also the assumption that female gamers simply did not like the same kinds of games as male gamers. We have already seen this implicit within there being a larger female presence in *Nintendo Power*. Nintendo provided more family-friendly games, meaning that girls could stay away from the more masculine violent games. In online culture, male gamers often pondered over what games girls would like. On the *IUP* forums, one poster asked “Hey if ur [sic] a girl and u [sic] play games what kind of games do u [sic] like[?]” Only two female gamers answered the question, with the rest of the posters being males who

⁷¹ Andra Gumbus and Patricia Meglich, “Abusive Online Conduct: Discrimination and Harassment in Cyberspace,” *Journal of Management Policy and Practice; West Palm Beach* 14, no. 5 (October 2013): 47-8.

⁷² “Any Girls out Here? - General Gaming Board - IUP Forums -- boards.lup.com,” January 23, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040123122632/http://boards.lup.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=5495>.

could only guess. “Guy here,” wrote one poster, “but I’m gonna [sic] go out on a limb and say The Sims and Animal Crossing.” Both *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing* involve little to no violence, and revolve around living a virtual life, making them fit into the stereotype that girls eschew violence, and want to play “house”.⁷³ Another poster echoed this idea: “Yeah, I think your [sic] right about The Sims. Ever girl I know and there [sic] not really gamers only play The Sims.” One female poster gave a list of her games, and another cited *Animal Crossing* and *Resident Evil*, which is quite the range in tone. *Animal Crossing* involves living in a village with anthropomorphic animals, and collecting furniture.⁷⁴ *Resident Evil* involves surviving a zombie infested mansion.⁷⁵ No one responded to this, but one gamer did note how weird it could be that a female gamer played something violent. He wrote, “Guy here...my sisters only play Vice City (not joking) and Mario Kart: Double Dash.”⁷⁶ In another thread, this time on *GameSpot’s* forums, a poster wanted to know if his girlfriend would like *Final Fantasy X*. A forum user responded with blatant sexism: “does it matter? /makes whip sound.” Another was creepy: “1) Does she like Video games? 2) Does she like RPG games? 3) If you answered yes to both of the above, what is her telephone number?”⁷⁷ Male gamers could not get their head around female gamers, and where they should belong within video game culture.

According to Martha C. Nussbaum, a large portion of online harassment that women face “involves what feminists have called ‘objectification’: treating women as objects for men’s use

⁷³ *The Sims*, designed by Will Wright (Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts, 2000), PC; *Animal Crossing*, directed by Katsuya Eguchi and Hisashi Nogami (Kyoto: Nintendo, 2001), Nintendo GameCube.

⁷⁴ *Animal Crossing*.

⁷⁵ *Resident Evil*, directed by Shinji Mikami (Osaka: Capcom, 1996), PlayStation.

⁷⁶ “Girls and GAMES - General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- boards.1up.com,” January 23, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040123131310/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=6655>.

⁷⁷ “Do You Think My Girlfriend Will like ffX? - System Wars - GameSpot Forums,” June 24, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020624013901/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board/message?board.id=systemwars&message.id=1084>.

and abuse.”⁷⁸ She lists ten different aspects of male objectification of females, and I will be using three in my discussion on online gaming culture: reduction to body (where an objectifier treats a female “as identified with its body, or body parts”), reduction to appearance (where an objectifier treats a female “primarily in terms of how [she] looks”), and silencing (where an objectifier treats a female “as silent, lacking the capacity to speak”).⁷⁹ She posits that male objectification of females is due to males feeling weak, and needing validation “by creating an entire world in which [women] are no longer glorious, autonomous, or happy, a world in which they themselves enjoy complete power over [them]. . . .”⁸⁰ Online, much like in real life, males objectify women through using their bodies for themselves, whether that is through reducing them down to their appearances and body parts, or removing their agency from conversations.

Male objectification of females is rife throughout online gaming forums. One thread on the *GameSpot* forums was titled: “Best genre of games for nudity?” The thread received 43 replies.⁸¹ On the *IUP* forums, there was a thread titled “What is the sexiest game ever made?”⁸² Another thread asked for the “Hottest Game Babe,” and another asked for the “Ugliest gaming girls.”⁸³ Female characters were constantly being objectified for their body and their appearance.

⁷⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Objectification and Internet Misogyny,” in *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech, and Reputation* ed. Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 68.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸¹ “Wayback Machine,” August 19, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020819133037/http://gamespot.com/include/ads/ifc/RGROUP=2789/idx=1510861042217/BODY%3aBGCOLOR=%23000000>.

⁸² “General Gaming Board - IUP Forums -- boards.1up.com,” February 18, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040218030858/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general>.

⁸³ “General Gaming Board - IUP Forums -- boards.1up.com,” May 11, 2004, [https://web.archive.org/web/20040511055132/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general&page=6](https://web.archive.org/web/20040511055132/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general&page=6;); “General Gaming Board - IUP Forums -- boards.1up.com,” May 11, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040511054535/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general&page=4>.

The discussion surrounding nudity within the community reveal the nuances of its attitudes towards nudity and gender. On *Ars Technica*, there was a thread's title that proclaimed; "OMG! BARE RENDERED ASS!" This thread was a discussion on the controversies surrounding female nudity in games. The original poster wrote,

I remember the thread about the BARE RENDERED ASS in DOA3 that caused quite a nice flame session with people who were ashamed of the trend in certain video games...to focus more on near naked wimin [sic] over gameplay...The thing I find funny is that MGS2 has BARE RENDERED (male) ASS and there's hardly a mention of it.⁸⁴

It should be noted the poster's misspelling of women. This is intentional, and is therefore meaning to send a message. The slang removes the subject away from what she is – a woman. The poster does point out a commonly touted double standard in the gaming community: when males are strutted around naked, there tends to be no fuss like there is with females being objectified. This typically is used by those who defend female objectification. He continued, "Maybe a naked male ass will stir up more of a female gaming contingent?...Tomb Raider made 13-year-old virgins learn to use a dual-shock one handed, after all." The other posters argue about whether or not having sexuality in video games makes it more respectable or not, but one poster came in and added "you guys are missing the point. Its [sic] not that you get to see t&a,⁸⁵ its [sic] that you get to CONTROL it and do whatever you WANT with the t&a; that makes it appealing."⁸⁶ Fundamental to male objectification of females in gaming is the control aspect that comes with the interactive nature of games. Movies or pictures are one thing, but a female body

⁸⁴ "OMG! BARE RENDERED ASS! - Topic Powered by Infopop," accessed November 18, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20011201022651/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=tpc&f=39309975&m=4790956813&s=50009562>.

⁸⁵ Tits and ass.

⁸⁶ "OMG! BARE RENDERED ASS! - Topic Powered by Infopop," accessed November 18, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20011201022651/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=tpc&f=39309975&m=4790956813&s=50009562>.

that is dressed (or not) provocatively that is also malleable by the user is another. Players can move Lara Croft around and see different sides of her, for example. It is that control of the female body that is already so central to male objectification of females. It is only heightened in video games, and silences the woman being represented, instead of having her as an autonomous human being.

Overall, video game culture, being masculine, was resistant to pushes against sexism within games. Here is one thread that is indicative of the attitudes within gaming culture. The post title “Female game characters. The guys’ perspective” begins with “For the last couple months I’ve read too many articles of women complaining about the female image in video games. I’m sick of it. I would like to speak for the guys.” The poster continued, and given its relevancy to many themes discussed in this chapter, it is worth quoting at length:

To begin my argument I just want to say that not many women play video games and the ones that do are mostly, forgive me, fat and ugly. The fact that gaming attracts mostly male audiences it is only common sense for game developer to create hotties in video games. Some say that the image of women in video games are misrepresented, they’re too HOT, the cute face, the big breast, the nice butt, little body fat, etc. I would have to disagree. These images are not misrepresenting the women’s image they’re normal. There’s a place I go to 5 days a week that see these images in real life. It’s called the GYM....In my opinion, if it’s possible, the women in video games should look much hotter than how they’re already shown. I like games, I work hard for my money, and I pay \$50-\$60 for a game. I will NOT stand for ugly, even average, women on my games NO WAY IN HELL...I expect perfection....For my final argument, I’d like to say that game developers also make good looking guys to attract the female gender. I don’t think any guy is complaining that it is misrepresenting the male image. To sum it all up. Girls, stop complaining about how things look in video games and concerned yourselves with life. If you think you’re not pretty, which no one should think that way, fix it. Eat right and exercise. Don’t give me that, “My body was born like this” crap.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ “Female Game Characters. The Guys’ Perspective. - General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- boards.1up.com,” April 27, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040427210009/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=23309>.

This post is a clear example of the sexism and objectification within video game culture. It creates a hostile space for women within video game culture by emphasizing that mainly males play games, while the females who do are “fat and ugly.” It also places a large emphasis on the body parts of females, both digital and not. This is distinctly humiliation of female personhood.

Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson study adolescent boys in the United States, and they have discovered that boys humiliate others due to the shame they feel for not feeling in control. This is a “culture of cruelty” that is due to the “dominant image of masculinity that requires strength and stoicism.”⁸⁸ The masculine online culture of video games exhibits these traits. All throughout, male forum users put each other down when discussing their opinions, and subjugate women through objectifying them. The strength that is required in this image of masculinity comes to the fore when a forum user attempts to have the loudest voice in the room through posting. Their opinion is meant to be the strongest, and beat down any others. This also occurs when male posters interact with female posters. They shut them out of the conversation by diverting the original thread’s discussion to the fact that they are female.

Conclusions

The Internet presented a new opportunity for video game culture. It allowed for gamers across the globe to interact with each other, and so the culture evolved. It evolved, however, to be more virulent and toxic. Before the Internet’s pronounced rise during the late 1990s, video game culture was relatively the same as it had been since the days of the console war between

⁸⁸ Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (New York: Ballantine, 1999) quoted in Martha C. Nussbaum, “Objectification and Internet Misogyny,” in *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech, and Reputation* ed. Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 83.

Nintendo and Sega. A new competitor named Sony entered the fray, and perpetuated the “mature” masculinity that came with hard-core gaming. With the Internet, however, gamers connected with each other, and used anonymity and the means to have a voice to create a culture of toxic masculinity. What was already there in gaming culture, competition and violence, for example, was amplified through the online deeds of forum posters in what they said and how they argued with each other. Female gamers also used online platforms, but were objectified, and given little space within the community. The negative aspects of masculinity within gaming culture were worsened by the Internet. The age of claiming loyalty to one console on the playground was over. Now, claiming one’s loyalty was a matter of having one’s voice heard loud and clear. The voices that existed within this culture stay with us to this day.

Conclusion

In 2013, Zoe Quinn, a game designer, released a game called *Depression Quest*. The game is non-traditional in that it is more of a story, or even an interactive piece of art. Some critics lauded it, while others saw it as too “artsy” and not traditionally a game. A year later in mid-August, Quinn’s ex-boyfriend purported that she cheated on him with men in the gaming industry to further her career. Regardless that Quinn and one of the accused men denied it, the damage was done, and incensed gamers took to sites Twitter, Reddit, and 4chan to protest this ethical “breach” in gaming journalism. Hackers released Quinn’s personal information, including nude pictures. People sent death and rape threats, causing Quinn to flee her home in fear.¹ Quinn was not the only woman to be attacked. For example, game critic Anita Sarkeesian fled her home due to rape and death threats. She produced YouTube videos that analyzed the depiction of women in games.² Gamergate had been born. The movement became a culture war between two sides. One is made up of “independent game-makers and critics, many of them women, who advocate for greater inclusion in gaming. On the other side of the equation are a motley alliance of vitriolic naysayers: misogynists, anti-feminists, trolls...and traditionalists who just don’t want their games to change.”³ The Gamergate movement sees itself as against those who are left-leaning in the game industry, those they refer to as “social justice warriors.” In truth, this is anyone “who has ever questioned the patriarchal nature of the game industry or the limited, often objectifying depiction of women.”⁴

¹ Caitlin Dewey, “The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read,” *Washington Post*, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/>.

² Jenn Frank, “How to Attack a Woman Who Works in Video Gaming,” *The Guardian*, September 1, 2014, sec. Games, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/sep/01/how-to-attack-a-woman-who-works-in-video-games>.

³ Dewey, “The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read.”

⁴ Frank, “How to Attack a Woman Who Works in Video Gaming.”

Here are the death throes of a cultural identity that has existed for decades. The hackers, and trolls who were part of the Gamergate movement are of the same ilk as the forum posters that I explored in the last chapter. They have a strong sense of identity within their culture, and they do not like anything that challenges it. It is only natural that, with the increasing inclusion of marginalized voices in the gaming industry, the old guard would take issue, and act out. The forces we have looked at that have shaped the identity of gamers directly resulted in Gamergate, and the harassment and literal endangerment of women a part of the game industry.

As much as this thesis' focus has been on masculinity, the narrative of the increasing role of women in gaming is essential to understanding masculine identity within gaming culture. How male gamers reacted to female gamers picking up the controller reveals their entrenched assumptions about their identity. To them gaming was violent and competitive, both masculine things. As even female gamers saw it in previous generations, gaming was for boys (even if they then proved the boys wrong by beating them). Gaming has been gendered as masculine ever since at least the 1980s, and there is therefore no surprise that when more and more females have identified as gamers that those males who hold their gaming identity so close to their chest will lash out as the circle tightens around them. Gamergate is a natural progression from the masculine world of gaming. But, the tide is turning, and more marginalized people are coming to the fore, even if there is so much more to go.⁵

The boys-only club started as soon as video games began. As we saw in early 1980s magazines, boys dominated their pages, and participated in a culture that prized violence, competition, and the sexualisation of women. The magazines created ads and games that

⁵ For an excellent feminist middle-state publication that highlights marginalized voices, see "First Person Scholar - Weekly Critical Essays, Commentaries, and Book Reviews on Games," accessed December 7, 2017, <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/>.

appealed to their target demographic, helping to create a synergistic relationship between consumer and product, where boys were influenced by the masculinity in the games, and the boys influenced what kind of masculinity was put into the games. The early 1980s are also key in video game history, because of the age of Generation G (those born after 1970) by that point. They were growing up in the age of video games, and so were fundamentally influenced by it. Even though they were young, they were still exposed to mature themes, even if this was in the minority. Regardless, at this point, video games were not as mature as they would be down the road. They were living in a culture that prized fun competition, and fantasy violence.

Meanwhile, girls were relegated to the sidelines. When they were inducted into the culture, they were patronized. The “arcade girl” was real in that girls did visit arcades, and play right beside the boys. However, she was still very much in a boy’s world that sexualized her. Objectification was right there early on. Even though there was attention paid to girls for playing games, the gaming world was still a boy’s world. When female gamers were introduced into the culture, they were coming upon one that was masculine that catered to young males through violence and competition.

Video game culture could have very well ended with the video game crash during the mid-1980s. However, Nintendo saved the market in the United States, and defined how the video game industry would operate to this day. After Nintendo entered the scene with its NES, masculinity in video game culture picked up where it left off, and continued to prize competition and violence. Boys were still playing games. Nintendo created a family-friendly environment that opened up the doors of gaming to many other groups other than males, such as parents, and, most importantly, females. Even though games were still about competition and violence, games (and how they were advertised) were family-friendly. Nintendo was all about inclusion, and was

happy to play that up in *Nintendo Power*. Female writers were published alongside male writers. *Nintendo Power* wanted to make it known that everyone could sit around a Nintendo console, and have fun. This opened doors for female gamers while still maintaining the masculinity that was present within their games. Their masculinity was just safe, and age appropriate for all. Grandmothers happily blew up aliens, as they said in their letters. But, then Sega began the 16-bit generation with the Genesis, and began a generation defining marketing war against Nintendo. Rather than focusing on family-friendly entertainment, they aimed their efforts at marketing to an older audience. Their more mature brand was hypermasculine in its increased violence, and competition. The biggest competition was against Nintendo. The brand loyalty of future generations was invented during the 16-bit generation. Gamers were encouraged by the two companies (but particularly by Sega) to pick a brand, and stick to it. Female gamers found more space within gaming culture in Nintendo games. But, it was still a masculine space overall that was rife with console competition.

A sure sign of the video game industry's emphasis on maturity came with the senate hearings over the controversy of *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*. Parents and lawmakers were shocked by the violence in these games, and called for moral decency within the industry. However, their efforts were in vain, as games have continued to become more graphic, and controversy still surrounds gaming.⁶ The controversy surrounding *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap* only caused them to become infamous within gaming history (and a best-seller in the case of *Mortal Kombat*). Maturity in gaming was here to stay.

⁶ For a recent controversy, see the one surrounding Quantic Dream's *Become Human*: Wesley Yin-Poole, "Detroit: Become Human under Fire for Controversial Domestic Abuse Scene," *Eurogamer* (blog), December 4, 2017, <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2017-12-04-detroit-become-human-under-fire-for-controversial-domestic-abuse-scene>.

The console wars continued into the next generation, and the one after that. The mid-1990s saw the rise of Sony with their PlayStation, and the fall of Sega with their Saturn. The competition of the 16-bit generation continued on, and Sony picked up the torch from Sega for making games more mature. Nintendo kept on with its tradition of family-friendly games. Gaming continued to be a masculine space with the normalization of mature content.

Meanwhile in the 1990s, more and more people were adopting the Internet, and it soon became a fixture in people's households. Picking up in the early 2000s, I examined Internet gaming forums, and how they exhibit masculinity in the gaming community. I found that this was the significant turning point that accelerated hypermasculinity into a force that is toxic and has a true detrimental effect on people's lives. The Internet allowed for anonymity, and the ability to connect with like-minded individuals. Schoolyard debates on what console was better turned into flame wars, where posting insults at each other was the norm. Competition over console allegiance meant real battle lines were drawn, and whoever had the loudest voice was heard. There was no mediation like there was with print magazines. All it took to post your vehement argument was a forum account. Gamers formed a stronger identity through the Internet through connecting with each other, and fighting each other. And, in this space, female gamers were objectified, and given little space and voice.

The identity of hard-core gamers that exists today, the one that produces toxicity that results in events like Gamergate, has a long history that stretches back decades. It had humble beginnings. Usually young males played with blips and bloopers on screen, and these images turned into spaceships blasting aliens. The masculinity at this stage was the least toxic, because it focused on the fun of competition, and unrealistic violence. It was even accepting of female gamers to a certain degree. However, this generation of gamers grew up, and so did the games

that catered to them. Games became more mature, and gamers' identities both informed and were influenced by them. The masculine gaming identity was growing, changing, and becoming more complicated. On the one hand, there were Nintendo games that were family-friendly, and on the other there were games that reveled in blood and guts. Gaming was taking on new meanings. Then, with the Internet, gamers could now reach across the world to each other, and form a complex identity of masculinity that prized strength to combat inferiority, and embodied the objectification of women. The objectification of women had always been there, but it took a distinct turn when gamers could easily collaborate on their tendencies to objectify the women in their gaming, and create a culture of objectification. Gaming culture online was a masculine space that left little room for female gamers.

There is still a long way to go to create a healthier video game culture. The first step is to acknowledge that there is toxicity within gaming culture, and that it is intertwined with the masculinity that has developed over the past few decades. Once that can be done, it is up to male gamers to hold each other accountable. If there is one thing that this thesis has shown it is that the Internet is a powerful tool to collaborate and change cultural forces. Male gamers who are part of the old way of doing things need to understand that masculinity is so entrenched within gaming culture that simply standing by is not good enough. It takes actual action to call out toxic masculinity, and to stand with victims of it. A final lesson to take from this is that the only way to create a healthy gaming community is to have more diversity. Female gamers have been on the sidelines for decades. It is about time that they should not have to fear for having a passion for gaming.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- “8-Meg Death Duel.” *Sega Visions*. October 1994, 6.
- “A Letter from the Publishers.” *Sega Visions*. December 1990, 4.
- “A Letter from the Publishers.” *Sega Visions*. September 1991, 4.
- Adams, Stephen. “City Bomb.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1981, 54-5.
- “Advertisement,” July 24, 2013.
https://web.archive.org/web/20130724062915if_/http://ad.doubleclick.net/adi/N2790.Gamespot/B1481517.16;sz=728x90;ord=2004.12.17.05.19.34.
- “Alien 3.” *Nintendo Power*. March 1993, 76-81.
- Allen, Terry. “World Cup Manager.” *Computer & Video Games*. June 1982, 32-3. 35-7. 39, 41.
- “Any Girls out Here? - General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” January 23, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040123122632/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=5495>.
- “Arcade Action.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1982, 30-1.
- “Arcade Spotlight – Castle Park.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. March 1982, 12-3.
- Back cover of *Computer & Video Games*. August 1982.
- “Barbie Game Girl.” *Nintendo Power*. September 1992, 61-3.
- Barton, Richard. “Dogfight.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1982, 62-3.
- “Believe it or not...” *Sega Visions*. September 1992, 8.
- “Blast Off to the Future.” *Nintendo Power*. September 1996, 10-3.
- Brooks Ph. D., B. David. “Exploding The Arcade Myth: A Scientist Evaluates The Coin-Op Gaming Scene.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. August 1982, 35-7.
- “Clash Demonhead.” *Nintendo Power*. January / February 1990, 38-41.
- “Classified Information.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988, 56-61.
- “Cobra Triangle.” *Nintendo Power*. May / June 1989, 28-31.
- Contra*. Directed by Hidenori Maezawa and Shinji Umezaki. Minator, Tokyo: Konami, 1988. Nintendo Entertainment System.
- “Contra.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988, 74-7.
- Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*. May 1982.
- Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*. October 1982.

Cover of *Electronic Games Magazine*. Winter, 1981.

Cover of *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988.

Cover of *Nintendo Power*. September / October 1988.

“Crash ‘N’ The Boys: Street Challenge.” *Nintendo Power*. November 1992, 14-9.

“Desert Strike.” *Nintendo Power*. December 1992, 72-5.

“Do You Think My Girlfriend Will like FfX? - System Wars - GameSpot Forums,” June 24, 2002.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20020624013901/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board/message?board.id=systemwars&message.id=1084>.

“Doom.” *Sega Visions*. September 1992, 20-1.

“Ecco: The Tides of Time.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 48.

“Electronic Games Hotline.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. March 1982, 29.

“Enter the Sega Visions Save the Planet Contest.” *Sega Visions*. June 1994, 74-5.

“ESRB Mission and Additional Information.” Accessed December 8, 2017.
<http://www.esrb.org/about/>.

“Female Game Characters. The Guys’ Perspective. - General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” April 27, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040427210009/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=23309>.

Gallagher, G. W. “Ice Cream Vendor.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1982, 36-7, 39.

“GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” December 22, 2004.
https://web.archive.org/web/20041222132431/http://forums.gamespot.com/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

“GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” March 8, 2005.
https://web.archive.org/web/20050308104207/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

“GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” October 14, 2004.
https://web.archive.org/web/20041014090514/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

“GameSpot Forums - General Games Discussion,” September 4, 2004.
https://web.archive.org/web/20040904171228/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/show_topics.php?board=314159266.

“Game News.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1981, 12-3, 15.

“Game News.” *Computer & Video Games*. June 1982, 18-9.

“Gaming, Extra Strength Caplets - Forum Powered by Infopop,” December 17, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20011217043503/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=frm&f=39309975&p=4&q=Y&s=50009562>.

- “Gaming, Extra Strength Caplets - Forum Powered by Infopop,” December 17, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20011217204506/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=frm&f=39309975&s=50009562>.
- “Gargoyle’s Quest.” *Nintendo Power*. August 1992, 8-15.
- “General Games Discussion - GameSpot Forums,” April 23, 2004.
https://web.archive.org/web/20040423211822/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board?board.id=basic_video&page=4.
- “General Games Discussion - GameSpot Forums,” August 12, 2002.
https://web.archive.org/web/20020812105201/http://forums.gamespot.com:80/gamespot/board?board.id=basic_video&page=8.
- “General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” February 18, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040218030858/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general>.
- “General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” May 11, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040511055132/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general&page=6>.
- “General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” May 11, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040511054535/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general&page=4>.
- “General Gaming Board - 1UP Message Boards,” November 26, 2005.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20051126063012/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board?board.id=general>.
- “Genesis 32X.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 6-7.
- “Genesis to the X-treme.” *Sega Visions*. May 1995, 3.
- “Girls and GAMES - General Gaming Board - 1UP Forums -- Boards.1up.Com,” January 23, 2004.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040123131310/http://boards.1up.com:80/zd/board/message?board.id=general&message.id=6655>.
- “Hard Ball III.” *Sega Visions*. December 1993, 11.
- “Howard & Nester.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1988, 24-5.
- “If it’s not Sega...you lose.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 46-7.
- “If You Don’t Have Eyes in the Back of Your Head, You’re Dead Meat.” *Sega Visions*. February 1996, 60-1.
- “If you were colorblind...” *Sega Visions*. April 1993, 48-9.
- “In the bag.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1995, 79.
- Joiner, Elspeth. “Ms. Pac-Man.” *Computer & Video Games*. July 1982, 73.
- Joiner, Elspeth. “Soft Porn.” *Computer & Video Games*. January 1982, 77.
- Katz, Arnie. “Switch One.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. May, 1982, 6.

“Kirby’s Dreamland.” *Nintendo Power*. August 1992, 46-53.

Kunkel, Bill. “What’s New In The Arcades.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. March 1982, 70-2.

“Loaded.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1995, 20.

Lustig, David. “Arcade America.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. August 1982, 72-3.

“Machine Hunter.” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*. October 1997, 23.

“Mail Box from Players.” *Nintendo Power*. January / February 1989, 96-7.

“Mail Box from Players.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988, 96-7.

“Mail Box from Players.” *Nintendo Power*. March / April 1989, 6-7.

“Mail Box from Players.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1988, 6-7.

“Mail Box from Players.” *Nintendo Power*. September / October 1988, 96-7.

“Mailbag.” *Computer & Video Games*. June 1982, 5, 7.

“Mailbag.” *Computer & Video Games*. March 1982, 7, 9, 11.

“Mailbox.” *Sega Visions*. April 1991, 10.

“Mailbox.” *Sega Visions*. December 1990, 6.

“Maximum Force.” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*. October 1997, 115.

“Mickey Mouse in the Castle of Illusion.” *Sega Visions*. December 1990, 18-9.

“Mission: Impossible.” *Nintendo Power*. May 1996, 22-5.

“Mommy, what are those two Sega machines doing?” *Sega Visions*. December 1994, 50-1.

Mortal Kombat. Designed by Ed Boon and John Tobias. Chicago: Midway, 1992. Arcade.

Morton, Andrew. “Granny.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1982, 48-9, 51.

“My Favorite Cincy Lan Party Gaming Stories, and/or Quotes- Post Here - Topic Powered by Infopop,” December 1, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20011201022019/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=tpc&f=39309975&m=2280942913&s=50009562>.

“NES Achievers.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988, 98-9.

“NES Football Games.” *Nintendo Power*. January / February 1989, 64-73.

“NFL GameDay 98.” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*. October 1997, 1-2.

Night Trap. Designed by James Riley and Rob Fulop. Tokyo: Sega, 1992. Sega CD.

“Night Trap.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 42.

“Nightmare Creature.” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*. October 1997, 3-4.

“Nintendo Powerfest.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1990, 94-5.

“Now you can play with your worm in public.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1995, 15.

Oehrman, Mays. “Minotaur.” *Computer & Video Games*. May 1982, 62-3.

“OMG! BARE RENDERED ASS! - Topic Powered by Infopop.” Accessed November 18, 2017.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20011201022651/http://arstechnica.infopop.net:80/OpenTopic/page?a=tpc&f=39309975&m=4790956813&s=50009562>.

“Out of the Shadows: Nintendo 64 Debuts in Japan.” *Nintendo Power*. January 1996, 20-3.

“Overheard at Sega.” *Sega Visions*. May 1992, 4.

“Pandemonium 2.” *Official US PlayStation Magazine*. October 1997, 101.

“Play With the Big Boys.” *Sega Visions*. June 1990, 1.

“Players Guide to Electronic Football.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. October 1982, 43-8.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. April 1996, 6-7, 9.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. August 1991, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. December 1993, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. February 1991, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. January 1994, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. July 1991, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. July 1993, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1990, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. June 1996, 6-9.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. March 1996, 6-7.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. May 1996, 6-7, 9.

“Players’ Pulse.” *Nintendo Power*. September / October 1990, 6-7.

“Power Player.” *Nintendo Power*. May / June 1989, 96-7.

“Prince of Persia.” *Nintendo Power*. September 1992, 14-9.

“Punish Your Father When He Gets Home.” *Nintendo Power*. May 1992, 4.

“Racket Attack.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1988, 72-3.

Randle, Peter. “Solitaire.” *Computer & Video Games*. July 1982, 30-1.

“Review This!” *Sega Visions*. September 1994, 66-91.

“Say What? Overheard at Sega.” *Sega Visions*. May 1992, 4.

“Sega Does What Nintendon’t.” *Sega Visions*. June 1990, 25-7.

“Sega Saturn Delivers.” *Sega Visions*. May 1995, 8-28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40-1, 44-6, 48-53.

“Separate The Men From The Boys.” *Sega Visions*. June 1991, 27.

“Sex And Your Computer???” *Computer & Video Games*. April 1982, 36.

“Shut up and jam.” *Sega Visions*. June 1994, 27.

Sirrs, Janek. “Alien Chase.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1982, 38-9.

“Software Reviews.” *Computer & Video Games*. June 1982, 98-101.

“Space Laser.” *Computer & Video Games*. November 1982, 32-3.

“Splatterhouse 3.” *Sega Visions*. August 1993, 50.

Stones, Ivor. “Potshot.” *Computer & Video Games*. December 1981, 46-7, 49.

“Stop Playing With Yourself.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 36-7.

“Stormlord.” *Sega Visions*. December 1990, 2.

“Streets of Rage.” *Sega Visions*. December 1993, 106-7.

“Summer Challenge.” *Sega Visions*. August 1993, 101.

Summers, Murray. “Treasure Hunt.” *Computer & Video Games*. January 1982, 40-1, 43-4, 47, 49.

“Super Mario Kart.” *Nintendo Power*. October 1992, 83-91.

Taylor, George. “Save the Princess.” *Computer & Video Games*. June 1982, 50-1.

“Tecmo Super Baseball.” *Sega Visions*. August 1994, 97.

“Tempo: Hip Grasshopper Grooves on 32X.” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 38.

“Terminator 2: Judgement Day.” *Nintendo Power*. February 1992, 62-5.

“The Bugs.” *Computer & Video Games*. January 1982, 63.

“The Fun Machine.” *Nintendo Power*. June 1996, 11-42.

“The Sega Visions Save the Planet Contest Winners.” *Sega Visions*. October 1994, 114-5.

“The Trader Trilogy.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. November 1982, 82.

“Video Screen.” *Computer & Video Games*. March, 1982, 74-5.

“Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1990, 7.

“Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. March / April 1990, 7.

- “Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. March 1991, 7.
- “Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. May / June 1990, 7.
- “Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1988, 100-1.
- “Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. November / December 1990, 7.
- “Video Spotlight.” *Nintendo Power*. September / October 1988, 100-1.
- “Vizkids.” *Sega Visions*. February 1994, 108-18.
- “Wayback Machine,” August 19, 2002.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20020819133037/http://gamespot.com/include/ads/ifc/RGR OUP=2789/idx=1510861042217/BODY%3aBGCOLOR=%23000000>.
- “Wayback Machine,” December 6, 2003.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20031206115043/http://www.gamerevolution.com:80/chatter/gamepost.html>.
- “Where the Pros Play!” *Nintendo Power*. November 1992, 4.
- “Who Ya Gonna Call?” *Sega Visions*. June 1990, 8.
- “Wolfenstein 3D.” *Nintendo Power*. March 1994, 14-21.
- “World Championship.” *Nintendo Power*. January / February 1990, 90.
- Worley, Joyce. “Women Join The Arcade Revolution.” *Electronic Games Magazine*. May 1982, 30-2.
- Worrall, A. “Snakes & Ladders.” *Computer & Video Games*. July 1982, 28-9.
- Wu, Brianna. “No Skin Thick Enough: The Daily Harassment of Women in the Game Industry - Polygon.” Polygon. July 22, 2014.
<https://www.polygon.com/2014/7/22/5926193/women-gaming-harassment>.
- “Yo Sega!” *Sega Visions*. December 1993, 10-3.
- “Yo Sega!” *Sega Visions*. October 1993, 16-7.
- “Your Tombstone Will Read ‘Game Over.’” *Sega Visions*. February 1995, 25.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” July 30, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010730191005/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78462@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78462?EXP=ALL%26VWM%3d%26ROS%3d1%26VWM=%26ROS=%26OC=300>.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” July 30, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010730200128/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78641@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78641?EXP=ALL%26VWM%3d%26ROS%3d1%26VWM=%26ROS=%26OC=300>.

- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010625025156/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78926@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78926?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010625043209/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@79033@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@79033?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010625010046/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78807@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78807?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010625015842/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78879@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78879?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.
- “ZDNet: Gamespot: Video Game,” June 25, 2001.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010625004400/http://forums.gamespot.zdnet.com:80/group/zd.Videogames/videogames/videogamesnt.tpt/@thread@78801@F@1@D-,D@ALL/@article@mark@78801?EXP=ALL%26VWM=%26ROS=1%26OC=300>.
- “Zelda: The Second Quest Begins.” *Nintendo Power*. July / August 1988, 26-37.
- “Zen: Intergalactic Ninja.” *Nintendo Power*. February 1993, 80-5.

Secondary sources

- Ahl, David H. “Mainframe Games and Simulations.” In *The Video Game Explosion: A History From Pong To Playstation® And Beyond*, 31–34. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Arsenault, Dominic. “System Profile: The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).” In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and Beyond*, 109–14. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Beck, Victoria Simpson, Stephanie Boys, Christopher Rose, and Eric Beck. “Violence Against Women in Video Games: A Prequel or Sequel to Rape Myth Acceptance?” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27, no. 15 (October 2012): 3016–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260512441078>.
- Dewey, Caitlin. “The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read.” *Washington Post*. Accessed December 7, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/>.
- “First Person Scholar - Weekly Critical Essays, Commentaries, and Book Reviews on Games.” Accessed December 7, 2017. <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/>.
- Frank, Jenn. “How to Attack a Woman Who Works in Video Gaming.” *The Guardian*, September 1, 2014, sec. Games.
<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/sep/01/how-to-attack-a-woman-who-works-in-video-games>.

- Gabbiadini, Alessandro, Paolo Riva, Luca Andrighetto, Chiara Volpato, and Brad J. Bushman. "Acting like a Tough Guy: Violent-Sexist Video Games, Identification with Game Characters, Masculine Beliefs, & Empathy for Female Violence Victims." Edited by Andrew L. Geers. *PLOS ONE* 11, no. 4 (April 13, 2016): e0152121. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0152121>.
- Herman, Leonard. "Early Home Video Game Systems." In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and Beyond*, 53–58. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- . "The Later Generation Home Video Game Systems." In *The Video Game Explosion: A History From Pong to Playstation(R) and Beyond*, 161–71. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Herz, J. C. *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, And Rewired Our Minds*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Kent, Steve L. *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokémon and beyond, the Story behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*. Roseville, Calif.: Prima, 2001.
- King, Wesley C., Edward W. Miles, and Jane Kniska. "Boys Will Be Boys (and Girls Will Be Girls): The Attribution of Gender Role Stereotypes in a Gaming Situation." *Sex Roles* 25, no. 11–12 (December 1, 1991): 607–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00289567>.
- Kocurek, Carly A. "Identities." In *Debugging Game History*, 237–45. Edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016.
- Lammers, Susan. *Programmers at Work*. Redmond, WA: MicroSoft Press, 1986. Quoted in Mark J. P. Wolf. "Video Game Stars: Pac-Man." In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond*. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Levmore, Saul. "The Internet's Anonymity Problem." In *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech, and Reputation*, 50–67. Edited by Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Milligan, Ian. "A Haven for Perverts, Criminals, and Goons": Children and the Battle for and Against Canadian Internet Regulation, 1991-1999." *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 47, no. 96 (May 2015): 245–74.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "Objectification and Internet Misogyny." In *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech, and Reputation*, 68–87. Edited by Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Stanton, Richard. *A Brief History of Video Games: From Atari To Xbox One*. London: Robinson, 2015.
- Thomas, Kimberly D., and Ronald F. Levent. "Does the Endorsement of Traditional Masculinity Ideology Moderate the Relationship between Exposure to Violent Video Games and Aggression?" *The Journal of Men's Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 47–56.
- Wolf, Mark J. P. "Arcade Games of the 1970s." In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and Beyond*, 35–44. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- . "Arcade Games of the 1980s." In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to Playstation® and Beyond*, 91–98. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008.

- . “The Video Game Industry Crash.” In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and Beyond*, 103–6. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- . “Video Game Stars: Pac-Man.” In *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation® and Beyond*, 73–74. Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008.
- Yin-Poole, Wesley. “Detroit: Become Human under Fire for Controversial Domestic Abuse Scene.” *Eurogamer* (blog), December 4, 2017. <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2017-12-04-detroit-become-human-under-fire-for-controversial-domestic-abuse-scene>.
- Zackariasson, Peter, and Timothy L. Wilson. “Marketing of Video Games.” In *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*, 57–75. Edited by Peter Zackariasson and Timothy L. Wilson. New York: Routledge, 2012.